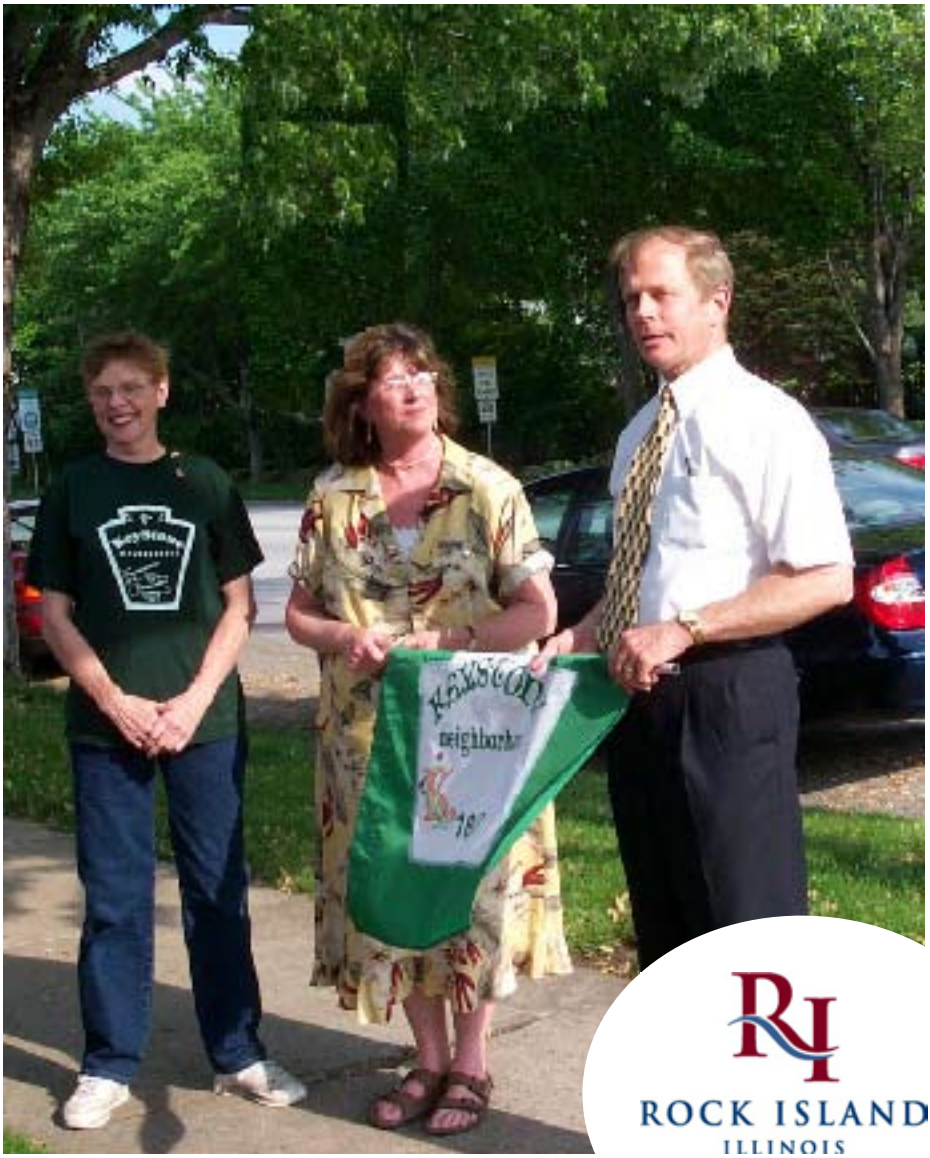
# Identify & Organize Your Neighborhood

## Become a Rock Island Neighborhood Partner



ROCK ISLAND
ILLINOIS

**Rock Island, Illinois** > 309.732.2900 > **www.rigov.org**

**The City of Rock Island** is committed to partnering with neighbors to improve the quality of life and pride in our community. Each neighborhood has unique physical characteristics that attract homebuyers, but it is residents who have the vigor to make their neighborhood what they want it to be or enhance the special qualities that drew them there in the first place. Want to build pride in your community and help determine the future of our city? Then, **identify** your special corner of Rock Island and **organize** a neighborhood association!

