



Connecting and convening leaders to work together for the improvement of their neighborhoods, communities, and cities.

Winter Newsletter

2021

Board of Directors

- Arlene DeYoung
- Christian Schock
- Dave Veltkamp
- Jay VanGroningen
- Ken Genzink
- Ren Broekhuizen

Help us grow the movement

- **Donate** to Great Lakes Urban to support our neighborhood strengthening activities.
- **Get to know** your neighbors.
- **Like and follow** Great Lakes Urban on Facebook!
- **Watch and share** our Lunch+Learn recordings and blogs with your networks.
- **Encourage** your church, business, etc. to get involved with a local neighborhood.
- **Visit our website** at: GreatLakesUrban.org to learn more.
- **Share** your ideas with us by emailing: info@greatlakesurban.org

To change how you receive this newsletter, or to talk with someone at Great Lakes Urban, send an email to: info@greatlakesurban.org or call 937-935-4844

The Soul of Good Neighboring

Did you know that more people than ever report feeling isolated and alone? It's a growing, global trend with massive implications. Research tells us that isolation affects your body at an equivalent rate as smoking 15 packs of cigarettes a day.

Research also tells us that knowing 6 or more neighbors reduces the feelings of isolation and loneliness. That's why we're on a mission at Great Lakes Urban to generate an epidemic of good neighboring! It's why we're launching what we're calling the Good Neighbor campaign.

The Good Neighbor campaign is a movement of people like you, people who are looking for deeper connection and meaning right where they are. Being a Good Neighbor means bringing people together in front yards, driveways, and porches to talk, laugh, and plan for a better future. It means knowing your neighbor's names and stories. Click the Good Neighbor tab at GreatLakesUrban.org to learn more.

As we approach Giving Tuesday on November 30, which marks the start of the end-of-year giving season, I am reminded of the fact that we are able to bring more hope and connection in place of loneliness and isolation through initiatives like these because of you. We are so grateful for you.

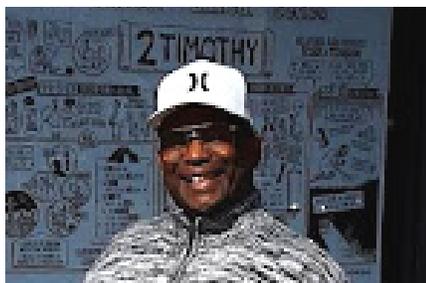
We're grateful for the good neighbors already at work in our communities. In this newsletter you'll read about James and Robin who show us that whatever your background, you can make a difference, but it never hurts to have encouragement along the way. It's good neighbors like Arlene, who financially support the work of building key structures and relationships, that help that to happen.

Frederick Buechner once wrote that one's purpose rests at the place where, "your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Together, I believe these stories paint a picture of what the soul of the work is. It's about all of us contributing out of our gladness to meet the basic human desire to feel gifted and connected. Thank you for living this purpose with us!



Eric Smith, Director

Finding Home, Hope, and Community: The Story of Paul Bowles



Paul Bowles
Westcore Neighbor

After struggling to feel at home for many years, Paul Bowles decided to take a chance and relocate to Holland, MI. Since moving to his current neighborhood in Westcore, Paul's life has improved in ways that he never would have imagined. He found a community and forged connections that transformed his mental, emotional, and physical health. We were fortunate enough to chat with Paul and learn more about how community involvement has led him to a life of meaning and possibility. Now he hopes that his story can encourage others to take a chance and get involved.

Can you share a little bit about yourself and how you came to live in Holland?

I spent the first 8 or so years of my life in New York, and then my mom passed away when I was 9, and my dad moved our family to Detroit, Michigan. At 18 years old, I went through things that most youngsters go through when they are testing the waters of life. At times, I was testing the wrong waters and ending up in the wrong places, but eventually a friend told me to come to the Holland area. I have been here ever since.

How did you get involved in the Holland community after moving?

Through my involvement with Circles USA, I was able to form concrete relationships with people in the community which have been really impactful on my life. I'm now involved with the organization Westcore Neighbors as a block connector, and my job is to be available for members of this block and help them find solutions for problems that arise. I also have the privilege to develop block parties and ultimately try to get people to come out of their shell and become neighbors.

Can you talk about the relationships you have formed in this community?

My friendship with Jay [of Great Lakes Urban] has been really important. He has helped me to prosper in life in so many ways. He's the one that pushed me to get to know others in the area by saying, "Paul, be a neighbor. Go knock on the door and introduce yourself and say hi." So, I did, and now I have a great friendship with my next-door neighbor, and they have become just like family.

How does having a stronger sense of community improve your life?

I know I'm not alone. Growing up I came from a family that wasn't very sociable and didn't have any community or relationships with extended family. When I got to Holland, I started developing significant and loving relationships with people that I had never had before. I've planted roots and found myself at home.

If someone was struggling to connect to their neighbors and community, what advice would you give them?

I would tell them my story and how most times, when I reached out of my comfort zone, I found myself welcomed into a new group of people. Fear is just you imagining that something bad is going to happen. I have relationships with all different people in the community of all ages and from all different cultures and background and it has enriched my life. I hope my story inspires them to say, "Hey, you know what, I am afraid of living in fear. Let me give this a try."

Community Pioneer: Meet Robin Klay

Community leader Robin Klay has lived in Pioneer Village for the past four years. Having worked and lived in places like West Africa, Japan, and Mexico, she has gained a diverse and global perspective that she brings into her community connecting in Holland, MI. After retiring from teaching at Hope College in 2010, she has spent a lot of time contributing to her neighborhood through forming connections and volunteering.

