

COMMUNITY SPIRIT THRIVES IN WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS DAY EVENTS, BARBECUES, BOUNCE HOUSES AND CLEANUPS

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The sights and sounds of summer were especially on display Saturday, Aug. 3, on the 18th annual ARISE Detroit! Neighborhoods Day.

Detroiters across the city used the Saturday break from the week to bolster their communities and neighborhood spirit.

Throughout the city, residents came together to bond over bounce houses, community barbecues, block cleanups and giveaways of backpacks filled to the brim with school supplies for youngsters as part of the 18th annual ARISE Detroit! Neighborhoods Day.

Whether it was coming together for collective good times with fellow residents or sharing much-needed information on health, wellness, financial literacy and other concerns, neighbors came out for Neighborhoods Day to be part of their community for the yearly event bringing neighbors together on their blocks and communities.

Some of the events were primarily focused on issues such as health and wellness offering on-site health testing and screenings. Others focused on attacking blight by cleaning up debris and abandoned lots.

SCHOOL SUPPLY GIVEAWAY: UNITY CHURCH

Parents with children streamed into the neighborhoods near Second near West McNichols to pick up colorful backpacks, pencils, notebooks, and other school supplies.

Volunteers Gerry Cousins, Jacqueline Holt and the Rev. Arielle Gandy passed out school supplies, colorful backpacks, notebooks, folders, and erasers to enthusiastic youngsters as families started trickling in as early as 10:30 a.m. to get the coveted school items.

Holt, of the Holistic Development Community Center housed in the Unity church, said the school supplies giveaway is part of the giveback, an essential part of a strong community and a cornerstone of the Center's participation in Neighborhoods Day.

Holt said she is happy to take part of Neighborhoods Day and does it because she likes giving.

"We just like to give back to the community," said Holt, the organizer of the event as excited children selected school items for the coming school year. "It helps the city and the ones less fortunate."

Gandy added the event gives the children assistance and also "gives them the tools to go back to school. If you help (the children) with their education then it helps the city. Hopefully, Our children can learn and grow and that helps the community."

The event brought smiles to youngsters like five-year-old Kylie who attended with his dad, Patrick Johnson and sibling nine-year-old Aleen.

Johnson said he is grateful for an event that the children can attend and get excited about going to school.

“I really appreciate it . It’s really helpful,” said Johnson as he helped Kylie and Aleen with the new school supplies. “Everyone (in the community) is coming together (and) that is great.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION: PEOPLE’S COMMUNITY CHURCH

The sound of music complimented the efforts of a group of fitness buffs doing step aerobics and the squeals of children in a bounce house greeted area residents who came to the health fair sponsored by 100 Black Men of Greater Detroit on the grounds of People’s Community Church.

The event offered attendees the chance to have their blood pressure checked and blood drawn to check their A1C levels, cholesterol, liver and kidney enzymes. A 5-K walk/run, mobile bikes and instructions from a chef also were part of the program.

Mark Elzy, organizer of the event and a member of 100 Black Men of Greater Detroit, said the issues of health and wellness are important ones to tackle and among the four key topics his group tackles among Black men locally and nationally.

Elzy said participation in Neighborhoods Day allows him to address the concerns around Black men in Detroit by hosting the health and wellness fair.

“I’m committed to trying to improve the health and quality of life for Black men in urban settings,” said Elzy . “When you talk about population, you talk quality of life ..when each of us improve then you improve the overall community because community is made up of the collection of things that we all bring to the table. If you bring negativity or things that cause more harm to the community then you’re bringing the city of Detroit down and we’re all about uplifting the community through health-related matters.”

James Young, an ambassador for the local office of the American Heart Association, passed out fliers at the event and was there to talk to people about healthy living.

Young said some of the deterrents to good health might be found in a lack of resources, access to nutritious food and access to information.

“That’s why events like this are very important,” said Young.

Paul Kurian, a lead research assistant for Wayne State University’s mobile medical testing unit, said he was happy to be part of the event.

Kurian said visits to the doctors for some people fell during COVID and that bringing out the mobile unit to do blood pressure checks and blood tests for a range of organ functions including kidney and liver is a bonus.

