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The Shifting American Community and the Rise of Social Media: Exploring Social Media in Grassroots Non-Profits

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The Shifting American Community and the Rise of Social Media:
Exploring Social Media in Grassroots Non-profits

Final Capstone Paper
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As one digs deeper into the national character of the Americans, one sees that they have sought the value of everything in this world only in the answer to this single question: how much money will it bring in?
-Alexis de Tocqueville

The American community is ever-growing and changing. As Alexis de Tocqueville asserted in *Democracy in America,* Americans represent a finance-driven community (de Tocqueville, 1835). As neighborhoods develop and formal gatherings devour a larger percentage of resources, Americans find themselves consumed with alternative routes for communication, gathering, and education. As new technology and ideas emerge, the community shifts and mutates, reflecting the societal impulses. Understanding the new American community opens new doors for grassroots non-profits. My study addresses both the shift in the American community and the new reliance on social media for promotion and fundraising. Using the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, a forming non-profit in central Illinois, as a case study for this investigation, I argue that social media can be used to further the goals and objectives of grassroots non-profits.

Addressed first will be the rise of the new American community. Next, I plan to investigate tools associated with social media trends, including Facebook[1] and Twitter[2]. Culminating these concepts will be my progression and education as Executive Director of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP). Established in 2008, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project is a current grassroots non-profit in central Illinois.

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[1] Facebook is a social networking website used to virtually connect friends and family, organizations and fans, businesses and clients, etc. (www.facebook.com).

[2] Twitter defines itself as, "Twitter is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting. Each Tweet is 140 characters in length." (www.twitter.com/about)

By examining the West Bloomington neighborhood and the WBRP, I plan to develop a cohesive look at funding grassroots movements with a tailored approach focused on social media. As the cyber universe is ever-expanding, non-profits are looking to take a larger role in the available market. As a new non-profit, the West Bloomington Revitalization project utilizes social media to build financially and publically. My study pays close attention to the new American community while investigating the principles behind social media development. I present strategies on using these principles to navigate the emerging social media explosion.

Literature Review:

The American community is a complex and constantly mutating. Understanding the current community may ensure successes in the future. My study uses the work of both Alexis de Tocqueville and Robert Putnam to shed light on the American community. Putnam, and his groundbreaking *Bowling Alone*, outlines the growing discontent in early community structure and highlights the shifting of the new community. Putnam helps to better define the logic behind the social media explosion (Putnam, 1995). Alexis de Tocqueville and *Democracy in America* illuminate the American society. Using this understanding, one can better define the roots of the American community (de Tocqueville, 1835).

Understanding how the community ties in with understanding the voice of the electorate. In their work, "Social Networks and Individual Perceptions: Explaining Differential Participation in Social Movements" Florence Passy and Marco Giugni seek to explain social movements and participation stemming from activity in social networks (Passy & Guigni, 2001). Authors like Michele P. Claibourn and Paul S. Martin work to

organize thought on mobilizing social capital[3] in different communities (Claibourn & Martin, 2007).

In order to fully understand and assess the complexities of advanced social media, various networking sites will be analyzed and evaluated. As the paper focuses on virtual progress within organizations, social sites across the internet are used as examples and references. In addition to using Facebook as a whole, group pages of Facebook will be evaluated, including the pages of organizations with impressive reputations in the social media circuit.

Twitter, as another agent of social change, utilizes various tools to build its social base. Reflecting on both Twitter and its other outlets, allows further investigation of media driven campaigning. Several additional social sites are used to highlight the current state of non-profits in the virtual community. YouTube[4] is another social media site playing a defining role in the developing virtual community. Utilizing YouTube plays a strong role in organizational development due to its visual base and overwhelming popularity.

In order to better understand the community as whole documents specific to West Bloomington are organized and reviewed. Key in this research is the Teska organized West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan. Teska Associates, a professional community planning organization based out of northern Illinois, worked to decipher the needs of the community and put them into an easy to read format. This document serves as a Rosetta

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[3] For the purposes of this paper, Social Capital is defined in the terms of Robert Putnam. 'social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called "civic virtue." The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital' (Putnam, 2000)

[4] Youtube promotes itself as the, " largest world-wide video sharing community" It allows users to upload video footage and share it with users across the globe. (www.youtube.com)

Stone for future progress; decoding many weaknesses and translating them into steps for the future. Additional sources being used include board documents, newspaper articles, and research from surrounding organizations like the City of Bloomington.

Robert Putnam & the Rise of Social Media

In 1995, Robert Putnam produced groundbreaking research entitled *Bowling Alone*. *Bowling Alone* illuminated the American electorate in a new, progressive fashion. Putnam discussed the disengaged electorate through a series of current examples, namely the example of an increase in bowling alone, rather than in leagues or teams. As technology advanced and the population became more isolated, the American electorate quickly began to lose its sense of "community". Putnam uses one technological advance as a key example of the increased isolation promoted by the American culture. One simple invention: the attached car garage revolutionized a new level of isolation between neighbors. During this time, citizens no longer had to venture beyond the confines of their own walls....ever. From the house, to the garage, to the car to the workplace, interactions between neighbors were limited to the point of extinction. In the last 25 years, several social behaviors have undergone a rapid shift. Family dinners have plummeted by 43%, groups having friends over has fallen by 35%, and those joining a social group or club has fallen by a startling 58%. (Putnam, 1995). Understanding the decline in communal involvement is pivotal in understanding the benefits of increased use of social media in the 21st century.

As Americans become increasingly isolated, technology has made leaps and bounds. Rather than being active in public clubs an increasing number of people are active in web-based causes. The internet has become a tool for communication,

innovation, research, and even relationship-building. Utilizing this tool, which has millions upon millions of users, is necessary in staying current with todays society. Television advertisements are now being replaced with less costly Facebook advertisements and reaching far more users. Where the television took 13 years to reach 50 million users, Facebook signed up over 200 million users in one year. Civically and socially, America keeps reinventing itself (Facebook, 2010).

Detailing the decline of the American community and the differing trends in social capital, Putnam cited startling facts reflecting a new American Society. No longer are people actively attending group meetings and organized social events. Donating ones time toward the cause of community or socialization is weighed heavily in a cost-benefit analysis. Increased commuting times, longer hours at work, time commitments to both pets and family; all of these things are weighed against participation in social events.

But how does this pertain to social media and grassroots fundraising strategies?

"Recently, some charities have been attacked for spending an "excessive" portion of their resources on fundraising. This concern has produced a variety of state laws regulating charitable solicitations" (Quarterly Journal of Economics, 1987). The current standards for charitable giving regulate the activities performed by a non-profit when receiving contributions. As highlighted by the traditional practices of fundraising, certain approaches quickly become expensive and taxing to the individuals involved. Current Illinois law prohibits organizations from promoting false uses of charitable funds. This law, for example, limits the amount of money being spent for promotional, non-educational, or mission-driven purposes. If an organization exceeds the limitations all

contributors must be a made aware of the exact use of contributed funds (Quarterly Journal of Economics, 1987).

In contrast to the expensive practices of traditional fundraising, social media driven campaigns offers a near costless alternative. Social media, as a tool of development, is quickly becoming a preferred way of communication for countless people throughout the world. Relevant social insights can now be passed quickly throughout the internet with light speed. Relaying messages to a target community has never been easier. Utilizing this tool is no longer an option; it's a requirement for development.

In order to understand the social media explosion, one must understand the roots of the shifting American community. Although face-to-face social groups and community activities have suffered visible blows the past decade, a sharp spike is felt in individual social media presence. Students, housewives, grandmothers and fathers alike are now all on LinkedIn. Twitter keeps parents updated on the daily activities of their son or daughter in college, hundreds of miles away. And Facebook is home to not only citizens across the globe, but countless non-profits, who are able to freely send information to thousands of supporters and solicit monetary donations in the click of a mouse.

Social Media: Tools of the Trade

The term "social media" refers to a number of virtual tools used to promote an idea or concept, or used to communicate with friends, groups, or target populations. Understanding several of these tools illuminates the pathway for non-profits begging to develop virtually. For my research, some of the tools being explored are Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Digg, LinkedIn, Flickr and YouTube. Each of these virtual tools are

used by various non-profit organizations for promotional and fundraising purposes. While some organizations find YouTube to be the most effective, others may find Facebook the more consistently useful. Picking and choosing the right tools may result in high levels of visibility and potential financial development.

Facebook: Social Networking

According to an estimate done by Google, Facebook draws an estimate 540 million users each month, making it the most visited website on the internet (Google, 2010). Facebook, as an early tool in social networking, emerged in 2004 from the mind of Harvard undergraduate, Mark Zuckerburg. This tool, meant to promote communication between college students, originated in the Harvard network. As Facebook's popularity rose, networks cropped up at universities across the nation. In 2005, Facebook was a popular tool of communication between college students nationwide. Rather than communicating in person, a spike rose in the number of correspondences received via wall post. Facebook's rise in popularity experienced a steady increase (Facebook, 2010). In August 2010, Facebook was the most visited site on the internet, with roughly 690 billion site views (Google, 2010). This giant shift in web based promotions highlights the intrinsic value of the Facebook universe.

With the purchase of Facebook in 2008, major changes occurred. No longer was Facebook limited to the college-aged population of America; different groups across the world are now connecting via friend requests and messaging. As of October 2010, Facebook is used in 207 countries, with users from a variety of different backgrounds. If Facebook were a country, it would have the 3rd largest population in the world (Facebook, 2010). With statistics such as those offered above, ignoring the overwhelming

uniting power of the World Wide Web is impossible. For new organizations or non-profits, Facebook offers a simple and effective way to reach a mass audience with minimal effort.

Digg: Social News Network

Digg, like Facebook, was launched in 2004. Varying greatly from the purpose of Facebook, however, Digg is a social news network, offering tailored headlines from across the nation to users across the world. Digg aligns with the social media trend in a unique way. Digg reflects the "instant gratification" desired by members of the new community. Originally titled, "Digg" because of users' ability to either "dig" or "bury" a news story, Digg has emerged as one of the leaders in social news networking. Users can now submit stories to fellow readers, and offer ratings.

