



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

Fall Newsletter

2022

## Focusing on the Core: Belonging & Civic Muscle

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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)

If you're like me, you're finding it hard to believe that fall is already upon us. Where did summer go, I find myself asking? There's no mistaking it, though. The kids are back in school, and the days are getting shorter, and a little cooler. The changing of the season is a good time to take stock of where things stand. And I, for one, am so proud of what we've accomplished together--all of us--the past month.

Read on to learn about the national Good Neighbor Day campaign, the results of the annual Restoring Our Cities (ROC) fundraiser, and our quarterly Lunch+Learn. Each of these recent events serves an important purpose in our efforts. They serve to fuel the movement, to inspire neighbors to action, and to share innovations and promising practices in Asset Based Community Development.

These events punctuated our ongoing work training and equipping leaders and neighborhoods to build strong, connected, safe, healthy and vibrant neighborhoods and communities. I think you'll enjoy hearing from Thomas White about his work in Springfield, Ohio, and about the work of 3sixty building a sense of place in Holland, Michigan.

If you find yourself inspired after reading these stories, one way to respond is by giving toward our Giving Tuesday campaign. This year, Giving Tuesday falls on November 29, the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. Visit [www.GreatLakesUrban.org/donate](http://www.GreatLakesUrban.org/donate) to learn about the impact you'll have.

Finally, I was asked the other day to share more about why we do what we do. There are a lot of reasons, and not enough space to detail it all. But I attempt on the last page of this newsletter to share a little about why we focus on cultivating connection and change.



**Eric Smith, Director**

## National "Good Neighbor Day" Campaign Builds Belonging



Did you know that Good Neighbor Day is a national holiday? It has been, by presidential proclamation, since 1978. To raise awareness, Great Lakes Urban has collaborated on a national "Good Neighbor Day" campaign.

People from across the country have been participating by visiting [www.nationalgoodneighborhood.com](http://www.nationalgoodneighborhood.com), taking the pledge, adding their zip code to the map, using the social media toolkit, and performing acts of kindness. And you can, too!

You can build belonging in your block, neighborhood, and community! It starts with hello, that's it. To learn more and find additional resources and ideas, read an article co-authored by Great Lakes Urban and The Hopeful Neighborhood Project at [www.GreatLakesUrban.org/blog](http://www.GreatLakesUrban.org/blog).

"We are mindful that the noblest human concern is concern for others. Understanding, love and respect build cohesive families and communities. The same bonds cement our Nation and the nations of the world. For most of us, this sense of community is nurtured and expressed in our neighborhoods where we give each other an opportunity to share and feel part of a larger family." --1978 Proclamation

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## Restoring Our Cities (ROC): Fueling Belonging & Civic Muscle

On September 10, 35 cyclists and fundraisers gathered to ride in the 8th annual Restoring Our Cities (ROC) event. It was a picture perfect day in Johnson Park as participating teams met at the pavilion for pre-ride fellowship and food and then dispersed toward the destination of their choosing.

Sponsoring the event were four corporate donors, including a Regional Champion (Code Blue), 3 City Champions (Rivershores Hardwood Flooring & Cabinetry, Ideal Life Financial and CareSource), and a Block Champion (The Hopeful Neighborhood Project). Others, such as Cross Country Cycle, Buist Electric, and Dan Vos Construction provided SAG/other support.

In total, 67 donors contributed \$25,000, exceeding last year's mark. What does all of this add up to? It means that we will be able to bring our connecting work to 2 or more new neighborhoods in 2023. We will convert this support into stories and quotes like the one below, which was made possible, in part, by last year's ROC fundraiser.

"I am grateful for the community involvement and connections I have made. These connections have improved my life in many unexpected ways. For example, a crew donated, delivered, and installed a water heater for my husband and I during the holidays. Best of all, I have connected with other folks who want to improve the place we love and live in."

Not only is this event important for the neighbors that will benefit, it's also meant to be a space of comradery and connection in-and-of-itself. As one participant commented, "It is so fun to come together as a community to help raise money to promote stronger communities. This was my first year doing this, but you can absolutely count on me being back next year!"

We look forward to seeing everyone next year. Put Saturday, September 9, 2023 down on your calendar (the first Saturday after Labor Day). We will open registration at 8:00 am again at Johnson Park, and add a 9:00 am guided trip for those wanting a family-friendly group experience. Details and registration will be added to [www.roccycling.org](http://www.roccycling.org). We've been told the weather will be perfect again!



