

# The Great NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

Bring residents together for the common good

The street lights start to blink awake as the sun slowly sets; there is just enough time to catch one of the early fireflies, or a quick game of hide-and-go-seek before the street lights declare it's time for all kids to head home.

The moms of these kids don't know exactly where their children are or what they are doing, but they do know that they will be home soon, and if they were up to something mischievous, a parent from the next street over will make a phone call and report any foul play.

For many, the above anecdote is a glimpse back to a childhood that doesn't exist anymore, at least not without a scheduled play date and plenty of adult supervision. Gone are the days of saying goodbye to Mom in the morning and running out the door with a baseball glove, and—just in case—wearing swim trunks under your pants, pedaling a Huffy, or if you were lucky, a Schwinn, only to return before it was really dark.

## The Missing Ingredient

Why can't kids have a little of what we adults had? To answer that, we need to identify what is different. Shows like

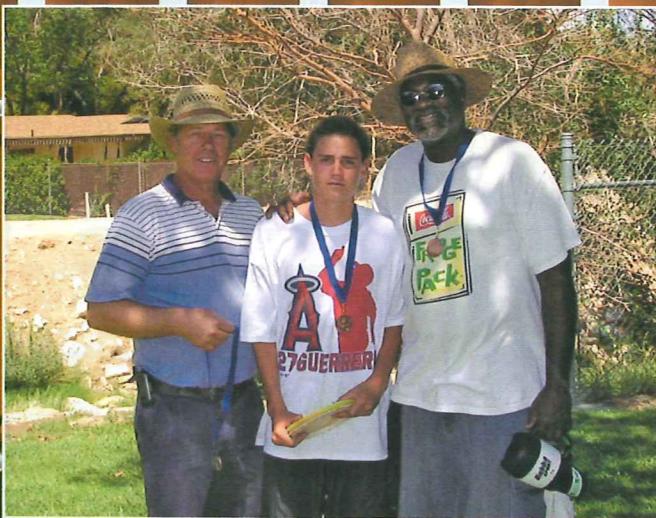
*The Andy Griffith Show* and *Leave it to Beaver* depict what is commonly missing in neighborhoods today—a sense of community. In Mayberry, adults knew all the kids or, more importantly, to whom they belonged.

Ultimately, kids knew that they would have to be accountable for their actions because many times news of their exploits reached home before the kids did—even in a low-tech town like Mayberry. People knew all of their neighbors.

## From The Backyard To The Front Porch

One of the reasons that Walt Disney built Disneyland was to encourage modern communities to design and build cities around people instead of cars. At that time, people were moving away from front porches in favor of backyard retreats.

Ray Oldenburg's book, *The Great Good Place*, lists four characteristics that make a place "good." First, it needs to promote sociability. There is a chance that you will run into people you know. You want to take friends and family there. Second, it offers a variety of things to do. Variety makes people feel more comfortable. Third, it should be clean and welcoming. Lastly, it should be accessible.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID COLEMAN



It's tough for anyone to make a great city, but what is a great city made of? Great neighborhoods! How many people on a neighborhood street are necessary to start a great neighborhood? It doesn't matter if the neighborhood is where you live or where you work; the answer is one, or more specifically—you!

There are many ways to establish a great neighborhood. Here are some ideas:

1. Make it a point to walk around the neighborhood and greet everyone. One thing that makes a neighborhood safer is residents who are alert.
2. Sit in the front yard. Sit close enough to the sidewalk or street to have a conversation without raising your voice. (In the Disney-designed town of Celebration, Fla., the front porches of houses were designed to be close enough to the sidewalks so that residents could talk to people passing by.) Start with a folding chair then maybe consider adding a bench to your yard.
3. After greeting everyone for awhile, be bold—introduce yourself! Initiate a conversation. Keep it simple and mention the days in which you can be found walking around.
4. Spend some time tending to the front yard. The effort will produce two desired results: first, you'll meet and greet more people; second, if your yard starts looking better, neighbors will notice and might take pride in their yards.
5. Have a yard sale! Pass around a flyer announcing a time and date, and encourage others to offer a yard sale on the same day.
6. Do something nice for someone. Now that you know some of the neighbors, drop by with homemade baked goods. If someone is moving into the neighborhood, ask a few neighbors to drop by together with some welcoming gifts.

These are the basics; accomplish these steps and you'll see a difference. Here are some more advanced ideas:

1. Organize a neighborhood Walk Night. Give everyone name tags to wear!
2. Do you Facebook? Start a method for easy communication.
3. Invite a neighbor to your next family activity—even a trip to the local ice cream shop.
4. Host progressive mini-golf. Have each resident design one hole in their front yard, and invite neighbors to play each hole and keep score. Make a homemade award for the winner, and take a picture of each hole for the homeowner.
5. Start a holiday tradition by asking everyone to make a version of a snowman or another decoration for their yard, although it doesn't need to be made of snow. Soon your group will be known as that cool neighborhood that decorates with snowmen every year!
6. Host a neighborhood party in your front yard, and ask everyone to chip in for a bounce house!

Just remember that 80 percent of the success of a great place is how it is managed after a project is finished. Disneyland would not be the popular place it is today if Disney hadn't gone to great lengths to maintain it. The same will be true in a great neighborhood. The project will never be complete, but the rewards will be great. **PRB**

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