Keeping track of the current pulse of the American community, in this respect, can help organizations feel out the most interesting ways to present a story and capture the attention of audiences. Non-profits across the nation use Digg as a promotional platform for publications. By submitting stories to Digg, non-profits project their information to a wider database of potential followers. Stories with the highest "dig" ratings are pushed to the front page, and shown to all users as they log in (Digg, 2010).

Twitter: Social Networking

Twitter, with its tagline, *"The best way to discover what's new in your world"* is one of the most interesting and widely used social media tools. Twitter takes the concept of a text message and pushes it one step further. With a Twitter account, users can send a message, under 160 characters, into cyber space for friends and followers to read and comment (Twitter, 2010).

Twitter began in 2007 and exploded onto the social scene. Celebrities and non-profits hold fundraisers based entirely off of Twitter accounts. Organizations even buy Twitter endorsements from celebrities, hoping to reach the millions of followers keeping track of their favorite pop culture icon.

Highlighting the new and growing trend of non-profits on Twitter is *TwitChange*. *TwitChange* is "The only global celebrity auction where Twitter users can bid to get three things: be followed by their favorite celebrity on Twitter, retweeted, or mentioned by them in a special tweet!" (TwitChange, 2010). For the month of October 2010, all proceeds from this online auction are going toward " aHomeinHaiti.org". Non-profits are using twitter in a big way, requiring very little work from members, celebrity endorsers, or even supporters. Local non-profits utilizing Twitter project messages into communities and spread messages via word of mouth or re-tweeting. Using Twitter, in the early stages of non-profit development, relays messages with viral speed and allows a minimal time commitment from supporters (TwitChange, 2010).

MySpace: Social Networking

MySpace and Facebook push one another higher into new levels of development in social networking. Much like Facebook, MySpace is a social networking site allowing users to add "friends" and leave messages on profiles. MySpace offers space for celebrities and musicians and allows music and videos to be play on profiles. As the most popular networking site of 2007, MySpace collected millions of users with its easy to use interface and personalized profiles. MySpace is home to celebrities, musicians, movies, television, advertisements, and blogs (Myspace.com, 2010).

As recent as 2008, MySpace generated the most virtual social buzz. Quickly sites like Facebook and Twitter surpassed the MySpace member base. As Facebook began to grow and adapt, shifting to accommodate different populations, it began to overtake all other social sites. From being the most visited site on the internet, to the current rank of 25th (far below 1st place Facebook), MySpace has experienced a great dip in users across the spectrum (Google, 2010).

Despite a significantly smaller non-profit population, MySpace continues to find innovative strategies to stay on top of the social media game. In the past year, MySpace has hosted various contests for network television. Boosting viewership for networks and hits for MySpace, contests like, "Find the next star of *Glee*" inspired a growing usage of MySpace for network reality star recruitment (Myspace Glee Auditions, 2010).

Youtube: Social Media Exchange

YouTube is the "largest worldwide video-sharing community" (YouTube, 2010). Quickly emerging as one of the most popular virtual file sharing site, YouTube allows users to upload videos of any context (excluding pornographic) and stream them to users across the globe. YouTube is a driving force behind a popular new internet video trend; the "viral video". For- profit organizations use the "viral video" campaign to start building virtual support and audiences.

Using this concept, the Dove Company created a viral video to push its "Campaign for Real Beauty". The promotional Dove video, titled "Dove Evolution" films a woman transformed from ordinary to edited, airbrushed, and photo-shopped. The video (linked below) became an internet sensation in 2009 and has reached over 11

million views on YouTube. Users viewing the video are self-selected and voluntarily receive the message portrayed by Dove.

(*Dove Evolution*: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U)

YouTube, used cooperatively with either a Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter account effectively selects an initial audience with similar interests. Depending on the quality of the video, initial promotion via Facebook may be a strong enough force to gain an audience base capable of promoting a stand-alone video.

Flickr: Social Media Exchange

"*Share your photos. Watch the World*", the tagline offered by Flickr, explains the basic premise of the site. Flickr is a photo sharing hub, designed to help users distribute and view photos online. Using this site helps organizations and users send images between supporter, friends, or constituents. Photos uploaded to Flickr are fully editable. Countless non-profits use Flickr to host all organizational photos. This photo sharing hub is a convenient tool accessible by individuals, non-profits, or for-profit organizations. Flickr additionally offers printing services from partner provider SnapFish. (Flickr, 2010)

LinkedIn: Social/Professional Networking

LinkedIn, much like Facebook and Myspace, is a tool for social networking. With this tool, users can find other users with similar interests, backgrounds, or hobbies. LinkedIn, however, is considered the 'professional" counterpart to Facebook. LinkedIn offers users a chance to connect with employers and users from similar organizations. On your LinkedIn profile, listed are your professional qualifications and educational development.

Social networking sites, like those described above, contribute to the visibility and public growth of organizations. With visibility comes familiarity.

West Bloomington and Development

Using the West Bloomington Revitalization Project as an example, one can easily see how using the described social media can be a pivotal tool in grassroots fundraising.

Because the WBRP is so new, both new and traditional fundraising styles must be incorporated in order to increase visibility to an optimal level. As demonstrated by the varied social media tools, citizens are using technology now more than ever to connect to their communities as a whole. Social media has quickly been adopted as the preferred form of communication for 18-44yr olds across the United States. Over 540 Million users log into Facebook each month, millions update their activities on Twitter, and employers now actively recruit on LinkedIn (Google, 2010). Social media, at this point, is entirely difficult to escape. With this in mind, the true power of social media mustn't be underestimated.

An important aspect of strategic fundraising is developing an understanding of the affiliated organization. Like most grassroots movements, the WBRP emerged out of a communal need from neighborhood citizens. Some residents began expressing discontent toward the infrastructure of the community, others were concerned about youth, some just wished for an open, safe green space. Formerly known as the West Bloomington Taskforce, area leaders, community residents, and government officials began to form a grassroots movement. Understanding the emergence of the organization, one must first understand the development of the West Bloomington neighborhood.

West Bloomington varies greatly from both McLean county and Bloomington, as a whole. West Bloomington is a highly diverse and economically varied region of McLean County. According to the 2000 Census, West Bloomington exhibits numerous

disparities as compared to Bloomington as a whole. The West Bloomington Revitalization Project developed in accordance with some of the more glaring community deficits. According to the 2000 United States Census, over 55% of West Bloomington neighborhoods have an income of less than $30,000 per year, as compare to only 25% for Bloomington as a whole. (U.S. Census, 2000)

Referring to the map below, west Bloomington is geographically defined with northern most boundaries at Locust Street, Southern most street at Taylor, and East and West boundaries at Lee and Morris respectively.

F.1 *Map of West Bloomington Target area,*
zoned off and set by Teska Associates

West Bloomington has its roots in early McLean county history. The last century saw a progressive push of business and technology into the east side of Bloomington.

Because of the increased social and economic development, west Bloomington slowly became a pariah in the cultural makeup of the community. Countless community members view West Bloomington as a "dangerous" neighborhood, many others simply won't set foot within certain engineered boundaries.

Despite the negative assumptions linked to the area, the west side boasts both historical and environment assets. Old growth trees line streets up and down the West Side. The Beer Nuts national headquarters has its roots in west Bloomington, operating since 1937 on Robinson Street (Beer Nuts history, 2010). One of the most historic businesses in town, West Side Clothing, has remained in the same location for over 100 years. Located on market Street, West Side Clothing is also one of the only clothing stores accessible by foot for west side residents.

Conversely, west Bloomington has frequently been called a "food desert". The west side lacks any substantial grocer with the exception of convenience stores littered with canned goods, overly processed snacks, and alcohol. Economically, the west side has been unable to support the development and sustainment of countless businesses. Responding to this concern, the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan outlines several points for progress in its pages on Economic Development (West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)

In response to the growing list of complaints from neighborhood residents and city officials, the Neighborhood Plan began to take shape.

Development of the WBRP

Located in the heart of the city, West Bloomington will be characterized by its high quality-of-life, empowered residents and deep sense of pride. Through partnerships and strong associations, and building on the neighborhood's history and diversity, West Bloomington will be home to new jobs, homes, and vibrant public gathering spaces in a safe and welcoming community.

Vision Statement from the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan

Despite opening its office doors in January of 2010, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project has had its roots in the community for several years. Using the Neighborhood plan leads the direction of the newly emerging WBRP.

The West Bloomington Neighborhood taskforce convened in 2008. This group of individuals, ranging from local government, to area residents, organized in order to draw a map for future progress. From the early meetings, the idea of developing a neighborhood plan emerged. The West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, developed by neighborhood residents and city officials serves as a blueprint for progress within the west Bloomington area. Funded by the City of Bloomington and State Farm, the plan was designed and written out by Teska Associates and created with the help of countless residents. In the fall of 2009, the American Planning Association presented the west Bloomington community and the Teska Associates with the Strategic Plan Award (American Planning Award Announcement: Attachment 1).

As the West Bloomington Revitalization Project grew out of an emerging feeling of discontent in the Bloomington community, growing pockets of community members began to feel socially and economically repressed when compared to their east side counterparts. With this palpable community viewpoint, the organization evolved.

Several areas of development are addressed in the Neighborhood Plan. From youth engagement to community greening, the plan, written in 2008, provides a blueprint for projects to be done now and in the future.

The progress of the WBRP, like most developing non-profits, is freckled with both achievements and setbacks. Since 2008, the WBRP has formed a board of Directors, with a popularly elected Board President. The board meets bi-monthly to discuss development activities and progress. The infrastructure of the WBRP is slowly progressing. As of November 2010, the organization has filed letters of incorporation and is in the process of filing for permanent 501c3 status.

Using the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan as a blueprint for development, the organization works to align projects with concrete goals and strategies. The Neighborhood plan is divided into 5 sections: Housing, Economic Development, Safety, Youth, and Education. As the organization grew within the community, an additional target area, community greening, was added. Analyzing the current progress of each committee lends to development strategies for social media.

A. Greening

Community greening is major part of the WBRP's progress. Achieving early success as a taskforce, the WBRP constructed and maintained a community garden on Roosevelt and Mulberry Streets; the West Side Community Gardens. The garden was created as a space for community members to gather and grow fresh produce on individual plots of land. In 2009 the West Side Community Gardens won a beautification award from the City of Bloomington. As the current WBRP board President and founding board member is a Master Gardener, one of the first goals of the committee was to utilize

and expand the West Side community gardens (Beautification Award Announcement: Attachment 2).

