



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

Spring Newsletter

2024

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- **Visit our website** at: GreatLakesUrban.org to learn more.
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Strengthening Neighborhoods. Transforming Lives.

I love serendipity, a word that describes when events conspire in a beneficial way. It feels like serendipity that this newsletter is coming out in March, the month when we honor the March 20 birthday of Fred Rogers of the *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* show.

Fred Rogers once said, *"The more we can be in a relationship with those who might seem strange to us, the more we can feel like we're neighbors and all members of the human family."* In the face of a world on edge, I need that reminder. We can't change the whole world, but we can change someone's world by caring for our neighbors.

Read on to learn about upcoming opportunities to honor Fred Rogers' memory. As well you will get a glimpse at new and exciting ways we're seeing neighborhoods and lives being transformed across the country. What started in a handful of West Michigan neighborhoods has grown into a ground-up movement across the country inspiring belonging and impact. It's heartwarming to see.

What makes all of this possible are our incredible partnerships with outfits like The Hopeful Neighborhood Project, as well as the many corporate, philanthropic, and individual donors who have invested in the dream of strong neighborhoods and transformed lives. This newsletter, and the stories contained herein, are dedicated to you for your dedication toward, and investment in, the vision for flourishing people and places!



Eric Smith
Executive Director



First Annual *Be My Neighbor* Breakfast March 20th, 7:30AM | Midtown Center | Holland, MI

Join us for our first annual Be My Neighbor breakfast! Don't miss your chance to meet leaders and neighbors from across Michigan who are transforming lives in new and exciting ways. As neighborhoods in Holland are getting safer, healthier, and more vibrant, we invite you to be a part of this movement.

Join us on March 20th. Breakfast begins 7:30, stories at 8:00 and optional networking at 9:00. Seating is limited. Reserve your spot and learn more today at greatlakesurban.org/events.

Belonging is a Journey

If the rates of loneliness and isolation are true, why don't more people see the value in being a neighbor? Across the country, people who are working to create belonging and impact in neighborhoods are asking that exact question. It's confusing that many people don't have the social support needed but won't cross the street to meet their neighbors.

We're on a journey to understand this better so that we can build the tools and resources needed to build a culture of neighboring. And we're bringing you with us.

Join us in this series as we discover the spark behind belonging. What leads people to such a deep understanding of belonging that they're willing to go out of their way to create it with others?

We'll start by meeting Jonna, Makya, and Robin. These three women are leading neighborhood organizing and connecting efforts in the West of Washington neighborhood in Holland, Michigan. As they've gotten to know each other and their neighbors better, they've realized how different their journeys to community and belonging are. Read their full stories on our website.

What is the spark that led you to community?

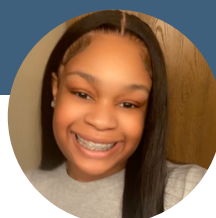
When I was about 7, my father, who was a lawyer, sent me (the oldest) out to connect with a man and his family who lived behind a nearby fruit ranch. I don't remember what he told me was the reason, because it soon became clear that it wasn't just an errand. The point was, I think, to let them know that we were their neighbors and wanted to be connected.

Reflecting back, I was learning that neighbors are created by someone reaching out across an invisible line—spatial, cultural, generational, or other.



Robin

The birth of my son is what started to spark this change for me. I realized how important it was that he grow up with good support systems and love and not just from me. It is important for him to grow up in a healthy community. Another thing that sparked this change was me taking a Community Connector course through Great Lakes Urban. This course really taught me not only the importance of community but also key ways to bring people together and asset mapping.



Makya

I realized, community is the solution. No matter the concern we want to address, no matter the joy we're looking for community is fundamental.

Many humans who are connected with the land know this already. When participating with and paying attention to the earth, interconnected life is more tangible, visible, obvious. I grew up removed from the land, among other barriers, so I needed to learn about community and interconnectedness the hard way.



