

Youth Shine



Joined by design: The youth group from Perkasio Mennonite in Pennsylvania sport convention shirts. Photos by Brian Schlabach, Sarah Shirk and Jonathan Stoltzfus

Dressed to a 'T'

Anna Groff
Goshen College

Youth groups can build unity with Bible studies, long van rides, card games, rounds of Truth or Dare – and matching T-shirts.

The creators of T-shirt designs said they were inspired by inside jokes, scripture passages or catchy phrases.

Many youth groups wore their matching shirts to the opening night worship, and have worn them during the servant projects each afternoon.

Oakgrove Mennonite Church from Smithville, Ohio, wore baby blue “Menno Power” T-shirts with an image of Menno Simons on the front. One of the adults in their congregation had a “Menno Power” shirt from the '70s. The youth group decided to take this vintage design and re-make it for Atlanta.

The youth group from Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Va., wore T-shirts with “We ain’t never scared” (the reference is to II Timothy 1:7) and with, for some, an obscure message, “Representing 757.” Viewers of “American Idol” will know the inspiration came from a recent winner, Ruben Studdard, who also wears his area code.

South Hutchinson Mennonite from Kansas chose a slogan for its T-shirts: “Satan is a Nerd.” MYFer Joe Ramsey said the youth pastor already had a similar shirt, and the youth group liked it. One youth member decided to add “Jesus Rocks My World” on the back. Brent Garber said the group wore the T-shirts today for greater visibility as they tried to stay in groups of three while going to the seminars.

Marion Mennonite Church youth from Shipshewana, Ind., all wore red Old Navy T-shirts. According to their advisor, Michelle Sharick, the youth group wanted to match for a day, at \$5 apiece.

With 5,000 other teens walking around the Congress Center, one can easily get lost in the crowd. But the T-shirts help the young people who pray together stay together.



Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Va.



Marion Mennonite Church, Shipshewana, Ind.



South Seventh Mennonite, Reading, Pa.



Bethel Mennonite, Inman, Kan.

Codes cause controversy

Megan Blank

Goshen College

As in past years, Atlanta 2003 planners established rules and regulations to guide various aspects of convention participation, including dress code and curfew.

According to Joy Cotchen, community life coordinator, "The dress code came about from past evaluations. Sponsors wanted help with dress code and curfew, so it was added to help the sponsors."

While the choice of a 12:39 a.m. curfew for youth is puzzling to some, it is generally respected.

"It's odd that it's 12:39," said Trinet Bontrager of Fairview, Mich.

"Why not [make the time] a normal number?" asked Heather Landis of Silverdale, Pa.

"According to the evaluation forms from Nashville in 2001, the youth wanted more time," said Lana Miller, assistant direction of convention planning. "The curfew there was 12:37 a.m. So we expanded it."

Despite any complaints that may come, the curfew was set for the good of the convention participants.

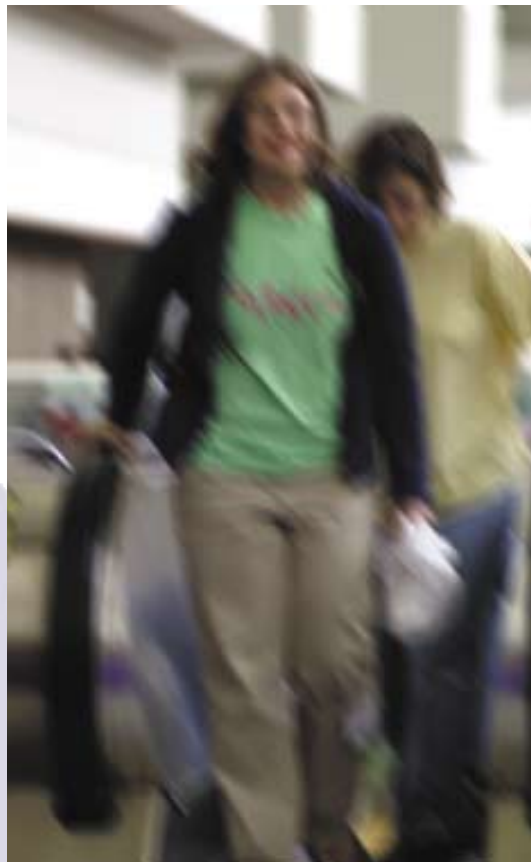
"It's generous. We want the kids to get enough sleep so they can enjoy the week," said Cotchen. "Sponsors, too."

Said Bontrager, "I'm already tired by then anyway."

The dress code, on the other hand, always seems to cause controversy. The formal policy states, "Girls, don't make the guys stumble, and guys, don't make the girls throw up." Banned clothing items include short shorts, tubes, halter tops, spaghetti straps and muscle shirts.

"I don't know if [the dress code] has to be that strict," said Mitch Hostetter of Lancaster, Pa.