Throughout 2010, the greening committee took substantial steps to ensure the continued success of the community gardens, from having community festivals in the area to redecorating the surrounding fence, the community gardens have remained a staple of the west side.

Because community greening has had such an impact on varied projects, committees from other branches of the WBRP began to align closely with the gardening program. In the spring of 2010, the WBRP wrote a grant for the creation of a west side, "Saturdays at the Garden" workshop series. The grant introduction explained the purpose of the program;

> The workshops have several different aims. First and foremost, the program will allow gardeners to meet at a specific time to discuss different topics; be it gardening, the neighborhood, or even families. Opening the gardens as a forum for conversation has the potential to bridge gaps between the diverse populations on the West Side. Next, the program brings in guest speakers to educate gardeners on a variety of topics, including composting, recycling, creation of homemade pesticides, and healthy eating. These workshops will be entirely voluntary, but will help to shed light on popular gardening and healthy eating practices. Finally, gardeners will be able to engage in a WBRP managed tool sharing program. By lending out useful garden tools only on scheduled workshop days, more residents will be encouraged to attend the Saturday sessions. Objectively, our program targets three WBRP priorities; A) Safety, B) Health and Wellness, and C) Community Greening.
> (Saturdays at the Garden Grant, 2010)

In May of 2010, the WBRP was notified that the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation (IPCF) had selected the grant to receive partial funding. An additional member of the IPCF picked up the remaining portion of the budget to fully fund the project.

Beginning in the spring of 2010, the community gardening program began. As the program progressed, the WBRP purchased tools and equipment to enhance the program even more for residents. (Saturdays at the Garden Grant: Attachment 3)

Housing

We have beautiful old homes in the neighborhood, reinvestment is being made in some houses, home ownership is prevalent among our older residents, and we have a variety of housing options. Our key housing issues include vacant lots and houses, absentee landlords, houses being used as storage facilities, inappropriate items lying around yards, tension between landlords and renters, and foreclosed properties. We imagine a neighborhood with affordable housing options, where properties are well-maintained, where streets have newly constructed curbs and sidewalks, where volunteers work on neighborhood beautification, and revitalized public housing. Our goals include more home ownership, affordable residential redevelopment and better code enforcement.
(West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)

The housing committee of the WBRP quickly became a highly visible part of the organization. Due to the dilapidated state of the housing stock on the west side, residents readily pointed out a great need for renovation and assistance. The housing committee of the WBRP consisted of several notable members of the community. From resident council representatives, to State Farm employees, to Habitat for Humanity executives, the housing committee brought together residents with a proven commitment to development in housing. Chairing the housing committee was an undergraduate from Illinois Wesleyan University.

In the spring of 2009, the first major task of the housing committee was completed. A Housing Summit, bringing together local housing professionals and representatives, was well attended by members of the community. During this time, members of the WBRP were able to gauge the opinion of active housing professionals.

Varied questions were asked to the group as a whole, including a question addressing steps to take for further development.

Economic Development

> *We imagine a West Bloomington with a full grocery store, with retail stores up and down Market Street, nicer buildings for small businesses, jobs in the neighborhood, opportunities for the local workforce, and lots of pride! We want to offer support systems to residents of our community, create a project to hire ex-offenders, and develop skilled employees. We will capitalize on traffic from the far west side, improve our incomes, create a facade rebate program, and transform each other into key stakeholders.*
> *(West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)*

The Economic Development Committee of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project was charged with the difficult task of building the economy of the west side. Outlined in the neighborhood plan, the economic development committee was designed to accomplish several notable tasks including;

1. "Grow existing businesses, attract new shops and expand workforce development training throughout our Westside community."

2. Retain existing employers in this area, encourage them to expand their operations and recruit new employers to the Westside.

3. Together with the Bloomington-Normal Public Transit System, explore the feasibility of creating an "Early Hours" public transit program.

(West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)

Developing the economy of the community requires a number of significant tools. Using the basic principles of grassroots development, the economic development committee worked to build ties within the community. One of the first achievements of the committee came in the form of a $5000 contribution from First Presbyterian Church in Bloomington. The WBRP used this donation to symbolically develop the presence of

the faith-based community on the West Side. Paving the way for future faith-based community development, the economic development committee continues to work with local congregational leaders.

As the year progressed, the economic development committee began to work with such groups as Heartland Community College to create curriculum for business start up courses. Much of the work done by the Economic Development committee focused on building awareness and support within the community.

Youth

We spoke out about our hopes and dreams for our community's youth. We envision a future where our youth have access to safe, healthy and supportive recreational activities in which to engage; a sense of pride, self-respect, and self-confidence; strong social support, including mentors, affordable child care, peer groups and support for the parents of our youth; specific places to go to participate in structured and supportive activities.
(West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)

Because of the strong commitment to youth in the community, the WBRP's youth committee made considerable progress in 2010. Originally formed to address the community concerns with unsupervised youth in the area, the youth committee worked to build programming aimed at giving students safe, alternative after-school activities. Working with the Blank Canvas Project, the youth committee of the WBRP developed the "100 Fun Things" list. This creative list outlined a 100 activities aimed at keeping kids off the street during the long summer months. The list, printed by State Farm, was distributed in several locations across the city, including the WBRP headquarters, the Farmers Market, Mid-Central Community Action, and the Global Youth Service Day Conference. (100 Fun Things: Attachment 4)

The list also spurred the creation of a "100 Fun Things" group. The small group, composed of WBRP board members and area children, worked to complete tasks from the list throughout the summer. Upon completion of the list, area students were rewarded with a celebration. Additionally, the youth committee worked to develop future programming aimed at encouraging students to stay in school.

Education

We envision a West Bloomington community where all youth finish school and where the younger generations are empowered to fulfill their potential while helping each other along the way. We will equip ourselves with life skills education on such matters as critical thinking and decision-making, financial literacy, conflict resolution, parental training, employable skills, and computer/internet/technological instruction. Finally, we imagine a diversity of educational programming at a central community center where people of all ages could partake in classes, explore areas of self-interest, become involved in music and the arts, and interact with friends and neighbors.
(West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)

The education committee was formed to address the needs, academically and individually, of the community. Not only does the education committee address the needs of school-aged youth, but also the needs represented by the adult population. Adult education, in west Bloomington, shows a startling need for development. Because of the large immigrant community within west Bloomington, the WBRP presents activities in both English and Spanish. Money Smart Week 2010, the WBRP hosted several workshops on using Link cards at the downtown Bloomington Farmers Market. These workshops, given on consecutive evenings, were taught in both English and Spanish.

The education committee also played a significant role in the "Saturdays at the Garden" program. Because the grant was written to work with several committees, completing all outlined activities meant working with both the greening and the health and safety committees to ensure success. The third objective of the community garden

grant, *"Utilize local experts to teach about a variety of agricultural topics, including state and local agriculture and community greening initiatives."* highlights the role of education in the west side greening initiatives (Saturdays at the Garden Grant, 2010). Over the course of the summer, various local experts spent their time with local community gardeners, teaching better techniques as well as valuable healthy eating lessons. Working with the Bloomington Public Library, the education committee also secured dozens of books to distribute at the WBRP office.

Safety

> *We discussed the strengths, issues and vision related to safety in our West side neighborhoods. In terms of strengths, we enjoy a strong sense of community and neighborliness, we have many hard-working people in the area, the police respond quickly to our safety issues, and our block parties offer opportunities for socialization. In terms of a vision, we imagine more monitoring of parks by police and neighbors, the introduction of community policing, and the creation of a website to share relevant safety information with each other. Our top goals for safety include building community trust, improving landlord/tenant communication and forming a neighborhood watch.*
> *(West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008)*

The safety committee of the WBRP developed slowly throughout the year. Because many of the goals were longer term, the committee worked to lay the groundwork for future development. In the spring of 2010, Illinois Wesleyan students undertook a lightening survey of homes on the west side. The data (as of November 2010, still in the process of being complied and synthesized) will be used to determine the best routes for further development regarding crime and safety.

The safety committee outlined several important goals for the future of west Bloomington. Viewing the Patrol Map (attachment 5), created by the Bloomington Police Department, west Bloomington falls in regions one and six. The most recent crime statistics produced by the Bloomington Police Department show that the bulk of

Bloomington crime (46%) occurs in Zones 1 & 6. That percentage increases significantly when examining only violent crimes (City of Bloomington, 2010). These statistics highlight the long road to be taken by the safety committee (Reported Offenses, August 2010: attachment 6).

Investigating the roots of the WBRP, as well as the community as a whole, paints a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses. Addressing each of these topics helps to form a more cohesive and collaborative community vision for the future of development. By looking at the work achieved by the committees of the WBRP and examining some goals outlined in the Neighborhood Plan, the fit for social media becomes apparent.

Fundraising, as the backbone to all progress within community development, continues to be a struggle for the WBRP. Looking at the current social media as well as traditional fundraising fits for different organizations helps to illuminate different routes for development inside the WBRP. Examining different social media usages also allows non-profits to see the benefits of a strong media presence in real time.

Combating the Cost of Traditional Fundraising: a Social Media approach

The West Bloomington Revitalization Project entered the non-profit world at the current height of the social media revolution. This section recognizes strategies already in place (including current effective uses of social media), critiques on past efforts of the WBRP, and innovative fundraising possibilities for the future.

Traditional fundraising tools continue to be an asset used by all non-profits across generations. From mass-mail campaigns to grant writing, and from special event planning to corporate giving, non-profits employee a variety strategies to obtain optimal results. Identifying the efficiency of traditional fundraising tools as compared to newer,

technology driven social media tools will better help illuminate new routes of fundraising for grassroots non-profits emerging in the current economy; one known to be difficult for non-profits across the board. Amending the construction of current non-profit fundraising strategies by incorporating increased social media could potentially limit costs and increase contributions.