Jonna

Won't You Be My Neighbor day is **March 20th**. You can be a part of it by making a difference right where you live! Here are some ways to get started:

- Hang a sign or poster in your front window
- Say hello to a neighbor
- Host a front lawn get-together
- Get the entire family involved with the free family activity kit

Even though we often want to meet our neighbors, we can feel like we need a reason to introduce ourselves to the person we've lived next to for seven years. This is a perfect opportunity to do so and honor the legacy of Mr. Rogers!

Visit **www.WontYouBeMyNeighborDay.com**, add yourself to the map, and find resources to help you connect with your neighbors. Don't have time to do it the week of March 20? Check out the web page at www.greatlakesurban.org/good-neighbor for great year-round ideas.

March Momentum



wontyoubemyneighbor.com

From the mountains of Citrus Heights, California...

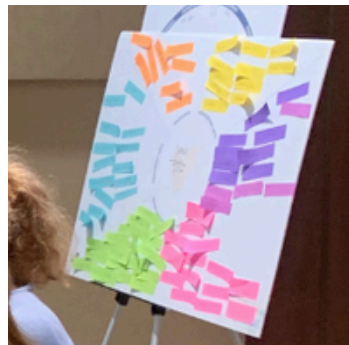
Earlier this month, the 11 neighborhood areas across Citrus Heights, CA came together to learn about neighborhood well-being and how to build on the assets of people and places. Great Lakes Urban staff had the opportunity to partner with The Hopeful Neighborhood Project in leading this Neighborhood Project Lab! By the end of the day, neighborhoods had action plans including:

- Revitalize the neighborhood's Veterans Garden
- Create a Toolbox Team that will help neighbors with small household repairs
- Start a neighborhood newsletter

Even more, neighbors left feeling motivated and capable to create change in their community starting with what's strong. Several participants shared how different and energizing to share why they love their neighborhood instead of what is wrong.



**Neighbors, City Staff and Elected Officials
creating Neighborhood Action Plans**





...to the foothills of Glenwood, North Carolina

In a recent neighborhood lab co-facilitated by Megan Ginn of Great Lakes Urban, neighbors across Glenwood implemented the Hopeful Neighborhood Project's three-step process to:

1. Discover the Gifts
2. Imagine the Possibilities
3. Pursue the Common Good

These passionate and caring neighbors have already begun to work on the next steps of their action plan to connect with more neighbors and build belonging where they live!

Interested in learning more about the Neighborhood Project Lab? Reach out to Megan, at megan@greatlakesurban.org.

Joe & Alice Geelhoed: Volunteers in Motion

The Geelhoeds, friends of Great Lakes Urban, organize a team (Plymouth Peddlers) every year to ride in the Restoring Our Communities (ROC) family-friendly cycling event. They fundraise over \$1,000 annually through ROC. We interviewed them recently.

Joe & Alice, can you share about your support of neighborhoods?

We mentor youth, do garage sales and crafts to raise funds for Connectors, and we work at the Plymouth Heights food pantry. These activities keep us connected to our neighbors that benefit from these resources. Connections matter. Yesterday, the local track coach had the students running sprints on our street since the neighborhood was outside. Neighbors and children were able to engage with the track team. It was a needed positive experience. And when our church is compassionately involved with the neighborhood, the entire diverse community is blessed with many ways to connect.



Joe & Alice at ROC

What about ROC? How'd you get involved and why does it matter to you?

One thing about us is we live in a neighborhood where you see it every day. You know the stresses and the issues and you want to make it better. Fundraising for ROC is a way to do that. It's ultimately about relationships. We first got involved when we were invited by Dave. And, through ROC we've gotten to know other good people, such as Kara. Kara lives in our neighborhood now, and has been a real gift. We'd miss being a part of the ROC community if we weren't involved every year.

What would you say to others curious about ROC and giving back?

Just do it. Register for ROC. If you can, pull some people together and make it a team experience with folks from your group or church. You'll grow your relationships and feel good about the difference you're making in places that need it. It's a simple way to start your own journey with neighborhoods.

Thanks so much Joe & Alice. Your efforts matter! **Visit www.ROCcycling.org** for details on our 10th annual ride at Millennium Park on September 7. Can't make it? Donate toward Joe & Alice's ride today!