



Urban Times

ARCHIVES

This document contains these stories from
past issues of Urban Times
(or its predecessor, The Lockerbie Letter):

FROM JUNE 2006:

Page 2: Keep Indianapolis Beautiful plants trees,
but builds community

From June 2006:

By planting trees, KIB gets to the roots of the issue

IT'S ABOUT THE TREES, OF course, but there's more.

Trees have been the focus of many a Saturday morning planting effort in every Downtown neighborhood, courtesy of the Johnny Appleseeds who populate the staff at Keep Indianapolis Beautiful.

And trees are the focus of a truly major initiative announced in late April which will bring another 100,000 trees to the city over the next 10 years.

Trees are wonderful, of course, with their value to society going far beyond the Joyce Kilmer poem. But for the urban neighborhoods which have pulled themselves up by the bootstraps over the past 30 years, the help offered by Keep Indianapolis Beautiful goes far beyond leaves and bark.

It's more about the roots.

David Forsell smiled at the suggestion that KIB's most important work has little to do with trees or the other environmental work the organization does. (Actually, KIB has only been in the tree-planting business for the past decade.)

"Sometimes, the material work we do is a vehicle for the greater goal of community building," said Forsell, president of the private, not-for-profit organization founded in 1976 as Indianapolis Clean City.

Forsell pointed to four elements of KIB's mission – uniting people, beautifying the city,



Michael Clark (front) and Jeff Bardon help plant a tree along Ohio Street. The Keep Indianapolis Beautiful planting launched a three-year program in the in the Cole-Noble Commercial District.

improving the environment and fostering pride in the community.

"I used to be so oriented to the last three," he said. "But number one – uniting people — is so

powerful, the most important aspect of our mission. There is such strength when people come together for a common purpose.”

Such as the first Saturday morning in May when volunteers and stakeholders in the Cole-Noble commercial district gathered to plant trees along College Avenue and Ohio Street, just south of Lockerbie Square.

Mark Easley, owner of Easley Winery, called the launch of the three-year effort “a tremendous boost” to the neighborhood that is almost entirely commercial in nature. “Our goal is to soften the hard concrete atmosphere,” he said.

But for a community that lacks a residential base, Easley said the tree-planting effort has brought the various business owners together in a unique way. “It’s a huge impact,” he said. “We tend to get locked in our own little worlds.”

Easley said property owners are now taking greater care of their areas and have begun to target other improvements. “We’ve gotten action, and now people are looking forward to the next project.”

Although Forsell himself has many such stories to tell, the first one that comes to mind involves a small neighborhood on Irvington’s southern edge, where children had to cross busy Washington Street to get to Ellenberger Park.

One woman targeted a vacant lot – which with KIB’s help was turned into a pocket park. With a good deal of sweat equity, he said, “they developed a culture of ownership among the residents and the youngsters.”

A sense of place is critical, he continued, “and residents understand that. This is big stuff – and we experience that week in and week out.”

The numbers support that thought. In ►►
►► 2004, KIB projects drew out over 30,000 volunteers who logged an estimated 114,000 hours of service by cleaning up litter, painting houses, planting trees and flowers and assisting with spe-



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cial projects. KIB estimates the value of such labor at a cool \$1 million – greatly magnifying the impact Forsell and his 12-person staff have on the city.

The volunteer effort is not only praiseworthy, but also essential. Keep Indianapolis Beautiful is not interested in helping neighborhoods not interested in helping themselves.

“Sweat equity is vital,” Forsell said. “We don’t ever want to be doing things for people. We need evidence of long-term ownership.” He said KIB shies away from groups that are not well-organized. “Projects won’t do well if there is not ownership on the neighborhood side.”

Fortunately, the seven neighborhoods served by Urban Times don’t fit that description. Forsell said KIB has been able to have an impact in each of those neighborhoods, “because those neighborhoods care.”

The flourishing Massachusetts Avenue commercial corridor also bears KIB’s stamp. Over the past three years, spring flower plantings have been made possible by KIB grants. Forsell said he thinks the beautification efforts have given Mass Ave stakeholders an enhanced sense of ownership, an opportunity to invest. “Flowers are just a vehicle to express one’s sense of value.”

This year’s planting, however, is going ahead without KIB’s help, because Mass Ave wasn’t included in this year’s grant program. Forsell said the omission was not because the program is not worthy.

“It’s a very competitive process,” he said. “We have only so many resources we can bring to bear – and we have to strike a balance. We try to weigh the relationships and the economic need.”

Wherever those relationships lead, Forsell is confident that community leaders and volunteers will step to the plate. “It’s a reflection of Indianapolis people,” said Forsell, himself a native

Chicagoan who has adopted the Hoosier capital. “They unite for a common purpose.”

For Forsell, that sense of greater community is one of the greatest rewards. “We are an environmental organization in so many ways,” Forsell said, “but uniting people is one of our greatest strengths.”

He understands that KIB is also involved in community development.