In the current economy, established non-profits, as well as emerging entities, have one goal in common; mobilizing resources to expand the donor base. Traditional strategies are commonly employed in order to reach the highest number of constituents within a given focus area. One of the most fundraising tools employed by most non-profits is the mass-mail campaign.

In April of 2010, the WBRP promoted their first mass-mail campaign (Direct mail letter: attachment 7). The direct mail campaign employees the tool of a fundraising letter sent to a database of potential and current donors. The costs associated with such a campaign vary depending on the number of recipients. Taking into account postage, printing, paper and supplies, and man-power, a direct mail campaign may be worth less than it actual gains. An average direct mail campaign receives contributions from approximately 5-8% of recipients (Jacobowitz & Lautmann, 2000). Depending on the size of the organization, as well as the amount requested, these contributions can vary greatly. As an early fundraiser for the WBRP, a direct mail campaign was employed. Our letter was sent to all businesses in the West Bloomington target area as well as those involved with the early planning stages of the West Bloomington taskforce. The result was average, at best. Utilizing this result, and taking into account the overall cost/benefit analysis associated, one may concede that a direct mail campaign is no longer the most

effective fundraising tool for a small, emerging non-profit. Larger more developed non-profits (For examples; the American Cancer Society, United Way) easily utilize such a tool due to the varied database of contributors and the consistent benefit of reaching out via direct mail. Focusing on the developing non-profits, the topic of minimizing fundraising costs is crucial. Analyzing traditional fundraising strategies, such as direct mail, shows a need for slight shifts and adjustments. By applying social media tools to traditional fundraising strategies, emerging non-profits, like the West Bloomington Revitalization Project may be better able to achieve optimal results from fundraising campaigns. What costs, then, are associated with development of a strong social media campaign?

As outlined, the benefits of maintaining a comprehensive social media campaign are limitless. What costs, however, must be factored in when building new forms of media?

The usage of social media is so highly acclaimed and wide spread for several reasons. One of which; it's free. Websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Digg require no user fees. Signing up for an account is simple and maintenance can be done as frequently or infrequently as necessary. Working with a non-profit, the associated costs related to upkeep and maintenance may vary in slight degrees.

The direct costs associated with maintaining a social networking site are analyzed by looking at the employee/volunteer makeup of the organization. First and foremost, a non-profit requires an employee or volunteer base to build and maintain the network. If the company uses an employee to maintain a newly formed social network, several factors must be taken into accounted. First, specific training may be needed to current or

established employees. If unfamiliar with social media usages, the process may require more company time and attention. After building a social site, direct costs may still be incurred. An employee may devote anywhere from 10 minutes to 10 hours a week to maintaining a variety of networks.

As the main goal of most social network sites is creating a community of supporters, friends, or constituents, each social site may draw a variety of supporters. Facebook, for example, offers a number of tools for each organizational "fan". As a user becomes a fan of an organization, they gain the ability to comment on a public space for all other "fans" to read and comment. With this ability comes an additional responsibility for employees. Administrators of facebook pages cannot regulate the content of messages. If a user posts inflammatory comments, all other users will be able to read it until an administrator finds and deletes the message. Without keeping a watchful eye on the organization page, derogatory posts have the potential to hurt an organizations campaign. For the most part, this is an issue organizations rarely encounter. However, political or mission-driven organizations are likely to reflect the views and beliefs of only a portion of the population. Combating this problem, social media campaigns administrators must be active members of their networks.

Finding the Fit

Reflecting on the trends cited by Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, non-profit organizations can no longer sit idly by and expect the trend of social media to fade away. The WBRP is a prime example. As a grassroots non-profit in a less than optimal economy, spending money of advertisements is out of the question. How, then, are

organizations expected to build infrastructure and donor bases without getting their name out into the community? As they say, it takes money to make money.

Several non-profit organizations stand out as leaders in social media. Using organizational models, the WBRP may be better able to focus their efforts and tailor an approach yielding the highest results. Among the highest caliber of non-profits in the social media universe is the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). Not only has the HSUS been able to mobilize its base via Facebook wall posts and Twitter updates, the HSUS actively recruits volunteers and solicit donations via varied social networking sites. The reach of the Humane Society expanded greatly by utilizing social networking tools that communicate with supporters in a non-aggressive manner. The HSUS has also been particularly effective in promoting political messages, and soliciting signatures for virtual petitions. Demonstrating its effectiveness, the Humane Society has taken countless progressive steps to stay ahead of the proverbial "pack". First, they continually demonstrate progressive message delivery through a variety of outlets. Next, the Humane Society frames messages to personally touch supporters. Messages stand out in such a manner that issue avoidance seems neglectful to the average citizen (HSUS Facebook, 2010).

Another organization that takes social media to a new plateau is *Invisible Children*. *Invisible Children* is an organization that sheds light on genocide and the use of child soldiers in Uganda. *Invisible Children* so frequently and effectively mobilizes their base via social media that they have won huge grants purely by their presence on Facebook. This organization continually utilizes college-aged adults and puts them in positions of promotion and message distillation (Invisible Children Facebook, 2010).

Lastly, one for-profit organization has so effectively used social media that is has forced smaller non-profits to mobilize their virtual base. PepsiCo. uses advanced social media and networking to promote not only its own interests, but develop a steady base of community supporters via the Pepsi Refresh Project. The Pepsi Refresh project offers individuals, community groups, or organizations a chance to win grants of varying amounts to complete service projects in their community. The winners are all decided by virtual vote and notified online. In order to vote for an applicant, a user must be registered with PepsiCo. Organizations and individuals can promote their ideas via Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, or any other avenue imaginable. Conversely, Pepsi is always promoted as well. Non-profits that win grants, such as the National MS Society, must reflect a superior ability to navigate social networking. The innovative strategy PepsiCo employs forces more and more nonprofit groups to rethink and retool current fundraising strategies. Pepsi Co. has, perhaps, done more for the medium of social media, than countless other missions and causes. With this glaring information from non-profits across the globe, ignoring social media has become both neglectful and irresponsible to the grassroots movement. Viewing social media as a fundraising tool, rather than just a loosely connected network of potential supporters, allows non-profits to invest equitable time and attention to its development (Pepsi Refresh Project, 2010).

Finding the fit for social media, within the WBRP, requires an in-depth analysis of the community, the population, and projects outlined for completion. Reflecting back on the Neighborhood plan, a detailed project outline marks spaces for potential community involvement throughout West Bloomington (West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, 2008). Using this map, with the additional data offered, a strategic

plan can be created. As the planning items revealed varied data, different tools must be combined to complete a comprehensive promotion and fundraising campaign.

As the WBRP began as a grassroots movement, promotion and public exposure were limited. Established in 2008, early on the WBRP had a very limited community following. Those involved in the project knew of the goals and concepts offered, those out of the loop knew far less information. Many community members expressed confusion toward getting involved with the organization.

The West Bloomington Revitalization Project employed several strategies to orientate community members with the goals of the organization. The wealth disparity, highlighted between east and west community members, showcases a need for extensive, diverse community outreach. Some of the strategies employed by the WBRP included creation of a Facebook page, creation of a West Bloomington newsletter, and usage of a direct mail fundraising campaign. Finding the social media fit with each of these strategies better defines the goals and directions of the promotional tools used.

During the January 2010 Board Retreat for the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, one of the first tasks delegated to the Youth Committee Chair was the creation of a WBRP Facebook page. This site (as of October 18th, 2010) has 309 "friends". 'Friends' of the WBRP receive consistent updates and communications from the newsfeed function of Facebook. Additionally, each user has the ability to correspond via wall posting or direct messaging. This first venture into social media proved to be successful and paved the way for further social integration.

Entering the wide world of social networking can be a daunting task. Facebook offers one of the most user-friendly formats for a variety of users, from children to

specialized non-profits. Delving further into the realm of social networking, one can better see the varied tools accessible for increased fundraising for all grassroots non-profits.

Using Facebook offered an expanded community a window into local community development. The tools offered by Facebook and other social media sites are an invaluable tool in deciphering the language of community development to neighbors across the city. The WBRP has also been able to better define its goals according to the voice of community members.

Using the West Bloomington Revitalizations Projects Facebook page as a promotional tool, inexpensive, yet effective, promotion of the first fundraiser occurred, The fundraiser, a dinner, wine tasting, and silent auction, began its promotion solely on Facebook. Using Facebook, the WBRP was able to not only reach a new set of community members, but additionally promote silent auction and raffle items. Several users even contacted the WBRP via email and offered additional silent auction items. By keeping community members connected through Facebook, the WBRP effectively promoted an event with minimal cost and time associated (WBRP Facebook, 2010).

Clearly, this use of this social media website is an effective tool for promotion as well as post-event feedback, but in what other ways can Facebook or other social networking sites offer a benefit to the non-profit world? One tool neglected by the WBRP (in Fall of 2010) is the "Giving option" offered by Facebook. With this option, users are able to donate directly to cause by channeling funds into a Facebook feed. This feed is connected to a bank account or fund started on behalf of the organization. Encouraging Facebook users to donate even $10.00 could result in thousands of dollars in donations

with little efforts made on the side of information distillation. Although Facebook is clearly the reigning champion of the social network empire, several additional sites offer more specialized assistance regarding a variety of topics. Promoting the WBRP, in general, is of utmost importance for any future fundraising within the organization. Applying traditional fundraising strategies, such as the direct mail campaign with a social media campaign has the potential to produce optimal results.

As the WBRP is a developing organization in an economically diverse community, the organization employed different techniques to build and audience base and raise funds. Two traditional approaches, as explained previously, were the mass mail campaign and the newsletter. In what ways can both traditional techniques be enhanced by the use of social media?

View again attachment 7, the actual letter for the WBRP mass mail campaign. The letter was sent out to over 200 organizations and individuals within the Bloomington Normal area. This letter yielded roughly $500.00 in donations. The cost of the mail campaign was in the area of $100.00. The response rate was relatively low, yet corresponded with the national rates of most mass mail campaigns (roughly 5-8% return rate). How could one social media tool be used to potential heighten this number? Take, for example, Twitter.