Robin believes that despite epidemic levels of loneliness, building community connections can really make a difference.

"Ultimately, humans are meant for friendship," Robin says. "A lot of people whom I have engaged with—especially while living abroad—have been waiting for years for someone to ask them to share their knowledge, experience, and values. I think that's the case with a lot of us; we are waiting to be asked to be a part of something meaningful."

Robin isn't waiting to be asked – she's doing the asking. Last winter, Robin met Jonna Johnson and learned about Jonna's experiences in community development and her work with Great Lakes Urban. They began talking about how Robin could make some connections with people in the condo area. To start, she went door to door to each of the 72 condo units with a flyer inviting those interested in creating opportunities to share their talents to meet neighbors' needs. Jonna and Robin quickly discovered that all the residents of Pioneer Village felt like strangers in their own neighborhood, even though some had lived here for years.



Robin Klay
and the Pioneer Neighbors

Robin was pleasantly surprised by the eagerness her neighbors have shown to get and stay connected. “Residents have started to recognize others in their community and strike up conversations.” She told the story of one woman who had recently lost her husband who wanted to find something to fill her time and meet people. She joined the Pioneer Neighbors group and offered to write up biographies so that people could get to know something about each other. “This woman spends 20 minutes or so getting to know the person,” Robin describes. “She then writes up an engaging biography that helps neighbors learn about each other, discover mutual interests, and create opportunities for new and deeper friendships.”

Robin was excited about this project because she knows from her experiences that, while people all over the world love to tell stories, they often do not believe that their stories matter, or that anyone cares to hear them. She described her experience living in a rural area of Oaxaca, Mexico. Living in a remote village, people assumed that their lives were of little interest to the broader community. Robin continues, “but if you ask them to tell you their stories, they are excited to share and, through sharing, they came to see their stories as important. They were shaping better futures for their communities and the world. It’s inspiring to see people who don’t believe they have remarkable lives come to realize that they do!”

According to Robin, connecting in community is as simple as letting them know you’re interested. “It’s important to show your neighbors that you are interested in getting to know them. If you are living in an area where this is a safe thing to do, I suggest going over to your neighbor’s house and knocking on their door. Saying ‘hello’ to those around you is the best place to start.”

Meet the Board: A Conversation with Arlene DeYoung

One of the many dear friends of Great Lakes Urban is Arlene DeYoung. Arlene graciously gives of her time, talent, and treasure as a member of our Board of Directors. We recently caught up with her to learn more about what motivates her to support the mission.

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved?

My husband and I have three kids and, even though we are rooted in Michigan, we like to travel to different states and countries so that our kids are exposed to different places and cultures. Community is important to our family. We volunteer with schools, churches, and community organizations. This opened me up to the nonprofit world, and I found I was inspired by how Great Lakes Urban empowers the community to make change.

What is something you admire about Great Lakes Urban’s efforts?

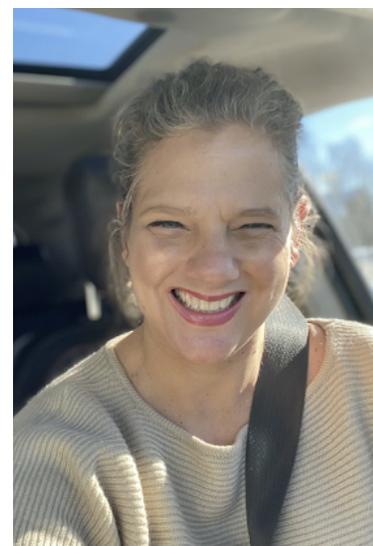
I love to hear the stories of the community and how, every time there’s a need or an event, everyone wants to be engaged. I was impressed by the success of one of our recent fundraisers, for example. We had an initial goal of \$8,000 and we ended up raising more than \$20,000! That really came from people hearing and connecting with the story of Great Lakes Urban and realizing its impact. It’s awesome to see people inspired to support the cause.

Why should people support Great Lakes Urban?

I would say that people should donate to Great Lakes Urban because you’re helping make a change in the community. These donations help empower and build on the work of the connectors and support the people that want to make change but are lacking resources. These people are doing a lot of hard work, and it’s a part-time job that they should be paid for. And, they really are trying to do big things with little resources. But those \$10, \$20, \$30 donations per month can go a long way.

What would you like people to know about this work?

That anybody can do it. Everyone can play a role: there’s hands-on work, hands-off work, prayer, literally getting “in the weeds” of a community garden, or whatever it may be. It’s also vital to provide feedback and share what your needs and wants in the community are so that you can find the support to make those changes happen. Great Lakes Urban is all about providing that support and giving you the tools and resources needed to start having an impact.



Arlene DeYoung
Donor, Board Member

Thank you Paul, Robin, and Arline! You can read their full stories at www.GreatLakesUrban.org/Updates

Supporting Good Neighboring



Restoration Network

100 Pine St Suite NW-4

Zeeland, MI 49464



Give the gift of dignity, hope, and connection this season.

When you give to Great Lakes Urban, that's what you're doing. And, you can double your impact when you make a contribution this Giving Tuesday (November 30) through the end of the year. A generous donor will be matching up to \$2,000 worth of total donations. It's easy to give. You can:

Return the provided envelope with a check

OR make a secure online donation by clicking "DONATE" at

www.GreatLakesUrban.org

We know you have a lot of giving options. Giving to Great Lakes Urban is different because your contribution will grow the ability of neighbors to meet each other's needs, and create a sense of belonging and hope in the process. As one donor says, "I choose to give to Great Lakes Urban because my contribution unlocks multiple other contributions by neighbors on behalf of neighbors." Thank you, thank you, thank you for your support!