



Connecting and convening leaders to work together for the improvement of their neighborhoods, communities, and cities.

Fall Newsletter

2021

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Every Hue of Fire: The Color of Change

There's something special about fall, don't you think?

I grew up in a small African village just three degrees south of the equator. The only seasons I knew were the rainy and the dry season. How delightful it was to experience my first fall in the U.S. The world seemed to glow with every hue of fire as the trees showed off their yellows, oranges, and reds.

I've come to realize over the years that neighborhoods are equally beautiful, each one bringing into the world its own character and rhythms. What adds to the beauty of a neighborhood is the rich color and texture that every living soul brings to the collective story, the common whole.

The child who colors his driveway with chalk; the mother that makes the children on her block feel loved; the longtime resident that knows the arc of local history; the neighbor welcoming support after the loss of a pet; these are the hues of yellow, orange, and red that can turn a place into a home.

I think this newsletter will bring you the same sense of delight that my first fall gave me. In it you'll read about the some of the people that are adding color and texture to our neighborhoods, that are helping to bring out the unique flavor of the place where they're planted.

I know you'll love reading about Lori, a resident and business owner that's passionate about where she lives. Doris' story will warm your heart as you watch her weave lives together into a rich tapestry. And then there's Susan, who chose to invest her time in support of connectors like Lori and Doris by riding in our annual Restoring Our Cities fundraiser.

Whether you want to cultivate relationships and belonging where you're planted, or to support others as they do, there's a place for everyone in the extended Great Lakes Urban family! Together, you are the forest of trees that make our communities glow with color this fall.



Eric Smith
Executive Director

Lori Appeldoorn: A Passion for Change



Lori Appeldoorn
Eastcore Connector

Thirty-two years ago, Lori Appeldoorn moved to her home in Holland, MI, and has been there ever since. While she may have stayed in the same house, her neighborhood is hardly recognizable as the same place it was when she first moved. Near Lori's house, there is an alleyway that that leads to many of her neighbors' homes. Many neighborhood residents would dump their trash over the fences into the alley. Lori thought, "We live here, and we can choose to either have a crappy alley or we can choose to have a nice alley." Lori chose a nice alley and started off by picking up the trash and planting some flowers. Pretty soon, other neighbors started to show interest and Lori invited them to help her.

The project quickly gained momentum and Lori and her neighbors discovered that the city of Holland offered a mini-grant for people interested in improving their neighborhoods. They joined forces with the organization 3sixty and applied and received the grant amount of \$1,500, which gave them the resources needed to expand this project even more and improve other neighborhood spaces.

While it's nice to see how these gardens and spaces improve the appearance of the area, these projects bring so much more than that. Lori emphasizes that, "It's really about humanity and just being out with each other. Everybody gets together and has so much fun. Because of this work, we now know our neighbors and if we are ever in a jam, night or day, we know that our neighbors are going to have our back."

Before getting involved with 3sixty, Lori wasn't aware that the neighborhood that she lived in actually had a name: Eastcore. After connecting with Lori, 3sixty provided support to Eastcore, such as volunteers, that helped to build the raised beds and advance the projects they were working on. Lori and 3sixty ended up working together on another grant, this time from the State of Michigan. They received an award of \$10,000 to put towards alley improvements, which gave them the opportunity to expand their vision past the alley and into other areas.



For Eastcore, Lori is grateful that the State of Michigan was willing to provide funding and she hopes that they continue to support similar initiatives. Lori sees a variety of added interests coming from the local residents on all of these ongoing projects, which they will continue to work together on in the years to come. She says, "People need to have that sense of community and purpose, and when they get together, they can do amazing things. With this work, you always have to think positive and remember that everything you are doing is for the long haul and it won't happen overnight. It takes a lot of patience and love, but it is worth it."

Doris Perez: Weaving the Tapestry of Change

Doris Perez of Great Lakes Urban has long devoted her life to serving the community. She was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, where her parents were both heavily involved in their community. They ran a medical clinic out of a trailer that they were able to move all over the island to bring assistance to many people. Every person that they helped was treated with dignity and love – a value that was very important for their family to uphold, and one that Doris continues to practice in her work today.

