

## Realizing a dream

*Reeveses' after-school ministry counts on volunteers*

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As the youngsters begin to arrive at the Frazee Dream Center, 34-year-old Matt Reeves is putting the finishing touches on a couple dozen grilled cheese sandwiches that will soon get the attention of his guests.

On the gym floor just a few feet away, Eastside High students "J" Seymour and Marrie Cudd play basketball as they wait for the elementary-school friends they'll soon be tutoring.

Seymour and Cudd are Tuesday regulars, as is Amy Pieper, a physical therapist by trade who drops by two days a week to volunteer as a dishwasher. Pieper, who also volunteers as an administrative aide, gets a kitchen reprieve on this day because fellow volunteer Ken Pettus is treating the center's 16 after-school students to dinner at a nearby Pete's Restaurant.



Matt and Jenny Reeves sold their family the Frazee Dream Center.

GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

In a room adjacent to the basketball court, Russ Bennett seems oblivious to activity around him as he methodically lays ceramic tile in neat, precision rows. It's a backbending job -- but not as difficult as the roofing project Bennett tackled (also without pay) a few weeks earlier.

By 3:30 p.m., all the Frazee Dream Center students are accounted for, although one is slowed by a fever. Alongside them in the classrooms are 15 volunteer tutors, marking the second straight day that the group has enjoyed the 1-to-1 ratio.

The ratio brings a quick smile to Reeves' face. "Most of our kids don't need one-on-one help --we have some brilliant children -- but they all need the attention," says Reeves.

"The more volunteers we have, the more attention they get."

For Reeves and wife Jenny, another daily fixture at the Frazee Center, the persistent volunteerism of others serves as a confirmation that their bold decision of the past year -- when they sold their family business to plunge into this after-school ministry -- was a good one.

"People just keep coming, and they keep bringing things," says Jenny Reeves, a former teacher. "That's one of the reasons I'm so sure we're doing the right thing."

Alise Brown, another former teacher now drawn as a volunteer to the program for children ages 6 through 12, gets the same feeling.

"I've been surprised at how many high-school kids have caught on to this and really want to help; I thought we'd just have a few businessmen and some stay-at-home moms," says Brown, who, along with husband Gresham, has known Matt and Jenny Reeves since joining Grace Church in 2000.

The Browns moved to Columbia and returned to Greenville last summer, shortly after the Reeveses had purchased the former Central Baptist Church as the new home for the Frazee Dream Center.

"We called and said, 'We want to be on board with whatever you're going to do,'" Brown recalls.

Husband Gresham is a fourth-grade teacher at Stone Academy, where he sees Frazee Center students on campus. Three months into the program, he's noticed that the Frazee Center students have become more confident.

Pieper, Bennett, Seymour, Cudd, Pettus and the Browns are among 45 volunteers -- all screened with SLED background checks -- who comprise the all-volunteer staff. Some come to the center at the corner of Pinckney and Lloyd streets three times a week; others as occasionally as once a month.

"I feel sure that God has called us to do this," says Jenny Reeves, a mother of two young children. One of them, 5-year-old daughter Tomy John, is a regular at the Frazee Center.

The Reeveses are at the Frazee Center six days a week -- five as workers and once for a Sunday-evening church service held in the small cafeteria. With help from the Radius Church in Columbia, the Reeveses purchased the campus of the former Central Baptist Church -- and began renovating it as a haven for after-school hugs, tutoring and meals.

Matt Reeves considered starting the after-school ministry while maintaining his fulltime career as the owner/operator of a landscape/stonemasonry business. He soon realized that plan would have required hiring help at the Frazee Center, so he sold the business. "You can't pay someone else to do your dream," Reeves says.

It is a dream that began when the Reeveses worked during their college years in summer camps, as part the Fellowship of Christian Athletes ministry. It became a reality when they purchased the property in 2006 and opened for business with 10 students in January. It expanded to 16 children in February and grows to 21 next week; the Reeveses envision a day when more than 200 will come to the center every day after school.

The work is funded by donations that have arrived from churches and individuals who know the Reeveses personally, and by the Reeveses themselves. The mortgage on the property is \$4,500 a month, and Reeves says donations to the 501 c-3 ministry have taken care of every mortgage payment thus far.

"We haven't asked anyone for money. People just keep walking up and handing us money, saying they 'believe in what you're doing,'" says Reeves, who, through the sale of his business, can pour two years of his life into the Frazee Center without needing a salary.

Reeves received help in buying the property from the Radius Church in Columbia, where his brother, John Reeves, is the pastor. The church raised \$50,000 of the \$60,000 down payment in just two weeks, another signal to Reeves that something special was going to happen on the property that had been vacant in recent years. Reeves is accustomed to turning the unlikely into a reality. A football star at Anderson's Hanna High, he was a non-scholarship member of the Clemson football team from 1992-95, where he earned letters as a special-teams player. He was the snapper for punts and placekicks.

Reeves met and married Jenny as a student at Clemson. In addition to working with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, they helped start the Downtown Community Fellowship.

Reeves' love of athletics lured him initially into teaching, but he left the profession after one year to launch a landscaping/stonemasonry business that became very profitable but time-consuming.

"We left the good life for a great life," says Jenny Reeves, a bookkeeper in the family business. "The landscape business gave us a comfortable living, but neither of us really enjoyed it. I always knew Matt and I were cut out for something else."

The couple named the ministry in memory of the late James Frazee, a friend and former principal at Providence Christian Academy in Murfreesboro, Tenn., who died at age 34.

"We present the gospel a little differently," says Matt Reeves. "To us, the gospel is loving people. We're not as much about Bible verses as we are about teaching kids to serve each other."

Carl Sharperson, another volunteer who learned about the program through his Rotary Club at Anderson, loves the fact that the program involves life skills and family values as well as tutoring.

"There are tasks involved, but the kids come here because they want to be here. They get the opportunity to develop worth ethics and life skills," Sharperson says.

Reeves calls his work "a long-term deal. My hope is that a great governor or a great lawyer or a great mechanic comes out of here, and they'll have the attitude of serving Reeves signed a contract on the property within 30 minutes after seeing it. It includes a sanctuary built in 1918, a fellowship hall built in 1942, and a gym built in 1965. "Everything I could've wanted is here -- it's a perfect building on a great street, near plenty of kids," says Reeves. "I think God put it all here so we could love on these kids."