## Reasons to Identify & Organize Your Neighborhood

- Joy and security in actually *knowing* your neighbors;
- A collective voice is stronger than a single voice;
- Improved, quick and customized news-sharing network (newsletters and/or email);
- Regular access to municipal officials;
- Better influence at city hall;
- Increased awareness of proposals and decisions that impact neighborhoods;
- Improved access to grants and gifts;
- Acknowledgement of your neighborhood's special qualities by media and others;
- Proactive initiatives that show with a clear vision and a positive attitude, a group can improve rather than just protect its neighborhood and enhance daily life for residents.

## Why Neighborhoods Organize

- Address a particular concern
- Empower residents
- Build or augment community
- Responsibility to the larger community

> "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."
>
> *— Margaret Mead, anthropologist*

## Methods to Identify Neighborhoods

When developing neighborhood boundaries, it is important to define an area where there are common interests and goals and where residents feel they have some affinity with one another. Contiguous geography is an overriding factor. Size can range from 50 to 500 or more households. It is important, however, to be practical; just how many houses do you have the capacity to leaflet? In the end, most neighborhoods are built from common themes or physical characteristics, such as:

- Cohesive architecture or building stock;
- Major boundary barriers such as ravines, roadways, open space, land use change;
- Historical, cultural or ethnic commonality or origin;

- Shared schools;
- Original subdivision or collections of subdivisions; and
- Homeowners associations.

## How to Organize

> "The best ideas are common property."
>
> *— Seneca, Roman philosopher*

Truthfully, the idea to create a neighborhood association starts with just a few people. The large and active Rock Island neighborhood associations everybody knows about today didn't start out that way. Once, each was just an idea – one neighbor talking to another.

Some important tips for starting your group:

- Be clear about the purpose or reason for your association – actually writing a mission statement will help provide focus;
- Establish a core group of dedicated and reliable people – shoot for six;
- Select initial activities that have a good chance of success in order to build momentum and confidence;
- "Brand" your neighborhood by selecting a color and logo and then put that logo on everything from letterhead to t-shirts to signs;
- Build relationships with institutions such as churches, schools or senior centers in your neighborhood;
- Keep people informed through newsletters, short fact sheets or email, but include a little of everything to appeal to as wide an audience as possible;
- Host neighborhood-wide meetings on an occasional basis, but be sure the agenda is carefully planned and moves briskly;
- Take quick action after the meeting to reinforce the importance of decisions and input;
- Stay focused on a few well-defined goals or projects and avoid too many tasks that will dilute volunteer resources;
- Ask neighbors John Doe or Jane Smith for help on specific tasks because general, vague calls for volunteers are nearly useless;
- Be a team player and take on occasional tasks or activities that benefit the entire City of Rock Island and not just your neighborhood;
- Don't forget to celebrate achievements.

## Who Can Start the Association?

**Anybody.** If you are the person with the drive and interest to accomplish the task, then start organizing! Sometimes the chief organizer is not necessarily the person who becomes the "public face" of the association. Recruit suitable people to enhance your skill sets. If strategy is your strength, but managing a public meeting isn't, then add the "manager-type" to your core group. Remember, the initial "board" or core group can be hand-picked by you. A democratic process for electing neighborhood representatives will evolve.

"This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure Somebody would do it. Anybody would have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Everybody could not do it. As it turned out, Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done."

## Who Else Do You Need?

Your core group should include people who

- Have the respect of neighbors;
- Inspire confidence;
- Have a feel for democratic process;
- Have the ability to listen; and
- Are self-motivated.

## Some Important Tips on Being a Neighborhood Association Leader

- Share the vision with others;
- Share the workload by creating numerous opportunities for involvement to attract people with a wide range of skills and interests;
- Share the glory and always, always, always publicly recognize those who helped or donated;
- Welcome newcomers;
- Make efforts to accommodate special needs populations (aged, disabled, immigrants with language barriers, parents with young children, etc.)
- Make sure all meetings are productive, inclusive, start on time and review progress made to date;
- Appoint people who are not part of the core group to important tasks or leadership roles in order to secure long-term vitality for the association and encourage new involvement and fresh perspectives;
- Know your audience and summarize important points;
- Keep public officials informed;
- Get solid answers and don't be satisfied with a vague response;
- Be willing to let an idea ripen, plan adequately and await the right time for action;
- Ask neighbors to make decisions instead of the core group or board making all of them;
- Model the behavior you expect of others, and this includes maintaining a clean and neat property in the neighborhood.

"Good leadership is shared leadership."

*— Milton Doheny, former Neighborhoods USA President*

"Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know that you trust him."