In 1979, Doris came to Michigan to study psychology and social work at Spring Arbor University. These four years taught her a lot about social work in America and inspired her to continue working with people. Post-graduation, Doris continued to work in various community-focused roles for 12 years in the Dominican Republic until she returned to Michigan to finish graduate school. Eventually, Doris was offered a position as a community connector with Great Lakes Urban and became the community connector for the Godfrey Lee Listeners.



Doris Perez
Godfrey Lee Connector

Every week, Doris and other residents participate in a walking club, in which they walk around the area and talk with one another. After walking, they meet at someone's home to cook, share stories, talk about goals and hopes for the future, and uplift each other. They also like to come together and look for ways to help others in the community that are in need. In one instance, there was a woman that was at a low point both emotionally and physically and was unable to care for her garden. Doris and the walking club came along and not only helped her with her garden but also spent time showing her support.

Uncovering that potential has been one of Doris' favorite things to do and she calls this "treasure hunting." This consists of going out into the community and getting to know and appreciate what every person has to offer. She says, "Every person has a distinctive, beautiful thing to contribute to society."



By practicing what she believes in, Doris has inspired others to want to connect with their neighbors and volunteer their time in the community. Great Lakes Urban has been committed to providing the training and support that the residents of West Michigan need to lead the growth and transformation of their communities.

If you live in or near Wyoming, Doris invites you to come to an event to see what they are about first-hand. On September 15 Doris was joined by Mayor Jack Poll of Wyoming and Godfrey Lee resident Susan Van Bronkhorst for a virtual discussion about how steady efforts to connect with neighbors can add up to stronger, more abundant communities. You can watch the recording of the full webinar by looking up the *15 Sep 21 Lunch+Learn* on our website at greatlakesurban.org under the *Updates* tab.

Susan VanBronkhorst: Riding for Change

Eleven brave souls came out to ride in 90-degree temperatures to raise funds for Great Lakes Urban through the Restoring Our Cities (ROC) bike ride on August 28th.

Susan Van Bronkhorst was one of those riders, tackling 17 miles. Susan is a board member for Godfrey Lee Listeners, a group of concerned neighbors living in the Godfrey-Lee community. This group meets regularly and was brought together to learn what can be done to improve the neighborhood they all love and live in and what assets this neighborhood has to support each other and make their neighborhood even better.

Susan has lived in the Godfrey-Lee neighborhood a long time, long before her neighborhood group was organized. She graduated in 1978 from Kuyper College, then known as Reformed Bible College, where she met her husband, Steve. They became missionaries and served in the 1980s in Mexico, and moved back to Michigan in the 90s. In 2003, they did another stint in the mission field in Latin America, this time in Ecuador. They have been living in the Godfrey-Lee neighborhood since 2004.

Susan believes that the asset-based system of neighborhood improvement, the ABCD method, is a sensible one. Why wouldn't you determine what the assets are in a community and use those people with their particular talents to improve the places they live? Being bilingual has helped immensely living in a neighborhood with many Spanish speakers. Susan has taught ESL and citizenship classes for her neighbors.

Susan has what she calls a “blurry” dream that in her mixed neighborhood, with all its socio-economic, cultural and language differences, she and her neighbors will continue to celebrate those differences; lift up the Hispanic businesses in the area, do more to celebrate Hispanic festivals and their heritage. Maybe even create a Little Mexico right there in their own backyard. Using her connection to Great Lakes Urban through Godfrey Lee Listeners and their Community Connector, Doris, this dream can become a reality for Sue and others in her neighborhood.

Susan and the other 10 ROC riders raised more than \$20,00 to support Great Lakes Urban! We are grateful to everyone who rode, volunteered, and gave!

We can't wait until next year!



Susan VanBronkhorst
Godfrey Lee Listeners



Or via our secure online system by visiting www.greatlakesurban.org and clicking the "Donate" tab.

Great Lakes Urban
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