“We help communities get better,” he said. “It’s about people getting to know each other while improving their environment. That is very compelling.”

— **Bill Brooks**

Holy Cross one of the ‘hot spots’ for ‘NeighborWoods’

CITY OFFICIALS CHOSE IPS School 14 in the Holy Cross neighborhood to announce an initiative known as NeighborWoods – in which Keep Indianapolis Beautiful will lead a \$14 million effort to plant 100,000 trees in Indianapolis over the next 10 years.

“NeighborWoods is about improving the quality of life in communities across Indianapolis,” Mayor Bart Peterson said at the late April event. “Planting trees has proven to be an effective tool to rally neighbors, promote community pride and bring new investment to areas that need it most.”

Center Township is a focal point of the effort, with the Holy Cross neighborhood being one of the “hot spots” targeted by NeighborWoods.

The project got off to an immediate start when 100 trees were planted on May 20 in Holy Cross between New York and Michigan streets.

David Forsell, president of Keep Indianapolis

Beautiful, Inc. said that trees do far more for the community than simply making it prettier.

“Remarkable national research clearly demonstrates that trees improve air and water quality; increase neighborhood property values; encourage economic and retail vitality; and likely create neighborhood environments that reduce domestic violence, property crime and violent crime.” Forsell said. “We want to apply that research locally, and measure the difference intensive community tree planting will make throughout Marion County.”

In the identified “hot spots,” every plantable space approved by government and property owners will be targeted for tree planting to meet a 25-percent tree cover goal.

Tree coverage in targeted areas currently ranges from 9-17 percent, according to KIB officials. American Forests, Inc., the nation’s oldest conservation organization, suggests tree canopy goals of 25 percent for urban residential areas.

KIB will use computer modeling to measure the environmental benefits of trees that are planted in these neighborhoods, and will work with public safety experts and researchers over time to measure the relationship between the greening of neighborhoods, volunteer engagement and localized crime statistics.

More broadly, understanding the value trees provide (among them improving property values and business climates), KIB will partner with the city and others to promote and facilitate extensive community tree planting throughout Marion County through volunteer projects, tree distribution days, wholesale/retail partnerships, and other avenues.

Neighborhoods and property owners will be required to pledge care for newly planted trees. Those efforts will be supplemented by KIB’s Youth Corps and Indy TreeKeepers programs.

Researchers using Geographic Information Systems mapped a variety of indicators of socioeconomic and environmental challenges, including higher than average crime rates, ambient air temperatures, and impervious surfaces; and lower

than average income and tree cover.

Forsell is confident NeighborWoods will succeed, despite a funding gap.

“But just ten years ago,” he said, “KIB wasn’t in the tree-planting business. With support from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Efroymsen Fund, IPL, the City of Indianapolis and others, we’ve gotten this far. With new partners on the horizon — such as the Alliance for Community Trees, Plant A Million, U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar, and others of which today we’re unaware — there is no reason to believe we can’t take this next important step, and we must.

“The return on the investment of planting 100,000 trees will pay off for generations,” he said. ■

Plantings have had big impact on Old Northside

THE KEEP INDIANAPOLIS BEAUTIFUL tree-planting program helps create a sense of community in four ways, according to Tom Mote, for many years one of the driving forces of the Old Northside Foundation.

“First is a shared effort to plant them, even on rainy days like last year when 20 people got totally soaked,” Mote said. “That brings neighbors together.

“Second is born out by the studies that KIB has quoted showing that forested neighborhoods have less crime and residents enjoy more of a sense of belonging,” Mote continued.

“Third is that the residents feel more a sense of ownership of the neighborhood — especially for the trees they have planted,” Mote continued, noting that neighbors contact him to report that trees have been harmed or improperly trimmed. I am sure that my predecessor, Rick Patton, who led the

initial effort that planted hundreds of trees, has experienced the same phenomenon,” Mote said.

Finally, he continued, the tree-planting program allowed the Old Northside Foundation to reach beyond its own borders when it developed the soccer fields east of College Avenue.

“Our tree planting efforts the past few years have done this, extending past our northern and western borders at 16th and Pennsylvania streets to plant trees in adjoining neighborhoods to help interconnect us,” Mote said.

“We also hope that this will help create a ‘sense of place’ along what was once known as Tinker Street (now 16th Street),” Mote said, adding that he envisions the 16th Street corridor becoming a meeting place such as is found around Café Patachou at 49th and Pennsylvania streets.

“Some say we are done planting trees in the ONS,” Mote said, “but I like to remind them that the ash bore is coming and the Austrian pines helping to shield us from Interstate 65 are near the limits of their lifespan”

Mote added that several parking lots along 16th Street are in sore need of “scenic rows of trees, “and our forgotten alleys should be just as verdant as our front doors.”

Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, he noted, has boosted the Old Northside not only by donating trees and technical expertise, but also by recognizing the foundation’s efforts through such programs as the Monumental Awards. ■