



North End Connection

The Newsletter of the Creston Neighborhood Association

Winter 2015

Thank you and goodbye from Mac Brown

By: Mac Brown

As I come upon my last days as Creston Neighborhood Association's Community Organizer it's a time of reflection in regard to the trials and accomplishments of the last six years.

I have had the pleasure of partnering with so many neighbors. We worked side by side making a small corner of the world a safe place for families of all backgrounds and a place where neighbors believe in the joined prosperity of economic development and environmental stewardship.

Coming into this job I had no idea in how many different areas of the community I would contribute to for the better. It has certainly been a learning experience.

I have had an excellent time working with students of our wonderful neighborhood schools, the business leaders tirelessly revitalizing our business corridor, church leaders whose commitment

to community transcends denomination and our neighbors who realize that the only way to change their neighborhood for the better is to be an active and positive part of it. I truly believe our neighborhood's future is filled with many great opportunities and while the job may be done for me, there is still much to do.

I want to thank the many wonderful neighbors that sup-



Photo by: Pete Tabberer

Mac Brown and Captain McWatters present the Mary Bueche Public Safety Award to neighbor Scott Coldwell at CNA's 2013 annual meeting.



Photo courtesy: CNA

Mac Brown addresses the crowd at last summer's National Night Out and Monarch butterfly release at Briggs park.

port CNA's mission and have made my job a blast.

To our Public Safety Volunteers, thank you for partnering with me to help keep Creston a safe neighborhood for all. It is no surprise that Creston is experiencing some of the lowest crimes rates in the city thanks to dedicated neighbors like you. Many of you have thanked me for helping with specific crime issues on your block, however I did very little but point you in the right direc-

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City High student volunteers with Living Green

By: Ana Cecilia Lezama

CNA would like to thank the Wege Foundation for supporting our service learning partnership with City High. In this article Ana Cecilia Lezama, a City High student who volunteered with Creston's Living Green Committee through this partnership, talks about her experiences:

Volunteering with the Living Green Committee has been a good experience for me. I have only volunteered for two events, but they have been fun, and great learning experiences.

The first event I volunteered for was the Butterfly Garden Celebration. It celebrated our new butterfly way-station at Briggs Park.

We got an amazing turnout for the event. I helped out in preparation to the event by making the posters indicating where and what all of our stations were. Then, during the event, I was

face painting. I had fun volunteering because everybody was so happy and excited. It was incredibly gratifying.

The other event I volunteered for was the Autumn Harvest Festival. It was at Aberdeen Park, celebrating the pear and apple trees. The trees had been previously planted, but had just begun to fruit.

Due to the weather, we did not get such a good turnout on this event. It was a bit chilly, and the wind didn't help. Again, for this event I made posters. I also helped direct some of the games and events. The people who were




Photo Courtesy: CNA

Neighbors and volunteers gathered at Aberdeen Park to celebrate Autumn and Creston's newest urban orchard.

there seemed to like our cause, and we even got one or two extra volunteers!

Along with doing my part and helping with events, I have enjoyed getting to know different, wonderful people. It has been amazing, and I look forward to more events.




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tion and foster relationships with those that have the resources to help. Stay dedicated to the prosperity of your block by continuing to make friends with your neighbors, build relationships with your community officers and use CNA's new Community Organizer as a resource. The safety of our neighborhood will continue to thrive.

Thank you to our wonderful environmentally focused neighbors. It has been my pleasure to watch Creston's Living Green in Creston Committee grow to be a leader in green initiatives for our neighborhood and city. Not long after arriving on the job, I had a neighbor that came in and wanted to work on environmental issues in our neighborhood and out of that commitment to work with CNA and organize neighbors, we

have the first Urban Orchards planted here in our city, a butterfly garden to assist our wandering Monarchs on their amazing journey, rain barrels for our gardens, Creston's Community Gardens and much more.

Thank you to the wonderful leaders of this organization. Over the years I have seen many of our neighbors take on the volunteer position of being on CNA's Board of Directors. Thank you for the many hours you have put in to ensure the continued success of our organization.

