



BLOCK CLUBS SPRUCE UP, KIDS PLAY GOLF AND SCULPTURE EXHIBIT ARE SHOWCASED IN WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS DAY EVENTS

By Scott Talley

Special For ARISE Detroit!

A day for beautification, a day for community unity and a day for sharing information about community resources.

The 15th annual Neighborhoods Day presented by ARISE Detroit was all of those things and more on Aug. 7 for proud Detroiters at participating sites across the city's west side.

“I love Neighborhoods Day,” proclaimed Evelyn House, president of the **Stoepel Block Club**, which covers the blocks of Stoepel between Curtis and Seven Mile. House has lived in the neighborhood for 57 years and for the past 10 years she has been the block club president.

House’s enthusiasm could not be contained by the face mask she wore, emphasizing that volunteers and participants stay safe on Neighborhoods Day as they worked to improve their neighborhood.

“We are cleaning and beautifying the Stoepel Community Parking Lot (at Stoepel and Curtis) a vacant lot that we have adopted and have been keeping clean and beautiful for years with flowers, and by cutting the grass and keeping the weeds down,” House said proudly. “Neighborhoods Day brings neighbors together and we brainstorm about what we can do to make things better and beautiful. We do what we can on Neighborhoods Day and then we keep those ideas and work on them the whole year long.”

Further proof that the Stoepel Block Club’s efforts on Neighborhoods Day and throughout the year could be found at the Stoepel Community Garden (nearer to Seven Mile), which can be described as an English Garden done in a distinct Detroit way that has been passed down from earlier generations.

“I’m on the shoulders of those who came before me,” House explained. “When I first came here years ago, others were here and they had strong block clubs and did all kinds of activities and I learned from them. As a person who has a heritage here, I’m carrying on, and prayerfully there will be others that will come along and continue this Stoepel Block Club because Detroit is known for homes and block clubs, and neighborhoods.”

Like House, Sharon Kelso is steeped in Detroit history. Before heading off to Cass Tech for high school, Kelso attended Pattengill Elementary and McMichael Middle School during a time in Detroit’s history when the Grand River area was truly grand and bustling with shops, movie theaters, restaurants and prominent churches, along with healthy, wholesome and enriching activities for youth.

“Let me tell you something, I love Detroit,” Kelso bellowed.

Kelso, who has called Santa Barbara street between Margareta and Clarita in the Bagley Community home for the past 40 years, makes it clear that her love for Detroit extends to today’s Detroit. That is why her block club’s annual picnic coincided with Neighborhoods Day. She is president of the Rose Of Sharon Block Club.

“Neighborhoods Day is special this year because our neighborhood is changing so much,” she said. “It’s really important that we have inclusion and celebrate the diversity in our neighborhood. On our block we have three or four neighbors that have moved in and we just need to use this time to meet and greet, so that our neighbors can know each other because that’s the importance of neighborhoods—that we support each other. With the diversity changing we have to appreciate and learn, and be together as one.”

Dr. George Swan III is the chairman of ARISE Detroit! but was also personally involved on Neighborhoods Day. He has produced more than 250 sculpture pieces, which he presented on the front lawn of his home in the University District during his “Art by Docswan” exhibit. Swan’s sculptures reflect many themes, including symbols of nature human liberation, global unity, sustainability, ending mass violence and more.

“I’m a fourth-generation educator and what I most enjoy is that you’re sharing your spirit, sharing your art and also have an opportunity to expound on things of importance, like my liberation series,” said Swan, who retired as vice chancellor of Wayne County Community College, but continues to educate and positively touch lives in his community as a sculptor, carver and inventor.

Not only does Dr. Swan respond to requests from community members when creating his artwork, he also explained that many of his pieces are from resources in his neighborhood, including trees.

An abundance of sharing and of fun also was found on the grounds outside of Holy Ground Missionary Baptist Church on Puritan, which was a magnet for neighbors.

“This is what I call a hub—a place where people can come together, get information and just enjoy life,” said Pastor Annie Adams, an ARISE Detroit! board member.

Activities at her site included children’s games featuring a bounce house and extensive giveaways with community resource information from the City of Detroit and other entities. “It’s all about “arisification” we’re all coming together to rise up, instead of neighborhoods being shut down,” she said. “ We’ve been a part of ARISE Detroit! for 15 years and Neighborhoods Day is a concept that I hope catches on internationally. We have become so fragmented, but this is about people helping people as we used to do in the olden days.”

Pastor Adams addressed how the resource information at her site could transform lives today.

“We’re trying to catch people that fall through the cracks because there is nothing that a person can’t do if they just reach out and say they need help,” she said. “And we’re here to be that help in connecting our people to services in the community.”

Here are snapshots of some of the other west side Neighborhoods Day events through the eyes of the participants..

- **Wanda Bynum, Owner, Spa-A-Peel (Neighborhood spa in Rosedale Park):** “Neighborhoods Day was very successful. Five of us (Spa-A-Peel staff) canvassed Grand River from Southfield to Evergreen picking up litter and debris. Afterward I treated my team to ice cream to recognize their hard effort and work.”
- **Minnie Davis, Executive Director, Young Men N Motion:** “We have been a part of Neighborhoods Day for 15 years and it just keeps getting better each

year. More than just doing a clean-up or giving out essential supplies (at Mathis Community Center, 19300 Greenfield), the day was about caring and seeing all of the people caring about each other and our community alongside our young men.”

- **John George, Detroit Blight Busters:** “Neighborhoods Day is a special day that gives all the individuals and organizations across the city that work diligently on behalf of the city a chance to shine. It’s just a great day to put a spotlight on what’s going on positively in our city. Every Saturday for the past 33 years we have met at 9 a.m. at the Java House (17336 Lahser). We met on Neighborhoods Day and we meet every Saturday afterwards and we are always looking for new soldiers.”
- **Selina Johnson, Hollywood Golf Institute:** “What pleased me the most during our Neighborhoods Day event (at the Rouge Park Driving Range) is that my three-, four- and five-year-olds had an opportunity to see golf demonstrations performed by our older students, including a 17-year-old who just received a \$75,000 scholarship to Miles College. The day was about exposure because preparation brings opportunity. There is no sport or activity that our young people cannot do—greatness is everywhere!”
- **“The Real Coach” Garnet Mims, Real Detroit, All Districts:** “I grew up at Eight Mile and Livernois on Stoepel and I learned how to help people and do community events—that is the spirit I brought to Neighborhoods Day. I had a great time! events—that is the spirit I brought to Neighborhoods Day. I had a great time! The Real Detroit All Districts Neighborhood Association did a great clean up in districts 2, 3, 4 and 7. I thank ARISE Detroit! for helping us help the community.”