The Twitter universe is one that exploded in late 2009, yet started in 2006. Twitter offers a unique service. Allowing users to cast out micro-blogs under 160 characters, Twitter helps users stay in touch and updated with both ease and efficiency. The constantly updated stream, with over 100 million 'Tweets" per day, showcases a diverse range of information being pushed into the internet. The current use of Twitter in

Bloomington Normal showcases the varied range of users. From the Economic Development Council of McLean County to the Pantagraph, Twitter is an asset utilized to promote events, job postings, and political ideologies. If a site as powerful as Twitter is used to promote job listings, promoting fundraisers is a likely and useful tool.

Fundraising via Twitter has taken the shape of only a promotional tool. Twitter does, however, allow the use of imbedded links to direct users to a new site; one over the allowed limitations of a "tweet". Using Twitter, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project could have reached out to the Bloomington Normal community and offered non-threatening reminders. "Did you get a letter from the WBRP? Check us out on Facebook or stop by the office!" Small reminders like this have the ability to drive further participation and contributions.

Another promotional tool used by the WBRP is the community newsletter, named *West Word* (West Word Issue: Attachment 8). The West Word is an example of effective social media strategies employed by the WBRP. Kicking off as an entirely electronic publication, the West Word compiles interesting community information and presents it in an easy to read format for community members and organizations. As the West Word progressed in its publication, the virtual base began to grow. Realizing the increased desire for community education, the WBRP expanded the West Word audience by offering hard copies at locations across the city. Because many area residents fail to access internet on a daily basis, the WBRP was unable to reach countless residents. Making the West Word available in both hard copy form and electronic form demonstrated an undeniable community understanding.

An additional social networking site used by many of these organizations is the "Wiki". Wikis are an easily used alternative to a personal website. Wikis are a fully editable web space, secured for people, organization, non-profits, etc. The use of the Wiki in the realm of fundraising is limitless. By developing a wiki space, organizations can update current information in real time, in a fully editable format. If an organization tried to start a community dialogue on a topic, using a wiki space may facilitate discussion and allow users to add commentary on different schedules (WikiSpace, 2010).

Conclusions

After exploring social media and its benefits in non-profits, one question remains; how can a solid social media campaign translate into substantial community involvement? Looking at the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, community members can make a sizeable impact on the direction of social media. As of May 2010, west Bloomington non-profits, the Jesus Coffeehouse and Western Avenue Community Center, became recipients of a grant furnishing each organization with new computers and graphic design software.

The program providing the software, "The Blank Canvas Project", allows local youth to learn advanced graphic design through involvement at a community center. Utilizing local youth, such as students involved in the Blank Canvas Project, potentially teaches social media skills to a new generation. Using students in this capacity additionally limits the company time devoted to social media.

Community residents, again, can be utilized in fundraising social media campaigns, like the Pepsi Refresh Project. In order to create a viable entry into the Pepsi Refresh Project, candidates must create a video campaign and upload it onto the Pepsi website. After

being reviewed the video and cause are up for vote. Integrating a social media campaign into a community is necessary for projects such as this. By developing both a community base and a sound campaign, community residents will be charged with the task of message distillation. As voting for the Pepsi Refresh project is done entirely online, residents are forced to find unique outlets to votes.

Integrating community and social media can be either a daunting task or an interesting, innovative use of company time and energy. Referring back to the task of a mass mailing campaign, not only are company hours and supplies being used, but also the passivity of the program easily fails to reach the community as a whole.

American society has evolved and shifted in the past 50 years. Countless time constraints prohibit personal, face-to-face, interaction. Messages are now portrayed virtually. A sense of 'community' is no longer defined by knowing neighbors and hosting weekly dinner parties. Your social network is your community. Friends are linked via Facebook, and information is gleaned through periodic tweets. Understanding social trends, such as those revealed by Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, allows organizations to stay relevant in a complex society.

Examining West Bloomington, the WBRP, and usages of social media reveals varying gaps in development. Although social media will not always adhere strictly to a direct source of monetary input, it will be a tool for increased visibility. Using current social media outputs, organizations are better equipped to move forward and merge with the developing American community.

The future of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project lies in the hands of several devoted community members. Finding the ideal fit for the WBPR and social

media continue is an evolving process. In the current state of the organization, a Facebook account may suffice. As the organization grows and develops new tools must be integrated in order to ensure optimal progress. In order to ensure a sustainable future, addressing the current progress is necessary.

Viewing each committee of the WBRP as a single entity, rather than a grouping of goals and projects, usages of social media start to appear. Aligning the interests of the committee with the particular social media tool may decidedly drive the goals of the organization.

Over the course of seven months associated with the WBRP, certain achievements were slow to finish. Realizing the barriers to development and working with them to set achievable, mutually beneficial goals is necessary to progress. Looking back to the neighborhood plan, as well as newly established projects, the WBRP may be more effective with a retooling of the strategies employed to meet goals. Analyzing current projects and forming a virtual fit will undoubtedly help the organization build visually and publically

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Attachments

1. American Planning Association: Strategic Plan Award Announcement

2. West Side Community Gardens Beautification Award Announcement

3. Saturdays at the Garden Grant

4. 100 Fun Things Handout

5. City of Bloomington Police Patrol Area Map

6. City of Bloomington "Offenses by Patrol Area for August 2010"

7. Direct Mail Campaign Letter

8. West Word, 1st Issue

Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan

City of Elmhurst Comprehensive Plan
Funding Agency: City of Elmhurst
Contributors: HNTB Corporation

The Last Four Miles;
Completing Chicago's Lakefront Parks
Funding Agency: Friends of the Parks
Contributors: BauerLatoza Studio, Louis R Lurie Foundation, Topografis,
Soloman Cordwell Buenz, Greene & Proppe Design, AECOM

Strategic Plan

West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan
Funding Agency: City of Bloomington & State Farm Bank
Contributors: Teska Associates, West Bloomington Task Force

Reconnecting Neighborhoods
Funding Agency: Regional Transportation Authority
Contributors: Metropolitan Planning Council, HNTB Corporation, City of Chicago, Quad
Communities Development Corp , ShoreBank Corp.,
Chicago Transit Authority, Chicago Department of Transportation,
Partnership for New Communities, Metra

Ogden Avenue Corridor Enhancement Initiative
Funding Agency: City of Naperville
Contributors: Houseal Lavigne Associates

Best Practice

City of Naperville Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice
Funding Agency: City of Naperville
Contributors: Planning/Communications

Sustainability

North Branch Chicago River Open Space Plan
Funding Agency: Lake County Stormwater Management Commission
Contributors: Friends of Chicago River, Futurity, Inc.

Honoring Our Water; A Regional Stormwater Plan for Peoria,
Tazwell & Woodford Counties
Funding Agency: Tri-County Regional Planning Commission
Contributors: Peoria County, Illinois River Valley Council of Governments,
US Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service

Implementation

Village of Plainfield Lockport Street Streetscape
Funding Agency: Village of Plainfield
Contributors: The Lakota Group, Christopher B. Burke Engineering, Ltd.,
Baxter and Woodman, The George Sollitt Construction Co.,

Community Outreach

Kishwaukee Street Corridor Revitalization Plan
Funding Agency: City of Rockford
Contributors: HNTB Corporation

Student Project

City of Galesburg East Main Street Corridor Plan
Agency: City of Galesburg
University: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Department of
Urban and Regional Planning; University of Illinois Extension

Revitalization & Adaptive Reuse: Maximizing the Potential
of Downtown Carbondale
Agency: City of Carbondale
University: Southern Illinois University School of Architecture

PANTAGRAPH.

West side improvement project making big strides

By M.K. Guetersloh | mkguetersloh@pantagraph.com | Posted: Saturday, March 20, 2010 6:10 pm

BLOOMINGTON —Neighbors Valerie Dumser and Dennis Arnold are still amazed at how much has been done to improve Bloomington's long-neglected west side.

Two years ago, they were among 150 neighbors who helped write a plan to guide revitalization and redevelopment in an area bounded by Locust, Taylor, Lee and Morris streets.

On Saturday, the West Bloomington Revitalization Partnership officially opened its office at 800 W. Washington St. The goal is to coordinate volunteer efforts to improve the district through improved housing, fun and educational youth programs, safety and business development.

"It is such a relief to accomplish this," said Dumser, the partnership's board president and a member of the Olde Towne Neighborhood Association.

"I think we've known this could happen," added Rick Heiser, a member of Olde Towne. "A lot of people have been working on this."

Volunteer Brittini Gray, a junior at Illinois Wesleyan University, is working with the partnership to develop a list of 100 things for children.

"You can't look at improving an area unless you look at how to help children and give them a reason to care and to get involved," Gray said.

The most visible part of the partnership's work is the community garden built on a city lot at Mulberry and Roosevelt streets.

Arnold, from the Gridley-Allin-Prickett Neighborhood Association, said the garden has helped the partnership's "greening" of the area.

Heiser and Arnold said the most challenging part of the project's work will come from stabilizing neighborhoods and improving housing.

That work has become more difficult because of the recession, the collapse of the housing market and increasing number of foreclosures.

"When you have a landlord who has a number of properties in one area being foreclosed on, that puts whole blocks in jeopardy," Heiser said.

The group needs to raise about $50,000 a year to help pay for its office and executive director.

Landlord Brad Butzirus and the Stevenson Center for Public Policy at Illinois State University already have provided help.

"We never quit begging," Dumser said. "But there are people out there who want to help us and we are going to use that help."

