

The now and why of making a neighborhood

by Bruce Weik and Peter Schwartzman

A neighborhood doesn't just happen. Oh sure, you have neighbors. We all, for the most part, have neighbors. But the fact of the matter is: do we know who they are? Have you bothered getting to know them? If a neighborhood is to be a vital, active, humanizing part of our lives, we will have to work hard at reviving our neighborhoods. There are no textbook solutions. To bring back a vibrant, dynamic, empowering neighborhood, it starts with you.

The first thing that building a neighborhood needs is for someone (or perhaps a pair of someones) to step forward and be willing to organize an initial meeting of the neighbors. This obviously takes some time and energy. With the aid of only a few other volunteers, leafleting the neighborhood is a good first step. Leaflets should describe their intentions and set a meeting (including, time, date, and place—a driveway or garage works). A meeting will allow interested parties to share their concerns and air their aspirations and fears. It serves as a launching point for the development of a viable neighborhood.

Undoubtedly, it takes courage to step up and organize such a gathering. Some will doubt themselves and in moments of reflection will ask, "Why bother? What is the payoff?" As we pointed out in our last essay (dated 4/1/10), neighborhoods will enable us to live together in peace and without fear. Our efforts will give us pride and motivate us to become active members in the future of our community.

But what does a neighborhood look like? There is no clear formula. Some will be larger than others but, generally speaking, each should be fairly small. This is mainly for practical purposes. It is easier to get things done and have everyone agree on a particular direction in a small group versus a large one. Geographically, the boundaries of a neighborhood should be established by roads, parks, historical buildings, railroad tracks, waterways, or shopping centers. Setting the boundaries is a very important first step. It sets the stage for other necessary steps.

Once we know where the neighborhood is, then it is time to spread the word and encourage people to join in the fun. It isn't fun only because of block parties and neighborhood events that may ensue, it is fun because it is about improving security and safety. These are fundamental necessities for a livable neighborhood. No one wants to worry about vandals, drug dealers, violent dogs, speeding cars, or extremely loud noises. Life is hard enough to begin with. Having to deal with unruly neighbors adds to pressures and stresses that we can easily live without. Fear is one of our biggest challenges in today's world. Most often, this fear comes from not knowing or attempting to understand who our neighbors are and what they are up to. We have about 130 Neighborhood Watch groups in Galesburg. Some are active, many are not. A neighborhood watch group is a good addition to a neighborhood, but not its sole purpose. In fact, there may be several neighborhood watch groups within the boundaries of any given neighborhood. Perhaps this is where a neighborhood organization will draw its initial energy from. Alternatively, it will be from some

other existing group that has strong neighborhood connections. Or, maybe it will start with you.

Galesburg is struggling. That is not a secret. Economically, we are hurting. Our dropout rate in high school is unacceptable. Drug use and sales are high. People are hungry. Others cannot pay high utility bills. Others go without health care. Maintaining properties becomes more and more difficult. Will establishing and strengthening neighborhoods end these problems? No. That would not be a realistic expectation. But can a neighborhood help? The answer is unequivocally yes.

Reviving old-fashioned neighborliness can move us forward. Neighbors watching out for each other can make a huge difference. Can the neighborhood pitch in to help someone who cannot get their lawn mowed, for whatever reason? Can the neighbors get food to a household that is down on its luck? Can a group of neighbors approach someone with a threatening dog and voice their concerns? Can neighbors organize a driving service for people who have no other options? Can neighborhoods

put heat on the city administration for a slumlord who is not taking care of a property and taking advantage of the occupants? Or a house that is obviously selling drugs? Can a neighborhood organization petition the council for a park or ask that a vacant city-owned lot be used as a neighborhood garden? The answer is "yes" to all these questions. Working together, all of these things become easier than trying to do it individually.