It has been a blast building playgrounds, working with neighbors of all sizes and age, catching the bad guys, working in our garden and

working with many volunteers from all around our city and country. And, if I kept going, this whole newsletter would be filled with so many wonderful memories. So simply put, thank you for the chance to serve you and this wonderful neighborhood.



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Neighbors rally to support Creston's Library

By: Deborah Eid

Below are excerpts from comments made by Creston neighbors at the December 16, 2014 library board commission meeting:

We have heard that the library is cutting back on programs and may be considering closing the VanBelkum branch library altogether. We feel this will not only be a detriment to the residents in the Creston Neighborhood who use this library, but that it will diminish the desirability for choosing this area to live.

In looking over demographic information around the different branches and gathering other information, it appears a better case can be made for expanding the

VanBelkum library than for reducing programs and/or closing it.

A cut-back on programs or closing the library would also be an impediment to the efforts of both the North Quarter's and Creston Neighborhood Association's efforts to improve the business district along the Creston corridor.

Over the last 10 years CNA has helped with over \$500,000 of investment in public art, the award winning Plainfield Water Quality Islands and the creation of the North Quarter CID. This neighborhood development has in turn brought new businesses and facade improvements to Plainfield.

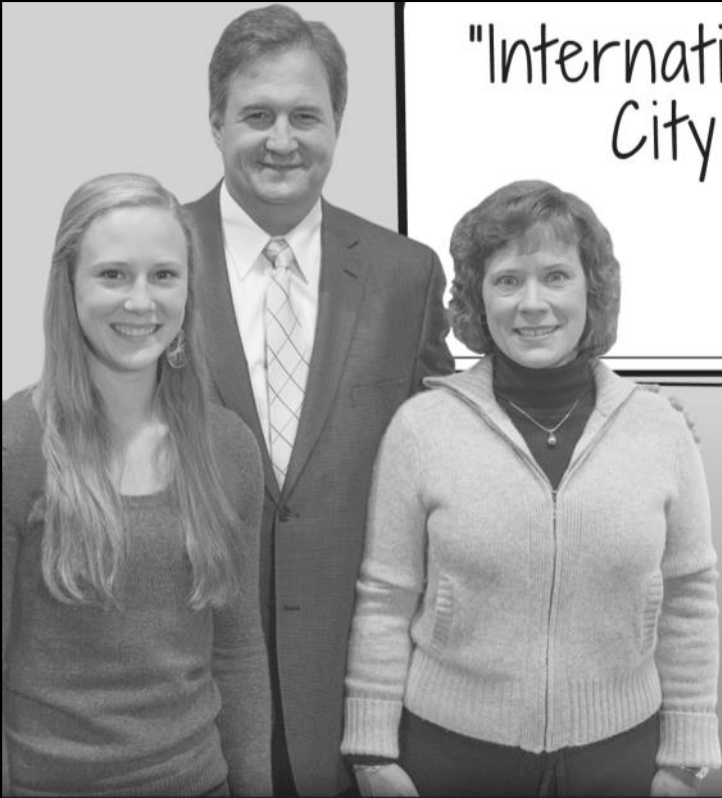
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CNA grows with some expert help

By Deborah Eid

Once a year CNA's directors meet for a retreat to assess where we've been and where we'd like to go in the near future. For the last two years we've benefited from the experience and insight of trainer and Creston neighbor Matthew Downey, who has given of his time as a volunteer at our retreats and follow-up trainings.

Matthew currently serves as Program Director for Nonprofit Services at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University. Over his 23 years as a consultant, program manager and development director Mr. Downey has presented leadership training to boards of small non-profits from Kalamazoo to Capetown (yes, that's in South Africa!).

Matthew "gets" us and helps us feel like we are part of a wider community and not uniquely alone in our challenge of always having too few resources and way too much work for such a small organization!

While helping us to understand our limitations, Matthew also emphasized some great practical ways to align our mission and our money. Organizing our thinking around where each of our programs or new events might fit was a tremendous gift to this hard working



Photo Courtesy: Matthew Downey

Matthew Downey serves as Program Director for Nonprofit Services at the GVSU's Johnson Center for Philanthropy.

board as we always look for the most impact for the best use of

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Expert, cont. from pg. 7

our resources.