Saturdays in the Garden

Submitted to the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation

April 1st, 2010

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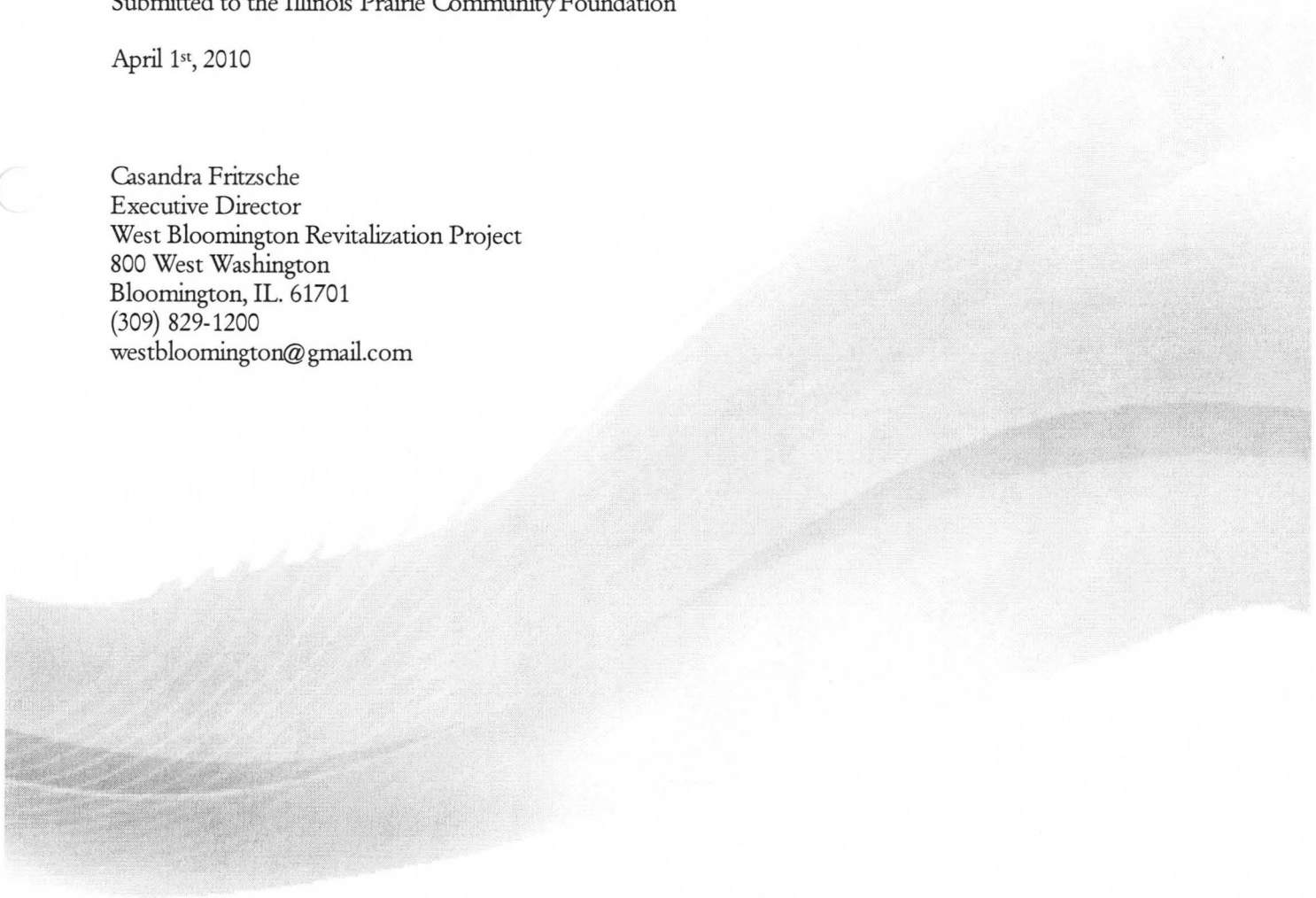
I. Summary Statement

Gardens grow relationships as much as they grow tomatoes. As a group full of neighbors and gardeners, we at the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP), recognize this fact. We hope to use our garden on the west side in a new, innovative way. This summer the WBRP plans to initiate an innovative new program called, "Saturdays in the Garden". Our program addresses community needs in three ways:

- Create a safer community on the West Side by nurturing resident relationships
- Develop healthy eating habits on the West Side
- Develop better knowledge of food systems and local agriculture

Kicking off the program will be a spring plant exchange. Saturday, May 1st community residents will be invited for a day of fun and conversation while switching plants and planning their gardens. This friendly "meet and greet" between neighbors will be also be the introduction of our program to all neighborhood residents. Saturdays from 9am-10am will serve as a workshop for gardeners and West Side neighbors. Our west side tool shed will open its doors each Saturday from 8am until noon, providing for additional hours of conversation and gardening. The workshops have several different aims. First and foremost, the program will allow gardeners to meet at a specific time to discuss different topics; be it gardening, the neighborhood, or even families. Opening the gardens as a forum for conversation has the potential to bridge gaps between the diverse populations on the West Side. Next, the program brings in guest speakers to educate gardeners on a variety of topics, including composting, recycling, creation of homemade pesticides, and healthy eating. These workshops will be entirely voluntary, but will help to shed light on popular gardening and healthy eating practices. Finally, gardeners will be able to engage in a WBRP managed tool sharing program. By lending out useful garden tools only on scheduled workshop days, more residents will be encouraged to attend the Saturday sessions. Objectively, our program targets three WBRP priorities; A) Safety, B) Health and Wellness, and C) Community Greening.

II. Need for the Project in the Community

Bloomington is a food desert. What little convenience stores we have are littered with alcohol posters, processed snack cakes, and overly priced canned goods. Rather than being educated on the best vegetables to buy, West Side residents are forced to learn the best prices for beer on any given day. With this type of selection, its no wonder west side residents have long wished for a better grocer. Even though we still won't be adding a grocery store to the West side (one day, we hope!) we will be adding an option for better eating. Our program addresses the community need for better food choices and healthy eating education with an innovative and multi-facetted approach. By addressing these topics in a cooperative fashion we hope to create a better educated community. By making our program so interactive, we hope to engage west side residents in a fun, safe fashion. Some of our exciting workshops include:

- Composting: Better soils for better gardens
- Where does your food come from: Lessons in local agriculture
- Navigating grocery stores: choosing better, eating better

- Grow Great Tomatoes: Tips for success in your personal garden

These workshops are just a brief sampling of the programming to come! Because of the great success of the West Side Community Gardens, we know our program will benefit the community as a whole. The West Side Community Garden is a well-respected, highly utilized space in the community. Since its opening, all the plots have continually been taken up by residents. Rarely have vegetables gotten stolen, and never has there been a serious problem with litter or graffiti. The garden itself will help the west side not only by growing vegetables but also by teaching valuable lessons. Children and adults alike sometimes don't make the best choices regarding their food. Who hasn't picked up a chocolate bar rather than a carrot for an afternoon snack? Our summer program works to put fresh vegetables in the hands of residents and walk them through the process of changing their eating habits. Although the garden isn't a grocery store, it's certainly a step in the right direction.

III. Specific Purpose of Funds Requested

In order to make our project a success, the WBRP requests $1400.00. The specific purposes of the funds requested are outlined through our timeline, methods, and budget. Our funds will go directly toward making our project a success now, and in the future. Our one-time purchase of tools, a shed, a rain barrel, and compost bin help to offset future program costs, and make our program easy to duplicate.

IV. Budget

	Total Budget	Funds Requested
Personnel	0	0
Program and Printing (office supplies, printing, refreshments)	350	300 ($30/week for ten weeks of programming)
Garden supplies (shed, rain barrel, compost bin, tools)	2000	1100
Incentive items (giveaways, "awards")	350	0
	2700	1400

V. Budget Explanation:

We, at the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, recognize the importance of personal investment in project development and implementation. Our personal investment is reflected in our contribution to the "Saturdays in the Garden" Program. The requested funding, as outlined below, will help us to create a fun and sustainable gardening program:

Personnel ($0)

There are no personnel costs associates with the Saturdays in the Garden project. All program coordination will be done by volunteers.

Program & Printing Costs: ($300)

With need some basic supplies to support the program. Office supplies will include clip boards, pencils and an easel to help with workshops. Few gardeners show up with pen and paper. A printing budget will make sure handouts are available for everyone. We will keep additional handouts on hand at the garden for gardeners and neighbors who were not able to attend the workshop. We will offer coffee and light refreshments at the workshops.

Community Garden Maintenance: ($1100)

In order to maintain a tool-sharing program several necessities are apparent. A transportable shed, to house the community gardening tools, averages at $750.00 - $800.00. A selection will be made depending on funds secured. We will get the best we can afford. We also hope to purchase both a rain barrel and compost bins, which will coordinate with our workshop topics. Gardening tools, including shovels (Average $15.00), watering cans ($18.00), and trowels ($12.00) will be purchased for the use of community gardeners. The amount requested including the shed and gardening tools is $1100.

Incentive Items ($0)

We will giveaway garden tools, gardening benches and other fun items to gardeners who participate in the program. This will be a fun way to draw gardeners and empower them to continue working in the garden. We hope to have some of these items donated but other things like gardening bags with the WBRP logo might have to be purchased.

VI. Method and timeline for evaluating the program effectiveness

Work Plan: 2010	May	June	July	August	September	October
Organize program with Greening & Safety Committee	✓					
Organize seminar dates with speaker schedules	✓					
Coordinate Spring Plant exchange	✓					
Promote garden program via different media outlets	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Purchases tools and Shed	✓					
Purchase necessary materials for lecture series	✓	✓				
Design surveys for evaluation		✓	✓			
Disperse and Collect Surveys			✓	✓		
Compile survey data				✓		

| | | | | | | ✓ | |
| Prepare Evaluative Report | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |

By adhering to our work plan above, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project hopes to create both a successful and easily evaluated yearly program, to be used as a model for future "Saturdays in the Garden" endeavors. Our methods to achieve the three measurable objectives are outlined below, with a brief explanation of placement in the work plan.

Objective one

- Create a safer community on the West Side by nurturing resident relationships

In order to achieve this objective, the WBRP plans to create a tool sharing program to encourage residents to become neighbors and friends. By allowing tools to only be checked out on Saturday mornings, we hope to bring together residents for a peaceful morning of gardening. These workshops will help to drive conversation, encourage questions, and build ties between gardeners. Our tool-sharing program will serve as the basis for community gatherings. In order to achieve this objective the WBRP must purchase tools and a shed in which to store them.

Objective two

- Develop healthy eating habits on the west side

Current statistics reflect a growing need for education on healthy eating. We, at the WBRP, plan to not only cultivate vegetables this summer, but also healthy eating habits. Many of our seminars will focus on the nutritional content of healthy foods versus unhealthy foods. Additionally, participants will learn about the nutritional quality of the foods they grow. At least one seminar will focus on best choices at local supermarkets, with a special emphasis on the most commonly patronized grocery stores, including Wal-Mart. By the end of our summer program, we hope to arm all participants with a sound foundation on which to base future food choices.

