

# Is it Time to Party?

## Public Square Communities Celebrates 10 Years of Positive Engagement

“Engineering a change in community behavior is hard work, accomplished in small steps.”

BY LIZ SOSA



Liz Sosa

**We can find** nearly any reason to hold a celebration—a birthday, a graduation, a promotion, or even a job well done. We invite our relatives, friends, neighbors, cubicle-

mates, and sometimes even a newly acquired acquaintance because, let's face it, the more the merrier.

But what could entice a community to celebrate itself?

Across the last decade, one man's passion “to rebuild the Public Square...one community at a time” grew to eight colleagues serving over 60 towns, cities or counties who have enacted Public Square's cross-sector, citizen-driven community change process, or have customized the process to address a unique local problem or opportunity.

One thing we know: engineering a change in community behavior is hard work, accomplished in small steps. Sometimes communities get so consumed by the challenges that they miss seeing how far they've come. So we asked communities: would taking a break from the action to reflect and to celebrate progress with other communities rekindle spirits and refocus energy?

Just asking the question triggered enough enthusiasm that Public Square colleagues decided it was time

we threw a party. Two parties to be exact—one east and one west, each complete with balloons.

Until Greeley County, our first community, reminded us, it hadn't sunk in that Public Square is 10 years old. Ah yes! Another reason to party. Strike up the band!

Our intent was to cast a spotlight on local community work: to celebrate their progress, their lessons learned, and their renewed energy for future endeavors. After all, the shape of Public Square's work today has been hammered out on the anvil of local community goals, personalities, learnings and achievements.

We cheered, we laughed, we networked, and we hoped. Communities shared their successes, openly discussed their challenges, and dialogued about the possibilities moving forward. We addressed new initiatives such as our Workforce Housing Pilot project and brainstormed ideas to promote community pride, spur economic development, and enhance healthy living.

But the celebration didn't stop there. Soon afterward, two surprising calls came in. One caller was deciding about a new job opportunity based on how that community's Public Square process was going. When he heard

back, “they're doing great things,” he exclaimed, “now I'm really interested in the job.” The second caller credited the Public Square process for introducing him to civic leadership, and shared that he had just filed for public office. “Without you, I would never have taken that step,” were his closing words.

So the celebration continues. Our Public Square mission—identifying, connecting, and developing community leaders who transform towns, cities, counties and regions into thriving communities—is surely hard work.

And when it works, it's fun enough to throw a party, complete with balloons. **KCL**

**LIZ SOSA** is CEO of Public Square Communities.



Before heading home from the Yates Center celebration, several members of the Cultivate Fredonia Public Square steering committee (Dr. Jennifer McKenney, Sharon Frankenbery and Destany Helton), showed off items from their community gift exchange.