

Good Neighbors are Priceless

Regional Conversations Lead to Positive Connections

“Every community should reach out and talk to its neighbors. Imagine the relationships that would be built.”

BY RICK BEHRENS



Rick Behrens

“If only you could sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person.”

Those words were spoken by America's pre-eminent neighbor for more than 30 years, Fred Rogers. Mister Rogers, as millions of schoolchildren knew him, implored us to become good neighbors. Anyone who has had a good neighbor knows how to change the world. My good neighbor Arnold Rogers (no relation to Fred) has been my friend and helper for almost 20 years. Arnold is one of the most important people in my life. His friendship has changed me.

Building positive relationships with our neighbors is at the heart of the Public Square process. We do this internally in communities as we interview, listen, have community conversations and learn how to work together for the common good. Once the community gains confidence in building their human infrastructure, we ask them to tell their story to a neighboring community. We call it a “regional conversation.” Here, the Public Square community shares its successes and struggles, openly and honestly, and asks their good neighbors what they think about the work they've been doing.

I had the unique pleasure of facilitating two such conversations in February. The first was in King City, MO, when Tri-C Partners 4 Progress (Conception, Conception Junction and Clyde, MO) came to town to tell their story of bringing three small towns together to shape a new, shared future. Just six days later, I was in Osage City facilitating a neighborly talk in which the folks from nearby Reading unveiled their saga of recovery from a devastating tornado last May. In both cases I was reminded of how important it is

to have good neighbors. I was inspired to hear:

- ▶ It's good to talk with like-minded people.
- ▶ I think we can do some things together.
- ▶ I was surprised at how interested they were in our story.
- ▶ They had some great suggestions and ideas.
- ▶ We're so glad to see positive progress happening right next door.
- ▶ We've been watching and hoping you would recover and we can't tell you how happy we are to hear your story of hope.
- ▶ We may be basketball rivals, but we're sure glad you came to visit!

I admit that having these two amazing experiences in less than one week inclines me to overstate the case. I'm tempted to say that every community should reach out and talk to its neighbors. Wouldn't it be something if, every month in Kansas and Missouri, at least one regional conversation took place among neighboring communities? Imagine the relationships that would be built. Imagine the positive connections and partnerships that could develop. This is at the heart of the mission of Public Square Communities: “to transform towns, cities, counties and regions into thriving communities which nourish youth, engage citizens and foster partnerships.”

There are people out there who would love to meet you and your community. Stories are waiting to be shared—of challenge, of pain, of success, of cooperation, of new-found hope.

Hey neighbor! You can't imagine how important you are to the lives of those you meet. Oh, wait . . . yes, you can, because you know how wonderful it is to have a good neighbor and how a good neighbor can change your world. **KCL**

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