Megan Bolthouse of Hastings, Mich. "I don't think it's fair. We should be allowed to wear



On dress code patrol: An MYFer gets a passing grade in the photographer's spot check.

Photo by Jonathan Stoltzfus

whatever we want."

Other youth think the dress code is appropriate.

"We need a dress code. Otherwise people would wear whatever they want. Some of which is inappropriate, and I've already seen some of that at this convention," said Emily Landis of Harleysville, Pa.

Sponsors are responsible for enforcing the monitoring the dress codes.

Staying safe, staying quiet

Raluca Barzu

Goshen College

On streets near the Georgia World Congress Center, men and women with white safari hats watch over Mennonite youth as they come and go from their rooms at the Hilton, the Hyatt and the Marriott Marquis.

These men and women are members of the Ambassador Force of Downtown Atlanta and have been alerted to the presence of the nearly 8,000 Mennonites, more than 5,000 of them registered for the youth convention.

Several ambassadors said they enjoy helping the youth, whom they described as genuinely interested in the city and not merely looking for directions.

Also keeping an eye on the youth are 18 Community Life staff members, all Mennonites, who walk the hallways in each hotel from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m. Joy and Patrick Cotchen are the two head coordinators who travel between the hotels to ensure that a 12:39 a.m. curfew is respected.

"When students notice the orange staff shirts in the hallways, it all quiets down," said Patrick Cotchen.

The Cotchens said they were pleased to have

hotel security members backing them up in enforcing the regulations. At times some youth have played their guitars in the hallway, taken elevators for joy rides and explored the buildings excessively.

Several youth spit off of the 10th floor of one hotel, and were immediately disciplined. Also, some hotel guests have complained about noise levels, and the penalties meted out have varied with youth sponsors.

"There are a few that we needed to send off to bed," Joy Cotchen said.

Still, hotel officials mentioned that floors do quiet down after 12:40 a.m.

At the hotels' front desks, officials spoke of the youth groups with enthusiasm and mentioned that no major issues have developed so far. Stephen Stewart, rooms director at the Hyatt, said, "It's just great to be so busy during this time of the year."

Katy Pando, public relations manager for GWCC Security Services, described the Mennonite youth groups as "fun to watch." She added that they are creating a good experience for everyone they meet. "It's just great to watch a bunch of nice men and women," she said. "And we can see in their faces that they're happy."

Fun is in the freebies

Rebekah Schmill

Goshen College

While winning a car wasn't the reason that Mennonites of driving age traveled to Atlanta, high school students have the opportunity to leave with a set of keys to a restored Volkswagen Beetle offered by Hesston College. In addition, they can take home from A-Junction one of 5,000 Bethel College Frisbees, 2,000 Nalgene water bottles bearing the Goshen College name, an Afghani hand-stitched bookmark from Mennonite Mission Network and many more items.

There's something for everyone in A-Junction.

For Bob Miller of Middlebury, Ind., visiting the exhibit hall is "an opportunity to visit with people." However, the experience also provides a space for various Mennonite agencies and institutions to vie for attention through their free hand outs.

J.D. Morgan of Goshen, Ind., said the ultimate giveaway this year is Hesston's car, even though only one person can win. David Graybill of Cassopolis, Mich., said he agreed, because of the uniqueness of the restored vehicle.

Next on the list of top freebie prizes, according to Daniel Love of Indianapolis, is the digital camera offered by Goshen College.

Gift certificates are also a popular prize. Mennonite Central Committee is offering coupons for the Thrift Shop while Mutual Aid Exchange is announcing winners of gift certificates for Provident Book Store and Ten Thousand Villages items.

Other giveaways include Eastern Mennonite University scholarships, a portable DVD player from Goshen College, polo shirts and foldout chairs at the MMA booth, popcorn and shirts from Bluffton College booth, a stuffed beaver from Canadian Mennonite University, Mennonite Mission Network Café Internationale coffee and mugs.



Photo by Sarah Shirk

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Rebekah Schmill

Goshen College

Grease rags, the convention message board, Frisbees and T-shirts – all might help youth to find their match. But this match is not for a soul mate, but a chance to win Hesston College's VW "Bug."

At the college's booth in the MEA section of A-Junction, high school students are receiving a metal tag imprinted with a four-digit number. If they find the one other student who was issued an identical number, both students will receive a key that may (or may not) start the engine of the prize vehicle.

In a desperate search to find match digits, teens have drawn big and bold numerals on Frisbees, arms and even clothing, and shout out numbers in hallways and on escalators.

The fun isn't only in considering the prize. Katie Watkins of Kalona, Iowa, said meeting "cute guys" was definitely a bonus.

But some "fake outs" have occurred as well, "like when people say they have your number and they don't," said Laura Stoltzfus, also of Kalona.