Objective three

- Utilize local experts to teach about a variety of agricultural topics, including state and local agriculture and community greening initiatives.

When it comes to gardening, the WBRP couldn't ask for a better Board of Directors. Board President, Master Gardner, and founder of the West Side Gardens, Valerie Dumser, will guide our slate of agricultural experts as they plan to present on the West Side. Our summer program will also utilize Sue Floyd (Greening committee chair and Board VP) to steer greening activities. Additionally, we'll partner with countless leaders in community agriculture and greening, include Heartland community College and the Ecology Action Center to further our goal of educating west side residents.

Evaluation:

In order to create the most sustainable and equitable project, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project plans to evaluate our project in the following ways:

Survey Collection:

Following each Saturday morning workshop, our volunteers will distribute surveys to gardeners and neighbors. These surveys will gauge specific reactions to each lecture. By collecting data following each presentation, the WBRP hopes to find the most relevant issues for future programming.

Evaluation Report:

The cumulative impact of such data collection will be a comprehensive report on the outcomes of the "Saturdays in the Garden" program. This report will be given to representatives at the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation as well as all board members of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project. Our cumulative report will be used to guide future garden program and highlight the most effective workshop strategies for facilitators next season.

VII. Personnel Qualifications:

Because the garden program aligns so well the current plans of the WBRP, our volunteers are already in place! Founder of the garden, Board President, and Master Gardener Valerie Dumser, will take a leadership role in our program and help to guide gardeners and presenters. Greening committee chair and VP of the WBRP Board, Sue Floyd, will also serve as an active leader for our program. Safety committee chair, WBRP board member, and Alderman Karen Schmidt was on the ground when the garden was being created. Her participation will help to steer the community building/ safety aspects of the gardening program.

VIII. How the grant will be recognized

The IPCF will receive credit as a sponsor of Saturdays in the Garden and the name and logo will be used (with permission and approval) on all signage and handouts. The IPCF grant will be recognized with a sign at the community garden and in the window of our office on Washington Street, with an article in our bi-weekly electronic newsletter, *The WestWord* (circulation of 102+ countless people forwarded on to), and on our Facebook page and website (currently "under construction"). The IPCF will also be recognized in our annual report.

IX. How the project would proceed with partial funding

The garden has a life of its own. Even without any new funding, the gardeners would still come and the garden would still be successful. Indeed, the gardeners are already busy! The funds requested of the IPCF would make an existing project *even better*. With partial funding, we would adjust the workshop schedule and reduce the number of tools for the sharing program.

100 Fun Things to Do in Bloomington-Normal
Summer 2010

1. Cool down at McGraw or Miller Park "spraygrounds"
2. Power through a movie marathon with friends
3. Read an autobiography
4. Go to the mall
5. Decorate a birthday cake for a friend
6. Have fun at an amusement park
7. Sample food from another culture
8. Visit the Miller Park Zoo
9. Attend Culturefest at Miller Park
10. Taste sweet corn (maybe at the Sweet Corn Festival)
11. Watch a $1 movie at the University Theatre on Main St
12. Run or bike on the Constitution Trail
13. Wake up early and go to the Bloomington farmer's market on Saturday morning
14. Enjoy ice cream at Gene's and Carl's on the same day – hey, it's summer!
15. Look for the earliest grave marker at Evergreen cemetery - where Adlai Stevenson is buried
16. Participate in the summer reading program at the library
17. List 50 things you want to do in your lifetime
18. Clean up your block
19. Volunteer
20. Mail a card or letter to a friend that has moved away
21. Spend time with your Grandma
22. Cook your favorite meal
23. Design a calendar with all of your family members' birthdays on it
24. Check out the skate park in Normal
25. Make s'mores
26. Splash around at the pool
27. Stroll around the Sugar Creek Arts Festival
28. Take a tour of ISU or IWU
29. Enjoy a free Shakespeare performance
30. Attempt a full day WITHOUT your phone
31. Linger in the gallery at the McLean County Arts Center
32. Ice skate at the Pepsi Ice Center
33. Catch the 4th of July fireworks
34. Find a summer job
35. Grow tomatoes
36. Donate five things to Goodwill
37. Learn to rollerblade
38. Camp out (even in the backyard!)
39. Host a party or backyard barbeque
40. Join a sports team

41. See the F14 Tomcat at the Prairie Aviation Museum
42. Sketch something interesting
43. Sell some stuff you don't need or use at a garage sale
44. Open a savings account
45. Write a note to your role model to say thank you
46. Switch the radio station and hear something new
47. Break the high score on your favorite video games
48. Admire the lights of the wind farm at dusk
49. Recycle papers laying around the house
50. Walk a dog
51. Play board games
52. Eat watermelon
53. Study a current event and tell 5 people what you have learned
54. Goof around at mini-golf
55. Freeze your own popsicles
56. Get outside and exercise!
57. Watch cheese being made at Ropp Jersey Cheese
58. Wash your family car
59. Complete a 1000 piece puzzle
60. Compose a poem
61. Start a blog
62. Explore Uptown Normal
63. Invite your friends over for a slumber party
64. Knit a scarf for next winter
65. Photograph interesting things about your neighborhood
66. Give blood if you can
67. Flip the Frisbee at the park
68. Dance
69. Improve your basketball skills
70. Cheer for the Prairie Thunder at a hockey game
71. Job shadow a career that interests you
72. Send your friends on a scavenger hunt
73. Redecorate your room
74. Drive go karts
75. Raise money for charity
76. Pick up a newspaper
77. Challenge your friends to a huge water balloon fight
78. Help someone in your neighborhood
79. Root for a friend at a soccer game
80. Dare to get a new haircut
81. Figure out how to ride the bus
82. See how we ate in 1830 at the McLean County Museum of History
83. Bake cookies from scratch
84. Scream on the rides at the County Fair

85. Discover your family history
86. Sign up for a library card – and use it!
87. Nap in a hammock
88. Test out a new restaurant
89. Offer to help your parents around the house
90. Turn off the TV and go bowling
91. Teach yourself to play guitar
92. Listen to music at a free concert
93. Serve as a role model for younger siblings
94. Draft your resume
95. Picnic in the park
96. Research a country you would like to visit some day
97. Hang out with your best friend
98. Meet your neighbors
99. Shop at a thrift store
100. Contribute canned goods to a food pantry

New Patrol Areas as of June 26, 2006

7

6

1

5

2

4

3

3   0   3   6   Miles

N W E S
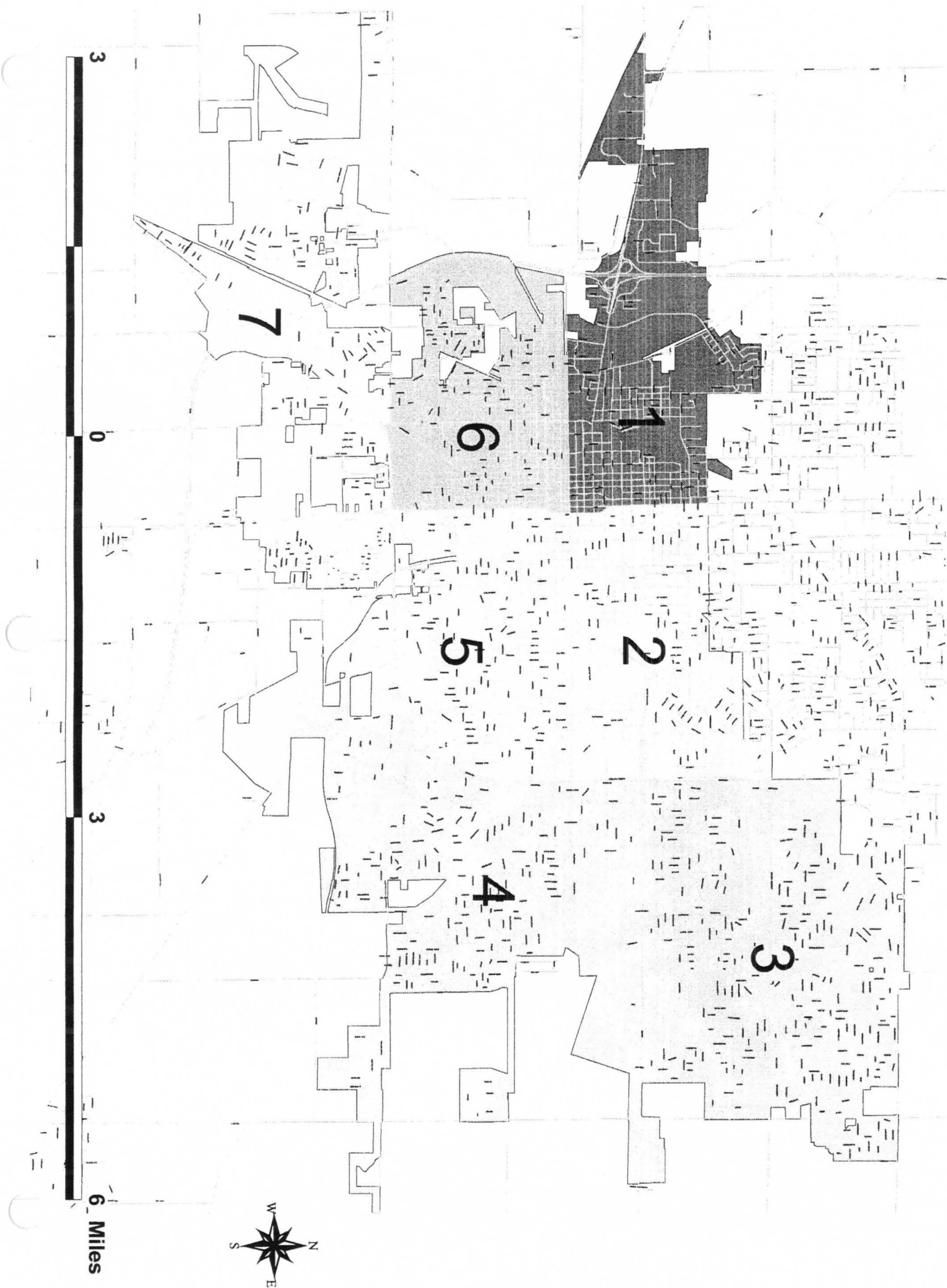
Reported Offenses by Patrol Area For August 2010

