



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

Spring Newsletter

2022

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### 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](http://GreatLakesUrban.org) to learn more.
- **Share** your ideas with us by emailing: [info@greatlakesurban.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@greatlakesurban.org) or call 937-935-4844

## Grounded in Strong Human Connection

I've been thinking lately about the words of Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General, from a recent address he delivered. "One of the enduring lessons of COVID 19 is that we really do need each other, that we are better when we are together, that we are stronger and more resilient as a society when we are grounded in strong human connection."

My hope and prayer is that 2022 is a turning point for our society; that we will take the opportunity that this season we're in provides to cast a vision for a state, a region, a country and a world grounded in strong human connections. Strong human connections, forged intentionally across race, class, age and every other divide, will pave the way for a lasting and bright future for ALL.

The beauty of it is that the simplest way to build the strong human connections that can counter the rising rates of isolation and loneliness-- and the physical and mental health toll that they have levied on our families and neighbors--is by building more connected communities.

I am grateful that you have joined with Great Lakes Urban in our mission to equip and mobilize people to connect, share life, and act on what they care about. I think you'll enjoy the stories in this newsletter of real people--like Jesus Ruiz and Raul Markum--whose lives are better because they live in more connected and supportive neighborhoods. You've helped make that happen! And, I hope you'll join us for a March 9 Lunch+Learn to hear how communities across the globe are engaged in this work as well.



**Eric Smith, Director**

## Join Us for a Special Lunch+Learn Event

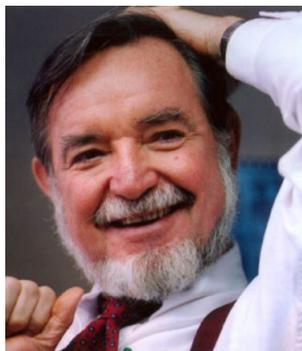
On March 9, 2022 from 12:00pm-1:00pm EST, two of the great luminaries of the global Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) movement -- **John McKnight**, Co-Founder of the ABCD Institute, and **Cormac Russell**, Director of ABCD Europe -- will be joining us for a special edition of our Lunch+Learn series. You won't want to miss their discussion of:

### **The Connected Community: Discovering the Health, Wealth & Power of Neighborhoods.**

As Jay Van Groningen, Great Lakes Urban board member and ABCD authority says, "it's hard to overstate the impact that the writings and work of McKnight and Russell have had on communities globally."

Our quarterly Lunch+Learn events are virtual conversations with the people building a more connected world. They are an opportunity get inspired, ask questions, and maybe even get some ideas to try in your community.

This event is free, but **registration is required**. To reserve your spot, go to the Events page of our website at [GreatLakesUrban.org](http://GreatLakesUrban.org). Have questions, or need help? Contact Eric at 937-935-4844 or [esmith@greatlakesurban.org](mailto:esmith@greatlakesurban.org).



**John McKnight**



**Cormac Russell**

## Conversations with the Community: Meet Jesus Ruiz

*At Great Lakes Urban, we do what we do because we believe in the value of bringing people together and forming strong community relationships. We also recognize that these strong relationships do not happen overnight. One place to start is to first listen to the needs, wants, stories, and dreams of the people sharing our place in the world. By speaking with members of the community and listening to what they have to say, we have learned so much about how people from all different backgrounds can come together and find that they have more in common than they thought.*

### Meet Jesus Ruiz

One member of the community, Jesus Ruiz, has been a part of his Holland neighborhood for over forty years and has seen first-hand how it has changed for the better as residents have become more connected. When he first came to Michigan at just 19 years old, he didn't think of his neighborhood as a very safe or friendly place. People were constantly moving to and from the area and there was very little chance to get to know one another and form friendships. But now, he notices that more people are staying in the neighborhood long-term and are interested in getting to know those around them which has resulted in a more comfortable and secure place to live.



**Jesus Ruiz**  
Westcore Neighbor

For Jesus, becoming friends with his neighbors has been a really wonderful experience. They come together, talk, hangout, and watch sports, one of Jesus' favorite things to do with his neighbors! Having these friendships also gives a sense of security to the residents. Jesus is grateful to know that if he ever needs anything, his neighbors will be there to help him, and he will do the very same for them.

Even for the neighbors that Jesus doesn't know as well, he likes that he is able to say hello or chat when they run into each other outside. Having conversations about what is happening in the neighborhood, local area, and the world is something that Jesus values, especially as he thinks about what he hopes to see in the future. He says, "thinking about the future is important to me — not so much for myself, but for the kids and young people. It's about supporting them and making the world better for them."