*— Booker T. Washington, educator and author*

# How Rock Island's First Neighbohood Groups Were Founded

## Broadway Historic District Assn. www.broadwaydistrict.org

After helping to host a couple of successful Rock Island Preservation Society walking tours in the neighborhood, Nona Williams gathered a few residents in 1988 to discuss forming a neighborhood association with the mission to stimulate revitalization and educate the public about the unique aspects of their historic architecture. The association adopted its moniker from the original name of 23rd Street. In just one year, the Broadway Historic Area Association developed a logo and newsletter, conducted two "vision" sessions, planted 50 trees, initiated the much-copied street sign project, and successfully downzoned the neighborhood from multi-family use. In the ensuing years, this prolific organization founded a national phenomenon called the Great Unveiling, where artificial siding is torn off houses to reveal original architectural details beneath, created successful tours of homes, recognized individual homeowners' efforts in rehabilitation with "Renovation in Progress" signs and achieved National Register of Historic Places district status in 1998. This association operated with a "core group" for many years before adopting a structured election system.

## Old Town Chicago Historic Area Association

Following the successful completion of the Broadway Neighborhood Conservation Plan in 1992, Rock Island City Council wanted to turn the same neighborhood-based attention to the city's northwest corner. Much of the land in this neighborhood is part of the original Old Town and Chicago Addition plats from 1836, and hence, the name. The Chicago Addition Neighborhood Plan identified the creation of a neighborhood association as an objective, and many of the founding association members were from the plan's steering committee. Early initiatives of the neighborhood association included the adoption of a color and logo, creation of street signs, 3rd and 7th Avenue improvements and neighborhood clean-ups. Back in 1993, members of the neighborhood association identified issues related to mortgage lending, personal financial well-being and absentee landlords, then implemented ground-breaking ideas such as the Neighborhood Nuisance Phone Number Magnets and housing finance and credit workshops to address these key concerns. Many of the Old Town Chicago association's initiatives have been expanded to benefit residents city-wide.

> "I have enough money to last me the rest of my life, unless I buy something."
>
> *— Jackie Mason, comedian*

## KeyStone Neighborhood Assn. www.keystonerockisland.org

The KeyStone Neighborhood Association was formed in 1994 when neighbors elected a steering committee of 12 residents, drawing together several smaller groups that had been meeting since 1986. Today the board consists of representatives from six sub-neighborhoods within KeyStone: Columbia Park, Fairview, Edgewood Park, Brooks Grove, College Heights, and Park View. These names mirror some of the original names used by William E. Brooks, the man responsible for platting much of

the area between 1872 and 1894. Initially, the Steering Committee focused on four concerns: (1) organizational development, (2) neighborhood identity, (3) neighborhood beautification, and (4) neighborhood cohesiveness and social activities. In 1996, the Committee registered the KeyStone Neighborhood group as a not-for-profit corporation with the State of Illinois and as a non-profit, tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Code. Neighborhood appearance was an early focus, with activities like a "Go for the Gold" marigold planting, a tree maintenance workshop, and a spring cleanup. Continued influence of the neighborhood association is seen in plans for IL-92 to be reconfigured with a landscaped boulevard and converted to two-way traffic through KeyStone. The neighborhood association has also maintained a keen interest in "town and gown" relations with Augustana College. The unrelated group family use and rental inspection ordinances, plus the mandatory "living off-campus" workshops sponsored by the college were important objectives of the neighborhood association. KeyStone's long-standing relationship with Longfellow School is a paradigm of community involvement in a neighborhood school. Active partnerships with St. John's Lutheran Church, Hidalgo Park Group and Moline's Floreciente neighborhood reinforce the broad focus of the association.

## Longview Neighborhood Coalition

Organizational structure has evolved over the years in Longview Neighborhood. The first neighborhood association formed in the early 1990s as the Longview Historic Area Association, with a focus on housing improvement and neighborhood clean-ups. This organization also implemented the street sign project. The Longview Community Mobilization Project followed in 1999 with the mission to inspire all residents to active and useful participation. LCMP received organizing support from the Illinois Attorney General's office as part of a community building program. Intrigued by asset-based community development initiatives in other cities, the Doris & Victor Day Foundation provided financial backing and the Community Caring Conference provided administrative support for a new Longview Neighborhood Coalition in 2004. This coalition has fostered important relationships between residents, institutions and groups, and has managed or assisted such projects as Hope House and Grow Your Own Teacher. The coalition also maintains active participation and involvement in community policing.