36 years as a non-profit means that CNA has enjoyed the opportunity to engage hundreds of neighbors over our lifetime in various volunteer positions. Those who have wanted to “notch it up” to a higher level of commitment join our fun loving and hardworking board of directors. All of these volunteer board members get to pick up new skills through our visible, multifaceted and high impact community work. A number of them have gone on to serve on other non-profit and city commission boards.

Because CNA enjoys professional training from experts like Matthew Downey, we are strengthened in being able to car-


ry out our vision for a beautiful, diverse and safe Creston.

Lots of organizations have “directors” serving as their governing body but CNA has always enjoyed a high level of participation from our board members; they make policy decisions, weigh in on issues affecting the neighborhood, provide guidance to the executive director, create and run new events and community programs and most importantly, work hard on the fundraising piece of our work to help us build and grow our community into a healthier place one day at a time.

The usual requirement for participation at this level is enthusiasm and dedication to our mission

of an improved quality of life for our community. The CNA board meets most months of the year on the 4th Thursday at 6:30pm. Come on by if you’d like to learn more about being a CNA board or committee member. OR call our office and ask for Deborah if you’d like a personal invitation!

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Library, cont. from pg. 6

N.E. with the first of potentially several new construction projects within blocks of Van Belkum. Proposed plans shared with CNA anticipate an additional 10% increase in the population of the residential area between Leonard and Sweet.

Just two years ago the Grand Rapids Public School System was planning on closing Creston High School and then vacating the building. When they were informed about all the energy that was being put into revitalizing the Creston Corridor, they

scrapped their plans to vacate the building and instead it is being used to house and grow City High-Middle School.

Respondents across the Midwest including Grand Rapids were surveyed and results featured in a June 2014 MSU Land Policy Institute



Photo by: Mac Brown

CNA staff and area neighbors turned out to support Creston's library



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study. They would like a wide variety of amenities within walking distance of their homes including libraries alongside cinemas, coffee shops and neighborhood grocery stores. And, even more importantly,


among millenials and lower income families a neighborhood library within walking distance was "the most desirable neighborhood amenity"!

Important Update: Judy Stilley, long time Van Belkum Librarian, will be moving to Yankee Clipper Branch in March 2015. Please stop by and let her know Creston appreciates her dedication!

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North End Connection
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Creston Neighborhood Association

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Board meets the 4th Thursday of most months. 6:30 pm @ CNA offices.

The North End Connection is a community newsletter published 4 times a year with a circulation of 1000 and is distributed in various local businesses. Advertising space is available. Contact our office for rate information.

The North End Connection is produced by volunteers and published by the Creston Neighborhood Association. The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the staff, Board of Directors or membership of the association.

CNA is partially funded by the City of Grand Rapids Community Development Block Grant and Justice Assistance Grant Funded Programs.

Volunteer Opportunities at CNA

Volunteers are important to the Creston Neighborhood Association! If you would like to get involved, here are some areas where you can help.

YES! Count me in:

- Communication Committee:** Promote the work of CNA through writing, social media, photography, graphic design, ad sales and event PR.
 - Volunteer and Membership Committee:** Encourages participation in CNA projects and events.
 - Fundraising Committee:** Plans & implements events to sustain CNA services and programs
 - Public Safety Committee:** Connects neighbors with one another through public safety neighborhood block clubs and trainings
 - Living Green in Creston:** Promotes the environmental health of the Creston neighborhood
- Students interns are invited to get involved with all areas of our mission!**

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*CNA Town Hall with Pancakes
Saturday March 21*

8 – 11am @ 2nd Congregational Church

*Public Safety Appreciation and Training
Thursday April 16*

6 – 8pm @ Berean Baptist Church

*Annual Art Battle for Community
Wednesday May 13*

6 – 9pm @ Rezervoir Lounge

*LGC Annual Perennial Exchange
Thursday May 28*

5:30 – 7pm @ Aberdeen Park



Winter 2015

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