“It’s great that we’re out here,” said Kurian. “It’s a bridge to get people back into health care ... a foot back in the door with their doctor.”

Francois Billingsley was among the local residents who came out Saturday. Billingsley said he took part in the medical testing last year at Neighborhoods Day and he wanted to do the same this year.

“It’s good they have this,” said Billingsley about the health/wellness fair.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE FOR RESIDENTS: 360 DETROIT CELEBRATION IN VIRGINIA PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

George Adams, the founder of 360 Detroit Inc., which sponsored the annual Neighborhoods Day event for the past several years, was all smiles as he viewed the gathering spots where residents of the area flocked and enjoyed the community picnic.

Adams said children enjoyed the mobile bowling alley that was housed in a mobile unit and a mechanical bull while adults got to gather information on help with property taxes and pick up free lightbulbs and smoke detectors.

More importantly, said Adams, residents got to meet and greet their neighbors.

“We use it as a time to gather the community and also offer free resources for the residents of the Virginia Park community and city residents at large,” he said.

Fourteen vendors had booths at the community event on Virginia Park near Second. Henry Ford Hospital offered health screenings, added Adams. He said last year’s event drew 300 people.

Neighborhoods Day is an important yearly event for people who live in neighborhoods throughout the city, said Adams.

“It highlights neighborhoods and the efforts we do all year-round,” he said. “This is a cumulative process from all neighborhoods in the city of Detroit that’s doing various things and a time for us to come together. Whether it’s (neighborhood) cleanups, a resource fair or whether it’s a dance concert we’re doing things in the neighborhoods.”

Virginia Park resident Montella agreed as she watch the children play and reminisced about her childhood when neighborhoods were filled with frolicking children outside.

“Every year this is a beautiful event,” said Montella who said it was the eighth year she has taken part in the event.. “Everybody gets together and learn about one another.,” she said.

HELPING COMMUNITY YOUTH: THE COALITION FOR URBAN YOUTH AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Marsialle Arbuckle remembers his own childhood which started out in foster care as a toddler after being abandoned on the steps of a courthouse when he was just two-years-olds.

Decades later Arbuckle and his son named Marseille Arbuckle wanted to help others when life dealt them dismal beginnings.

The senior Arbuckle formed CUYFD, The Center for Urban Youth and Family Development. He is the executive director of the organization. The Father and Son were able to secure federal grants and get funding for the two-story colonial home which now houses the offices for CUYFD. The Center also provides community resources for residents in the neighborhood around Indiana and Pilgrim Street near Wyoming.

The Arbuckle's say they make sure blighted homes and yards are taken care of in the neighborhood. On Neighborhoods Day, Indiana Street was the scene of a festive neighborhood celebration with music from a local Junior High School band and smells of grilled food permeating the air.

The son said he and his father have been doing Neighborhoods Day for several years.

The elder Arbuckle said the focus is try community development through the elimination of barriers such as substance abuse . The Center also provides programs in conflict resolution which aims at helping teens steer clear of bad choices such as drugs.

Teens in the community learn about becoming "stakeholders" in their own communities. Neighborhoods Day is key in teaching them about taking pride in their neighborhoods and taking action, such as cleaning up the lawns of abandoned lots and homes.

"It's about beautifying the community and days before Neighborhoods Day we have our young people come out and beautify the neighborhood ... cutting the lawns where the homes are vacant said Marsielle Arbuckle Sr. "We beautify the community and that gives them a stake in the community."

Marsielle Arbuckle Jr. added "It's a great chance for us to give back to the community to use the funding that comes from the federal government directly into the community."

Arbuckle Jr. added that participation in events like Neighborhood Day through the Center's programs "empowers the young people to find an alternative to drugs and the street."

Backpacks, containing a water bottle and other small items, were made available to children on the block as part of the event.

AVO JO's & DURRON FERRY PARK NEIGHBORHOOD FESTIVAL AND BACKPACK GIVEAWAY

The festival in the in Ferry Park /West Grand Boulevard/14th Street neighborhood highlights history and offers backpack giveaway and information on residential resources.

Yusef Shakur, PhD , has been involved in Neighborhoods Day all 18 years..