Jesus loves how nice everyone is in Holland. He knows that wherever he is in the area, people will stop and say hi. He looks forward to engaging with other residents in new ways, too, and he hopes to see more local sporting events and other opportunities to get outside, share meals, listen to music, and hangout with others.

Living in an area where you feel supported and liked by your neighbors creates room for you and your community to thrive. What begins with a few friendly residents looking out for one another can lead to substantial improvements in neighborhoods, cities, and beyond. Great Lakes Urban will continue to share voices from the community to bring us together and make meaningful changes that will enrich the lives of everyone.

## Life in the Westcore Neighborhood



## Dia De Los Muertos: When Culture & Community Meet

Great Lakes Urban is proud to support the work of 3sixty in the Eastcore neighborhood of Holland, Michigan. This past year, Eastcore residents launched a new event with special meaning; an event that showed us all the value of culture in building a connected community.

### First Annual Dia De Los Muertos festival

A significant percentage of Eastcore residents find connection, meaning, and belonging through the rich traditions of the Hispanic culture. Included in this number are business owners Jaqui Navarrete and Lucy Mircoles. When they were approached by Lori Appledorn from 3sixty's Neighborhood Advocacy Team about piloting a Dia De Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) festival, they agreed it was a good opportunity to share this tradition with the neighborhood.

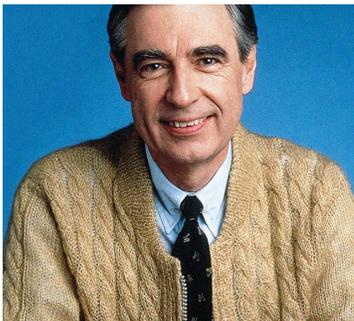


Residents of Eastcore woke up on October 31, 2021 to a sunny and somewhat chili morning. If they walked over to the field at Rosa Parks, they would see a flurry of activity as festival planners and volunteers hurriedly put up tents and tables, set out memory candles and sugar skulls, and organized the Altar. By 2:00 O'clock everything was in place. The festival kicked off with a welcome, followed by music from a Mariachi band. Children and youth took advantage of the face painting and craft booths, while families adorned the altar with photos, sugar skulls, and candles.

Through the festival, 63 residents created together a collective experience of remembrance and deep human connection. Sandy, for example, had recently lost her fiancé to COVID-19. She placed a photo of Tim on the altar and mourned his passing with others, in community. As Jake Norris, Director of 3sixty remarked afterward, "It was absolutely moving to see this shared appreciation for life lived together emerge." Every single one of the residents that participated in the follow-up survey said they'd come out again in 2022! With the likes of Jaqui and Lucy at the helm, you know next year's Dia De Los Muertos festival will be even more meaningful. We wish you all the best, Eastcore!



## "Won't You Be My Neighbor" Day is Nearly Here!



**Fred Rogers**  
Mr. Rogers'  
Neighborhood

In honor of the birthday of Fred Rogers, beloved T.V. personality from "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," March 20 is *Won't You Be My Neighbor* Day. March might be an excellent opportunity to try something in your neighborhood. Looking for ideas and inspiration?

- Visit the **Good Neighbor** page at [GreatLakesUrban.org](https://GreatLakesUrban.org) for ideas and inspiration.
- A good place to start is with the **8 Door Challenge**. Our friend David Burton explains how he got to know his immediate neighbors at [https://youtu.be/qP\\_QuOFUbqk](https://youtu.be/qP_QuOFUbqk).
- Sign up to get a weekly **Neighboring Tip** from our friends at the Neighboring Movement in your email inbox by visiting [neighboringmovement.org/52-weeks-of-neighboring/](https://neighboringmovement.org/52-weeks-of-neighboring/).

If you have questions, or if you do an act of good neighboring this month, please let us know at [esmith@greatlakesurban.org](mailto:esmith@greatlakesurban.org). We'd **LOVE** to be share about the impact of our collective neighboring in the next newsletter or blog post.

Or via our secure online system by visiting [www.greatlakesurban.org](http://www.greatlakesurban.org) and clicking the "Donate" tab.

Great Lakes Urban  
100 Pine St Suite NW-4  
Zeeland, MI 49464

Will you consider contributing toward our vision of reaching 100 neighborhoods with our connector program in the next three years?  
You can make a tax deductible donation by sending a check to:



## Give the Gift of Neighborhood Transformation



**Restoration Network**  
100 Pine St Suite NW-4  
Zeeland, MI 49464