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National Neighborhood Day One Step Toward a Better America

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Neighbor: 1. One who lives or is located near or next to another. 2. A fellow human being. 3. To lie close to or next a border directly upon. To live or be situated close by.

Neighborhood: 1. A district or area with distinctive characteristics. 2. The people who live in a particular district or area.

These words used to mean something more than the person who resided in the house next door to you or where your house was located. Back in the day, these words connoted a sense of extended family---people who were not related to you but you knew you could count on them when you really needed to. In some places, these concepts still exist. In others, they are nearly extinct. But there is good news on the horizon.

National Neighborhood Day is changing that. The idea came from a Rhode Islander named Lorne Adrain, who recognized that there was a slow deterioration happening within neighborhoods that resulted in a disconnect among people. There was a sense of isolation and loneliness that can lead to depression and a lack of hope in some communities. But when people come together and start sharing quality time with each other, simply getting to know each others names and actually showing care and compassion for each other, things change.

Some of the encouraging words on the publicity materials echo his sentiments: "Communities work better (students perform better, crime rates are lower, kids are safer, people live longer) when neighbors know one another better. Knowing your neighbor on a first-name basis, as National Neighborhood Day suggests, is a surprisingly effective first step toward a better America." Those are the words of Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, and *Better Together*. This national organization is changing the way America looks at itself, one neighborhood and one person at a time. Reverend T. Michael Rock, a board member of National Neighborhood Day, recently spoke at "America's Promise" and provided the audience of about 200 with an enlightening and inspiring presentation about this wonderful movement. "National Neighborhood Day allows people to get to know each other. It connects people. It's a chance to get together to have fun, get to know one another. When we know our neighbors, we feel safer," he said. It was thought provoking to think that the simple act of coordinating a neighborhood block party, cookout, cleanup effort or voter registration drive could be the impetus for connecting people of all ages and backgrounds. Yes. It goes back to the old fashioned neighbor to neighbor "get togethers" of yesterday. It has been proven to be effective and fits perfectly with Mayor Cicilline's neighborhood revitalization efforts. The recent "Providence Tomorrow" event hosted at the Roger Williams Casino, was an example of a broad scale neighborhood day. People from all the different wards of Providence came together to contribute to the strategic planning effort for the city of Providence. It was a beautiful thing.

National Neighborhood Day Reaches out to neighbors across the country; motivated increasing numbers of people to host neighborhood gatherings; provides a venue for idea and product promotion; inspires participation in neighborhood, community and volunteer activities; provides a communication distribution channel for emergency preparedness; helps to promote and advance the missions of other community building and service organizations; provides neighbors and neighborhoods access to community resources available to assist them.

To learn more about how you can host a neighborhood event in your neighborhood, go to www.neighborhoodday.org or call (401) 454-3183. National Neighborhood Day is celebrated on the third Sunday of September each year (September 17, 2006).