Shakur said while downtown Detroit has shown great promise and growth, the neighborhoods also have continued to exhibit steady growth thanks to efforts like Neighborhoods Day.

"Neighborhoods Day is part of us and we're part of Neighborhoods Day," said Shakur. "Being part of Neighborhoods Day is our part of helping people and loving on people."

Shakur said about 200 people come out to take part in his community's Neighborhood's Day which have included the school backpack giveaway but also offered health screening and services.

Detroit's neighborhoods continue to thrive through grass roots efforts and dedication made possible through initiatives like Neighborhoods Day, says Shakur.

"This is our effort of rebuilding the neighborhoods . This is our effort of showing that the neighborhoods are up and coming," said Shakur. "We may have died a little bit but pour a little water on us and we're actually alive."

Taylor Butler said the event was "amazing. "

Butler added "I think it's something more communities need especially with the lack of community centers and the lack of resources available. I pray that it continues to grow and prosper and be the amazing event that it is."

Butler said Neighborhood Day is important to community growth because it solidifies the neighborhoods by bringing residents to "get more acclimated with the people around you ... the resources around you."

Butler said the backpack giveaway was "essential" given the "economy we're in and for the people who really don't have."

BACK TO SCHOOL FESTIVAL: NEW HOPE CHURCH

Pastor Gwendolyn Williamson said she sees the benefits of bringing together neighbors and others in the community especially to help out youngsters who have lost a parent.

Williamson and her church family at New Hope City church gave away backpacks and fed neighbors and others in the small neighborhood where the church sits on Indiandale Street near Davison and 12th Street on Detroit's west side.

Some of the youngsters who took part had recently lost parents and Williamson noted that she particularly wanted to reach out to children who had suffered the loss of a parent.

Pastor Williamson, who has carried the congregation forward following her husband's death several years ago, said she is now part of Neighborhoods Day because she believes it is essential to sustaining vibrant residential blocks and strong communities.

"It shows us a peaceful way to come together and getting to know one another," said Williamson who added that it was her first time doing Neighborhoods Day but certainly not her last.

O'HAIR PARK NEIGHBORHOOD FESTIVAL IN NORTHWEST DETROIT

Children and adults flashed big smiles and enjoyed the ride on a colorful train rolling through O'Hair Park which borders Pembroke and Stahelin on Detroit's northwest side.

Tickets for a raffle sold out at \$300 and Yelena Ramautar along with other officers of the O'Hair Park Community Association were proud and happy to see the huge turnout of residents of the several residential blocks that make up their neighborhood association.

“I love it,” said Ramautar as the colorful train ferrying excited children and adults through the O’Hair Park, an expansive park in the center of the community and a gathering place for family picnics.

“It brings out the family. It brings out the kids,” said Ramautar. “You see the community just enjoying it. It is so worth it to have (Neighborhoods Day).”

Ramautar said while a lot of work goes into Neighborhoods Day for O’Hair Park Community Association it is an important part of “building a community.”

Niecey McClain, who grew up in the O’Hair Park neighborhood, was all smiles as she walked around O’Hair Park taking in all of the sights. She said she’s happy her childhood neighborhood is still thriving, thanks to events like the annual Neighborhoods Day and an active community association.

“We come every year,” said McClain who said her mother walks the park frequently . McClain said the annual Neighborhoods Day event is an integral part of keeping the neighborhood solid and strong. She said the association’s efforts to do that also involves neighborhood cleanups but Saturday was dedicated to having fun and enjoying one another’s company in a family style celebration.

COLLEGE PARK COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

For longtime neighborhood activist Peggy Noble Neighborhoods Day is a way to keep residents committed to preserving their communities.

“I have a passion for my neighborhood,” said Noble, a retired social worker. “If you don’t have a community you’re not going to have a Detroit. Detroit cannot function without community association and block clubs and things like that.”

College Park is bounded by Southfield, Greenfield, West McNichols and Seven Mile Road. About 75 residents came out for the neighborhood celebration at one of the area’s parks. The gathering featured a train for the children, said Noble.

The 52-year-old College Park community association nearly became defunct but Noble says she rescued it nearly a decade ago after the former community association leader passed away.

“It gives me great joy,” said Noble about her community and the annual Neighborhoods Day.