

Regional Neighborhood Network Conference -- Neighborhoods '98
October 2, 1998 - Lexington, Kentucky
Summary of Workshops Attended by David Walter

The first workshop was on Town & Gown Relationships. The presenters were Linda Huey who represented Ohio Dominican College in Columbus, Ohio and Jerry Jackson from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. Recently, both institutions had to react to community and neighborhood pressure to assist in resolving problems brought about due the presence of the university. Ohio Dominican has about 2,000 students and is surrounded by low-income neighborhoods with a high dropout rate. The children from this neighborhood attended 43 different elementary and primary schools. The administrators recognized that the college could assist by developing out-reach programs. One of the more successful programs is called "Village to Child" which develops interaction between the neighborhood, their children and the students of the college.

Bradley University had a different problem in that they had never considered a master plan for expansion of the campus. During the 80's, enrollment dropped and some of the dormitories were taken over for academic offices. When enrollment picked up again, the university encouraged off-campus housing in the nearby neighborhood. As a private institution, they were subject to local zoning codes. The city, in response to neighborhood complaints, required the university and the two hospitals to come up with a master plan for future expansion. As part of the master planning process, representatives from the neighborhoods were required to assist and agree upon the new plan.

The second workshop was on Neighborhood/City Hall Relationships. Barbara Schoppman from Ft. Wayne distributed a lot of literature on the "Community Oriented Government initiative of Paul Helmke. I have copied this information and it is included with this report. Basically, this program puts the citizens first in line for response to their needs from the city government. Through the neighborhood organizations, resolution to community problems is sought. Where possible, the city provides personnel, funds and assistance to resolve neighborhood issues. Ft. Wayne has over 227 recognized neighborhood associations in a city of 204,000 people.

Amy Sackman Odum of Lima, Ohio followed Barbara. Lima is a city of 42,000 with 30 neighborhood associations. She reported that the city had signed a contract for trash disposal that included a \$60,000 set-aside for special projects to clean up the city. Abandoned vehicles were towed, empty lots were cleaned of trash and debris, then graded level and reseeded for green spaces.

At the luncheon meeting, Paul Helmke gave the keynote address. He stressed the importance of neighborhood associations to provide input to government

decisions on allocations of resources. He also felt that strong neighborhood associations made a city safer and easier to govern.

The third workshop was about Role Models and Inspirational Stories from neighborhood representatives who had organized their neighborhoods to fight crime and drug dealers, to renovate houses, and to get city hall to provide adequate services. Annie Bonaparte was a most effective presenter. She is the president of Dayton, Ohio's Roosevelt Westwood Association. This group started in 1983 as a gathering of concerned grandparents who wanted to pull together to work with the youth of the community. Bonaparte herself was a role model – one of 10 children, she began working at age 14. At age 25, she learned she was dyslexic and finally learned to read, allowing her to teach her deaf daughter to speak and read lips. In 1974, she was severely injured in an automobile accident that left her unable to walk. It was not until 1986 that she was able to walk, partially because of her interest in community activism.

Some of her neighborhood association's promotions include "Neighborhood Pride Day", a neighborhood clean-up day; "The Urban Youth Connection" which promotes youth activities such as creating and maintaining flower beds; and "Back to School Celebration", a day of food, games, prizes, entertainment and distribution of free school supplies to returning students. She was able to start the Roosevelt Training Center, a social service agency that now operates out of its own facility and assists individuals between the ages of six and 30. They deal with problems of anger and violence that can result from teen pregnancy, learning disabilities, and dysfunctional homes. The center also helps clients to cope with problems brought about from crime and drug use. The center has extended out to include imprisoned youths from the community. Bonaparte has been able to convince authorities to allow the youth out of jail to work in the community and participate in the center's volunteer program. This program is privately financed through various fund-raising projects and public contributions. It is her feeling that "Many times people who need help the most do not meet the criteria" with an example being the youth who shuttle back and forth into the prison system.

Tony Costello, a professor of architecture from Ball State University, hosted the fourth workshop I attended on Infill, Stabilization and Redevelopment. As part of his presentation, he had slides showing a standard "infill" house that his studio had designed and constructed at a cost of less than \$55,000.00. By obtaining "scattered site" lots in Muncie for about \$2,000.00 per lot, he has been able to construct 12 new houses for low-income families to purchase. He has expanded the program to include the High School Industrial Arts students, who have constructed one of the houses presently for sale. The design of the houses allows some variation on the exterior without sacrificing economy of construction or energy-efficiency. The 1200 square foot floor plan includes three bedrooms, a bath, kitchen, dining and living rooms with a laundry space, front and back porch.

The house is designed to fit on a 50-foot wide lot and meet all setback requirements.

Donna Hunter followed him from Columbus, Ohio. Columbus has a major problem with abandoned houses and empty lots. The neighborhoods are dotted with these underutilized pieces of land. The city has set up a land management office that acquires these lots and advertises them for sale on the Internet. The property is maintained by the city until it is sold. Many times the sale price is the back taxes owed, with several lots going for less than \$2000.00.

The last presenter was Bill Bingham from the host city, Lexington, KY. His neighborhood consisted of about 200 homes sandwiched in between the University of Kentucky and several major highways. He distributed his "Tips for Revitalizing Your Neighborhood" which is included with this report. He stated that his major problem was the purchasing of large houses by slumlords that would then rent them to students. The problem was magnified by the lack of off-street parking. Where a family would only have one or two cars, the houses would hold five or six students, all of whom would have a car. They were trying neighborhood-parking permits, but their system was not as effective as Bloomington's in that no proof of residence was required for a neighborhood-parking permit. He said that the students who lived in the neighborhood would give their parking permits to friends to allow them to visit and park in the neighborhood.