

Nation's Cities

WEEKLY



Official Publication of the
National League of Cities

www.nlc.org

Newspaper Handling

VOLUME 29, NUMBER 18 | MAY 1, 2006

Providence Celebrates National Neighborhood Day *Cities Encouraged to Participate in September 17 Event*

by David N. Cicilline

When President Lyndon Johnson spoke to Congress in 1965 and told them that "the American city should be a collection of communities where every member has a right to belong," he could very well have been talking about present day Providence, R.I. Built on seven hills, Providence maintains and supports a vibrant array of culturally diverse neighborhoods.

In 2002, Fox Point neighbor-

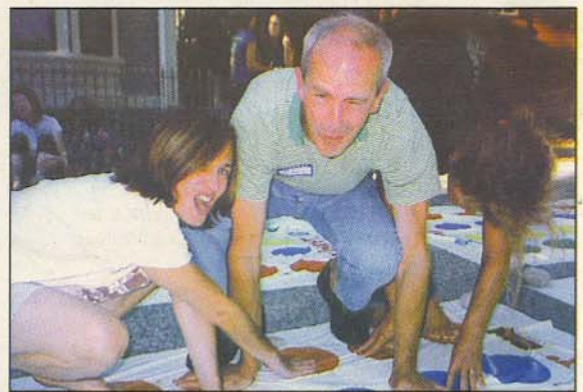
hood resident Lorne Adrain came up with the idea of National Neighborhood Day, one day set aside every year to inspire, build and sustain the neighborhood relationships that provide the foundation for civic action and the building of stronger, more caring and more effective communities.

Connecting Neighbors

In practical terms, National Neighborhood Day is an after-

noon of block parties, barbecues, games and service projects. Past events in Providence have ranged from an all-day band and dancing into the night in the Armory neighborhood to a gathering of neighbors writing "one kind thought" in chalk on the street in Freeman Parkway to a Twister championship sponsored by Adrain's own neighborhood. This year, National Neighborhood Day takes place on September 17.

What is most important is



National Neighborhood Day activities in Providence, R.I., include a Twister championship.

Call for Entries in National Neighborhood Day Short Film Contest

What does neighborhood mean to you? Students in grades K-12 and adults are invited to enter a National Neighborhood Day Short Film Contest.

K-12 students are especially invited to participate as individuals, groups or through classroom projects. There is no entry fee for the Youth Category and the Grand Prize is \$2000. The deadline for entries is June 15.

National Neighborhood Day is celebrated in neighborhoods across the country each year on the third Sunday in September as an annual day to recognize and reinforce the relationships that are the fabric of our communities.

To promote National Neighborhood Day's mission and vision, a film contest will offer opportunities for both professional and amateur filmmakers to illustrate, through a 5-minute or less film, what neighborhood means to them.

Films will be judged by a panel of renowned filmmakers including Terry Sanders, Academy Award-winning producer for his documentary on Maya Lin, and Gregg Hale, producer and filmmaker of "The Blair Witch Project."

Visit www.neighborhoodday.org for contest rules, entry forms and a downloadable poster announcing the short film contest.

that the gathering builds connectedness.

Robert Putnam, an expert on community life at Harvard University, said, "Communities work better when neighbors know one another better."

That is exactly what National Neighborhood Day promotes.

Do residents in your city know the first names of their neighbors? Do they know who to call when a car battery needs to get jumped, when plants need to be watered if they're away, or

simply who they are waving to every morning when they leave for work?

"Knowing your neighbor on a first name basis is a surprisingly effective first step toward a better America," Putnam adds.

Discovering New Opportunities

Good things are happening in Providence's stronger neighborhoods. These range from safety *see page 7, column 1*

in the streets to play groups for toddlers; from babysitters to house sitters to cat sitters; from checking in on elderly neighbors to welcoming newborn ones.

Take Adrain's neighborhood of Fox Point. The community is a mix of college students, young families, older couples who restored the 18th century houses that line its streets, African-Americans and Cape Verdean immigrants.

Two years ago at their Neighborhood Day gathering, as the firemen from the local fire station let the younger children climb onto the hook and ladder and the older kids rode their bikes up and down the street, which was blocked to traffic for the day, people started talking about the local playground that had fallen into neglect. "Look at all these kids," one of the older women said. "I had no idea the neighborhood had so many children."

That simple observation, made on a sunny September afternoon spent sharing hot dogs and hopes, led to a group forming and raising \$50,000 to improve the playground.

As dusk descended on the street that day, neighbors wrote their names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for each other. That list enabled one neighbor to call others — most of whom she had never met before — to help her raise that money.

At another gathering, a woman began to ask her neighbors if they thought their street would be improved by the planting of trees. She had long imagined her bare street lined with flowering dogwoods in the spring.

To her surprise, others had harbored the same vision. Connecting with her neighbors that day, she easily found 20

like-minded people, and before long the street was filled with trees waiting to be planted and neighbors digging the holes in which to place them.

Strengthening Communities

It is true that everyone leads busy lives these days. And as much as technology connects people to the larger world, it can also isolate us from those right next door to us. Too often, struggling to balance family and work, one can lose sight of the power and importance of connectedness to our neighbors. But city leaders all can make a difference in building stronger communities by sponsoring National Neighborhood Day events on September 17.

On National Neighborhood Day, the communities in Providence come togeth-

er to enjoy their city, to participate in it and to make it better.

More neighborhoods across the country are coming together to do the same thing thanks to the efforts of municipal leaders. And in so doing, they offer their cities and towns a powerful tool for establishing partnerships to create and sustain a truly great community.

Details: To learn more about ideas for National Neighborhood Day, visit www.neighborhoodday.org. For more information on NLC's initiatives to strengthen neighborhoods and communities, read the City Platform for Strengthening Families at www.nlc.org/iyef/7915.cfm.

David N. Cicilline is mayor of Providence, R.I.