Currently, our administrators search for that business that will come to town and supply us with jobs. We in fact pay them to do so. By organizing our neighborhoods and energizing each other, we are of the belief that this would no longer be necessary. Great neighborhoods make great cities. The more we invest in one another, the more outsiders will invest in us. Active, revitalized neighborhoods will attract investors to Galesburg. It's a sure thing. The bottom line is we have got to up the ante. The city administration cannot do this for us. The city council cannot do this for us. GREDA cannot do this for us. WE HAVE TO DO THIS FOR OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN. We

have to pump life into the neighborhoods. We have to revitalize our city. And it is imperative that we get started NOW. The Nurturing Neighborhood action group is looking for interested people to organize your neighborhood. We will supply what knowledge we have and lend a hand with the grunt work. Together we can make a difference, one neighborhood at a time.

No one is going to tell you, "Here is your neighborhood." No one is going to define it for you, or tell you what to do once you have a neighborhood organization up and running. The neighborhood calls the shots. The options are endless but they have to start somewhere. In fact, there are tools that have been developed in other cities that we will share in our next essay. At this point, we just ask that a few people step up and be counted. The time is now and we've got lots of people to support you in this neighborhood endeavor. So let's get started. Call 342-1593 if you are interested, or e-mail us at <weik@grics.net> or <thepeopleingalesburg@gmail.com>. Or better yet, attend the next Nurturing Neighborhood meeting at the public library, on April 20th, at 6 pm.

BABY BOOMER BABBLE

Bruce Weik

Sunday morning

I'm one of those baby boomers who never recovered from my early childhood religious experiences. I wanted to be a minister. One of my early role models was my friend's father, the minister at our church. He was not your typical, don't rock the boat, don't upset the congregation, type minister. He provoked you into listening and taking action. He was a big opponent of DDT. At the time, DDT was hailed as the miracle poison that would save corn and soybeans from weed ruination. It was a new miracle aid for farmers. Unfortunately, we lived in a rural community. That spelled trouble. I got a first-hand look at how ugly supposed Christians can be. In the end, he was right. DDT was a disaster for the environment. And for me, it spelled a rocky road concerning my relationship to the church. I really never fully recovered.

In 1980, I renewed my faith. "Sunday Morning" came on the air. I had a front row seat and didn't need to go any further than my living room. Charles Kuralt would deliver the sermon until April, 1994. Ninety minutes of top notch commentary on major headlines, in-depth stories on the arts, science, the environment, weather, education, world affairs. In a deal with CBS, he continued doing his "On the Road" odyssey, logging over one million miles on the nation's back roads, visiting places you never heard of, talking to anyone he found interesting, ending each show with about a minute of nature, filmed by the photographer that traveled with him. They went through six Winnebagos over the years. What a Sunday morning service.

Kuralt left Sunday Morning on April 3, 1994. He was dismayed by a new wave of anchor people taking over. He said, "I am ashamed that so many anchorpersons haven't any basis on which to make a news



judgment, can't edit, can't write, and can't cover a story." It looked like my "church in exile" was over.

Along came Charles Osgood, who stepped in for Kuralt. Osgood has been described as a poet-in-residence at CBS. Kuralt said of him, "He is one of the last, great, broadcast writers." Sunday Morning didn't miss a beat. The quality, the depth, the integrity, all stayed put.

For thirty years this "church in exile" has flourished. Oh, I've missed a few services here and there, but when I'm feeling down and blue, when it looks like all is lost, I sit in front of the TV on Sunday morning from 8-9:30am, and this funny thing happens: I get renewed, my faith gets energized, and I get this overwhelming feeling that there is a lot of good in the world, and all that good will beat out the bad.

Look at this list of choir members Kuralt and Osgood have had over the years: Ron Powers, Billy Taylor, Bill Geist, Roger Welsch,

John Leonard, Tim Sample, Ben Stein, Bill Flanagan, Anthony Mason, Harry Smith, and Mo Rocca. Some of the best newspeople in the business.

I suppose some of you are going to say that this is a poor excuse for a religious experience. But you would be wrong. No one has ever been known to say on Sunday Morning that I am going to hell because of my sins. They have never suggested that the creation story be taken literally, or made up an account of how Noah could have gotten all of those animals on a boat. I've never had to worry about my seat being taken, or wondered why an American flag stands next to The Ten Commandments in the corner. I never had to deal with anyone begging for more money to build a bigger church. From 8-9:30 on a Sunday morning, I feel good about the world and my place in it. What more could you ask for out of a Sunday morning?