## Lunch+Learn Series: Inspiring Belonging & Civic Muscle

**A MASTERCLASS**  
In Neighborhood Flourishing

Join us for a live, virtual Lunch+Learn conversation with best-in-class leaders and innovators in the Asset Based Community Development movement



<b>MARIO DAVISON</b> Community Organizer, North End Community Improvement Collaborative	<b>DEANNA WEST-TORRENCE</b> Founder & Executive Director, North End Community Improvement Collaborative	<b>TONY CHINNI,</b> Research & Development Manager, North End Community Improvement Collaborative
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Funds raised through ROC and Giving Tuesday make it possible to provide our network of neighborhood connectors and partners with funding support. Another way Great Lakes Urban cultivates connection and change is through our quarterly Lunch+Learns. This series creates space for inspiration, learning, and solidarity through live, virtual interviews with leaders and innovators in the Asset Based Community Development--or ABCD--movement.

On September 14, we heard from Deanna West-Torrence (Founder & Executive Director), Tony Chinni (Research & Development Manager), and Mario Davison (Community Organizer) of the North End Neighborhood Improvement Collaborative, or NECIC. NECIC is a Mansfield, Ohio-based nonprofit that uses

ABCD in their mission to revitalize the North End neighborhood. You'll want to hear, among other things, how using an asset lens helped turn a potential \$20,000 property fine into a \$100,000 gain for neighborhood residents and entrepreneurs!

To catch that story and a lot of other insights, visit [www.GreatLakesUrban.org/events](http://www.GreatLakesUrban.org/events). From there, you can click on links to our past Lunch+Learns. You can also see who we'll be interviewing next. We hope you'll join us on December 14 as we host another Lunch+Learn with another "best in class" organization, the Neighboring Movement, out of Wichita, Kansas.

## UpTurn Builds Belonging: Meet Thomas White, UpTurn's Director

*We love to feature the people and leaders that together make up strong neighborhoods. Thomas White, Executive Director of UpTurn Ohio, is one such person. Great Lakes Urban has had the privilege of providing Thomas with training and coaching. We caught up with him to learn more.*



**Thomas White**

### **Will you share a little about yourself and about UpTurn Ohio?**

UpTurn Ohio is a 501c(3) nonprofit Community Development Corporation that empowers the neighborhoods in Springfield to thrive. We invest deeply in one block at a time, building upon each neighborhood's strengths and goals. We're currently focused on the Spring Hill neighborhood, which is where I have lived for more than 10 years. It's a neighborhood with a rich history of independence and innovation and, today, a lot of economic and social isolation issues. I come to my role as UpTurn's Executive Director with a lot of private sector experience, but I have always had a heart for the city.

### **Will you share a little about what you've been up to in Spring Hill, and what your vision is?**

I began my work in Spring Hill in June of 2022, shortly after identifying Asset Based Community Development, or ABCD, as the tool that would work best in our community. I tested my listening skills using existing relationships with neighbors, and began listening as I walked and biked through the area. My neighbor and I hosted a lunch on the lawn, and we did door knocking to meet neighbors, invite them, and listen. We found that most of our neighbors wanted to engage with each other and have events but didn't know the best way to go about it. With this information, we began to take a deep dive into making every effort to build trust. We've started building better social engagements in my block with the hopes of creating an example of what could happen throughout the rest of the neighborhood.

### **How do you feel the partnership with Great Lakes Urban has benefited the work?**

I had a very specific vision for community work that I was unable to put a name to, nor did I know of any resources that would help me develop my thoughts on it. I was connected with Eric Smith through a mutual friend in May of 2022, and in the first conversation Eric named what I saw and provided me with tools, training, and a network of like minded people through Great Lakes Urban (GLU). Eric and Jay Van Groningen have been a wealth of knowledge for me, and during a visit to Holland, Michigan for an in-person training, Jay personally showed me a hospitality I'd never experienced before. In my short time in partnership with GLU, I feel equipped and empowered to do the work God has called me to do, and I don't feel alone.

*Thank you, Thomas, for sharing your story! It's an honor to be walking this journey with you!*

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## City Wall Mural Festival: The Color of Belonging

At Great Lakes Urban we often talk about the building blocks that are available in every neighborhood for self-development. One of those building blocks is history, culture and stories. What better way to bring culture and story to life than through the arts? Art--especially public art, like murals--can play a role in building a sense of place, and a sense of place is a critical ingredient for inside-out neighborhood transformation.

We want to congratulate 3sixty, a key Holland, MI partner, for a successful City Walls Mural Festival this summer. The festival included mural painting by dozens of artists, a block party complete with music, food, carnival games, kids' activities, pinatas and a visit from the Holland Department of Public Safety's Polar Patrol, as well as opportunities for residents to share what they felt a flourishing Eastcore neighborhood would be like.