## Greenbush Neighbors http://greenbush.info

Greenbush picked up its name more than a century ago as a neighborhood of Irish immigrants. More recent residents must have maintained a hint of the Irish passion, as they had a reputation for rallying around certain issues, such as changes to greenspace or rezoning of land for apartments. But it was not until 2003 that Greenbush Neighbors was founded. Hoping to expand a block club organized by the Community Caring Conference, resident Mike Markell did some research. He invited existing neighborhood associations and Neighborhood Partners to some meetings, and then put his considerable union organizing talents to use in a neighborhood setting. With a mission to promote spirit of community among residents, property owners and businesses, and an affinity for partnering, this neighborhood association has

achieved a lot in a short time. Youth have been a consistent focus, with fun and serviceable activities such as Trunk or Treat, garden planting at the Intermediate Academy, pinewood derby races, Easter Egg hunts and Red Cross babysitting classes. This neighborhood association is also a model of communication, with a website and newsletter packed with constantly updated information, a neighborhood fair that draws several hundred people each September, and monthly meetings with interesting guest speakers. Enduring partnerships with Broadway Presbyterian Church and neighborhood businesses keep energy high and volunteers fresh.

## Formal Organization

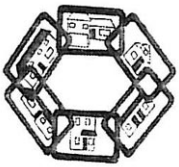
To join Neighborhood Partners, a neighborhood association simply needs to be based in Rock Island, possess by-laws and hold regular meetings. However, there are benefits to more formal organization, usually in the form of access to grant funds or charitable donations. Occasionally neighborhood associations can partner with a local organization or church as a fiscal sponsor. Existing neighborhood groups can serve as mentors if you choose to explore legal requirements and options related to incorporation and federal tax exempt status. Many organizations find professional assistance is necessary in filing these forms. Most neighborhood associations realize they must move toward formal organization once they undertake activities involving money.

## Benefits of Being a Rock Island Neighborhood Partner

- Provide individual and group direction on city-wide initiatives related to schools, leadership, problem properties, ordinances, and financial well-being;
- Quarterly learning/informational sessions;
- Access to scholarships for neighborhood-related conferences and workshops;
- Web presence at www.rigov.org;
- Mentoring from other neighborhood associations;
- Access to the twice monthly Neighborhood Partners E-News;
- Support and tips for your association's newsletter.

## Who Can Help Me?

### Community Caring Conference www.neighborhoodccc.org



Community Caring Conference was founded in 1976 as an organization committed to improve neighborhoods, address rising crime, and increase neighborhood awareness. Using the talents of a broad cross-section of individuals such as a board of directors, staff, block club council, block club members, sponsoring churches and other committees and volunteers, the Community Caring Conference works to improve the quality of life in the community. A spirit of caring and cooperation in discussing and resolving mutual concerns is a

cornerstone philosophy. The organization is committed to organizing block clubs and neighborhood watches and facilitating future activities of those groups. For more information, call 309.786.0345 or email ccc@qconline.com.

## Rock Island Neighborhood Partners

**www.rigov.org**

Neighborhood Partners is a city-initiated and coordinated partnership that builds stronger working relationships among neighborhoods, city government, service agencies, schools, churches and businesses. Since 1996 the organization has assembled the talents of volunteer citizens and city and agency staff to improve quality of life and pride in Rock Island through education, resident self-sufficiency and enhanced, user-friendly municipal services. Neighborhood Partners task forces bring together neighborhood associations, agencies, city staff and other dynamic citizens to build on positive achievements or solve mutual community problems. Current task forces are: Knowledge Through Neighbors, Neighborhood Leadership, Problem Properties, and School-Community.

Activities of Neighborhood Partners and its 15 member organizations are highlighted in a free quarterly newsletter mailed to more than 1,700 people committed to improving and promoting Rock Island. For more information, call 309.732.2900 or email planning@rigov.org.

## Neighborhood Partners Members 2011-12:

- Black Hawk Park West Neighborhood
- Broadway Historic District Association
- City of Rock Island
- Community Caring Conference
- Friendship Manor
- Greenbush Neighbors
- Highland Park Historic Neighborhood Association
- Keep Rock Island Beautiful
- KeyStone Neighborhood
- Project NOW
- Rock Island County Area Project
- Rock Island Economic Growth Corporation
- Rock Island Housing Authority
- Rock Island-Milan School District
- Rock Island Preservation Society
- YouthBuild Quad Cities

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