What makes events like these possible is the hard work of residents and community allies. 3sixty is hard at work strengthening its organizational infrastructure. In fact, 3sixty was recently featured in an article by the nationally recognized Lupton Center. You can read the article by visiting [www.luptoncenter.org/blog/](http://www.luptoncenter.org/blog/) and looking for the August 30 article titled "City Shapers Update: Holland, Michigan"

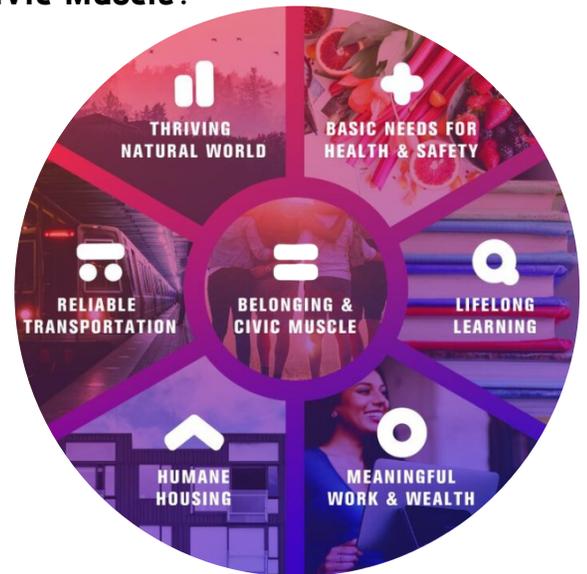


## Why Focus on Belonging & Civic Muscle?

Great Lakes Urban is committed to cultivating connection and change. Our framework for achieving this aim is based on our 14 years of experience as a community based organization, as well as on research, such as that of the WIN (Wellbeing in the Nation) Network. The WIN Network has conducted extensive vital conditions analyses.

Vital signs, like heart rate and temperature tell us what is going in our body. Vital conditions tell us what is going on in our community. As depicted in the graphic to the right, they are properties of places that we all need in order to reach our full potential, like food, housing, and work.

A key insight from their research is that "Belonging and Civic Muscle" rests at the heart of the other vital conditions. When belonging and civic muscle are strong, residents are able to assess their issues, identify resources, and work together to achieve a preferred future. In other words, it is the factor that makes improvements in the others possible.



<https://winnetwork.org/vital-conditions>

Belonging and civic muscle is, “about having fulfilling relationships and the social connection people need to thrive. It's being part of a community, contributing to its vibrancy, and developing the power to co-create a common world.” While there are numerous civil society organizations and public sector agencies focused on health, safety, learning, a thriving natural world, etc., there are relatively few organizations focused on cultivating place-based and people-centered connection and change.

Great Lakes Urban fills that void. We are at the forefront of a growing issue, an issue that some have gone so far as to call an "epidemic of loneliness" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/20/nyregion/loneliness-epidemic.html>). Even before the pandemic, everything from increasingly divisive politics to worsening health indicators appear to be linked to increased social isolation, a lack of belonging, and a decreased sense of mutual obligation.

This is increasingly acknowledged in the field of public health. Earlier this summer, in the Stanford Social Innovation Review journal, Great Lakes Urban was highlighted by Healthy Places by Design as a prime example of the important work that can help build community connections and improve public health. ([https://ssir.org/issue/summer\\_2022](https://ssir.org/issue/summer_2022)). Similarly, we were invited to speak by the US Surgeon General's office at the US Conference of Mayors on the topic.

So, how can we replace loneliness and isolation with hope and connection? Our experience is that the neighborhood--whether a city neighborhood, a subdivision, a high rise, or a small town--is the key unit of change. Neighborhoods are large enough that diversity exists, yet small enough to create the social environment in which a sense of community can thrive. When residents experience greater connectivity, they increasingly work together across differences to co-create a shared future.

Since 2008, Great Lakes Urban has been helping neighbors co-create a shared future using Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), a set of practices backed by three decades of research by the ABCD Institute. Community connectors--highly networked residents--are key to integrating ABCD into the rhythms of neighborhood life. Supporting and equipping connectors is the key to growing belonging and civic muscle, which is why it is the core of what we do.

## WIN Network Research Findings

### The state of belonging & civic muscle

- the number of people feeling isolated has doubled since the 1980's to 40% today.
- The number of people who say they have no one to turn to during difficult times has tripled since 1985.
- A third of people today believe that “most people can be trusted,” down from 50% in the 1970s.
- The number of definable hate groups has doubled since the year 1999.

### The impact of belonging & civic muscle

- Social connections contribute to our individual needs, including enhancing mental and physical wellbeing, helping us navigate life's challenges, and result in our living longer and happier lives.
- At the neighborhood level, social cohesion is associated with higher levels of trust and cooperation, lower crime rates, higher per-capita incomes and better long-term economic prospects.