Offense Type	Patrol Area	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
ASSAULT			3	1	1			2		7
BATTERY			17	17	5	5	9	32	5	90
BURGLARY			7	13	6	7	7	16	3	59
BURGLARY / THEFT FROM MOTOR VEHICLE			9	5	10	1	6	9	10	50
CANNABIS CONTROL ACT		1	7		1	2	4	10		25
CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES ACT		1	1	1		1	1	3		8
CRIMINAL DAMAGE OR TRESPASS TO PROPERTY			27	26	30	6	20	32	14	155
CRIMINAL SEXUAL ASSAULT			2				1	1		4
DEADLY WEAPONS			1		1	1	2	1		6
DECEPTION		1	14	7	4	4	3	5		38
DISORDERLY CONDUCT			17	6	3	2	9	17	10	64
DRUG PARAPHERNALIA ACT		1	3	1		2	1	4		12
INTERFERENCE WITH PUBLIC OFFICERS			8	4	1			7	1	21
INTIMIDATION								1	1	2
KIDNAPPING					1		3	1		5
LIQUOR CONTROL ACT VIOLATIONS			3			1				4
MOTOR VEHICLE OFFENSES		1	21	11	6	5	10	19		73
MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT				2			2		1	5
OFFENSES INVOLVING CHILDREN			12	4	2		1	11	7	37
OTHER OFFENSES		1	52	54	24	9	29	55	26	250
ROBBERY			1	1		1	3	1	1	8
SEX OFFENSES			3	2		2	1	2	1	11
THEFT			31	20	7	8	14	8	5	93
VIOLATION OF CRIMINAL REGISTRY LAWS						2	3		2	7
Totals for Patrol Area		6	239	175	102	59	129	237	87	1034

Spring 2010

Dear Friend:

In 2008, Aderian McPherren, an elderly resident of West Bloomington, lived in a home in desperate need of renovation. Members of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP) coordinated with city and community resources to complete extensive home repairs. Today, she remains in her home – safe and secure- and proudly raises her grandchildren there.
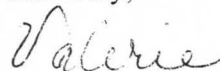
The WBRP believes that revitalization happens just this way – empowering one neighbor, one house, one business, and one youth at a time. With local residents leading the way, **there is meaningful change happening on the Westside of town.** Your support gives momentum to a proud grassroots movement achieving great things:

♦ Establishing the West Bloomington Community garden (winner of Bloomington's 2009 beautification award) and the Holton Homes garden where Project Oz youth garden alongside senior residents;

♦ Launching the LINK card program at the Bloomington farmers market which was recently recognized as one of the top market-based LINK programs statewide;

♦ Connecting resources to tutor and mentor programs for youth including new digital arts computer labs at Western Avenue Community Center and Jesus House;

♦ Conducting a lighting inventory to improve safety for all Westside residents

Stay connected to the good news by getting on our email list and receiving the WestWord, becoming our friend on Facebook, or stopping by our office at Allin and Washington Streets. We welcome your involvement and we need your support! Together, we can improve the quality of life for our community.

I see my support of the WBRP as an investment and I hope you will join me in this important effort. Your contribution to the WBRP gives hope and creates change. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Valerie

Valerie Dumser
WBRP Board President

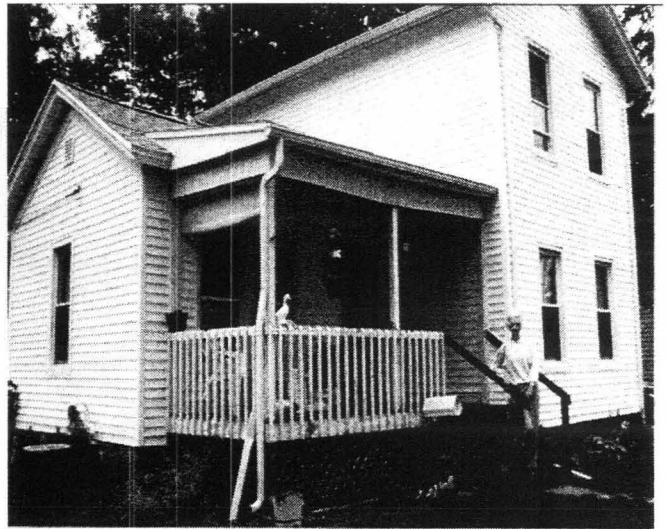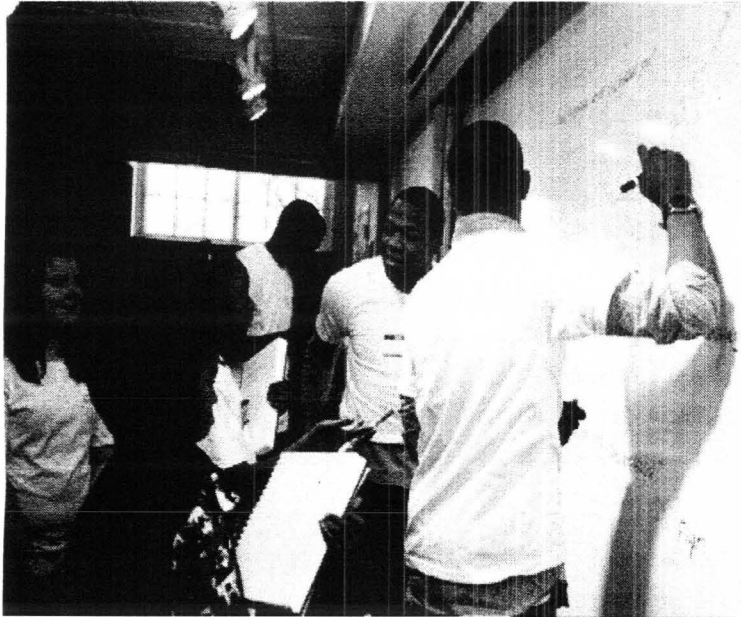*p.s. All gifts make a difference. Send in yours today!*

800 W Washington Bloomington IL 61701   309.829.1200   westbloomington@gmail.com

Youth in the new Blank Canvas program brainstorm how to promote college to their peers

Aderian McPherren outside of her Westside home

Neighbors work at the community garden

ROOTS · PRIDE · VISION

BLOOMINGTON
WEST SIDE

We support West Bloomington Revitalization!

☐ $25   ☐ $50   ☐ $100   ☐ _____ Any amount is greatly appreciated!

Contact Information   ☐ Please add me to the WBRP mailing list:

Name: _____   Email: _____

Address: _____

☐ Please record my gift as anonymous
   Please make checks payable to the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP)

THANK YOU!

The West Word

News from the West Bloomington Revitalization Project

800 West Washington Bloomington, IL. 61701

Welcome to *West Word*, the newsletter of West Bloomington. Produced by the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, *West Word* is a regular publication updating you on community events, local happenings, and stories of interest. Please feel free to contribute to *West Word* via email (westbloomington@gmail.com) or by call (309-829-1200) or stop by the office!

West Bloomington Revitalization Project announces Ribbon Cutting

After three years of work in the community, the West Bloomington Revitalization Project (WBRP) will be formally opening their office at 800 West Washington. This ribbon cutting marks the beginning a renewed commitment to the revitalization of west side neighborhoods. The ribbon cutting will take place at 10:30am on March 20th. In attendance will be Outreach Director for Representative Deborah Halvorsen, Christina Rogers. Rogers will additionally be holding office hours following the opening. Join us for this exciting event and stay to learn more about future projects on the west side!

Nothing to Do This Summer? Think Again…

The West Bloomington Revitalization Project is excited to announce the *100 Fun Things To Do in BN.* Youth claim there is nothing to do during the long months off school but we have some ideas. Using this guide, youth can get engaged and discover some great things to do in our neighborhood and through the community. The *100 Fun Things* will be distributed at the WBRP office at 800 West Washington and at the Global Youth Service Day Showcase at ISU April 23rd from 4-6pm. It will also be posted on the Lifeisablankcanvas.org website. If you have an idea to contribute to the list, tell us about it! Send us an email at westbloomington@gmail.com or call 309-829-1200

Blank Canvas Project: West Side Youth Promote College to Their Peers

How do you get local youth more involved in their education? Provide them with the tools and motivation to pursue future goals! The *Blank Canvas* project was granted nearly $100,000 by the State Farm Youth Advisory Board to purchase new computers, graphic design software, digital cameras, and printers to three youth-oriented organizations: the Jesus Coffee House, Western Avenue Community Center, and the UNITY Community Center. These materials will help underrepresented youth pursue education in the arts while learning more about different college opportunities. More information on the project can be found at: http://www.lifeisablankcanvas.org/

Housing Summit: May 21ˢᵗ 2010

The West Bloomington Revitalization Project is excited to announce our Spring 2010 Housing Summit. This gathering of McLean county professionals will focus on current gaps in housing information. During the dialogue, housing representatives, including landlords, non-profit workers, rental inspection workers, and local housing students, will work to develop a comprehensive understanding on the future of housing in McLean County. For more information, contact Lindsey Haines at lhaines@iwu.edu.

West Side Spotlight

Jesus Coffee House: 724 West Washington
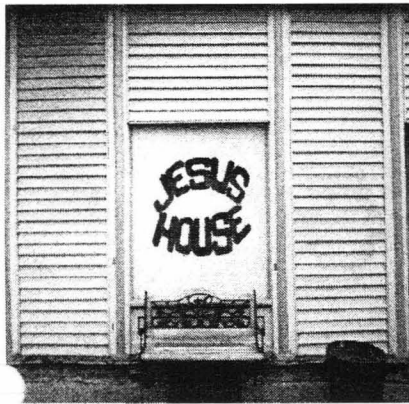
Since opening its doors in 2000, the Jesus Coffeehouse has become a staple of the West Side. Ran by Tom and Bonnie Lentz, the Jesus Coffee House provides numerous services to Bloomington residents. In addition to providing worship services, the Jesus House takes in the homeless population and serves coffee and snacks. In the upcoming months, the Jesus House will be home to brand new computers with state of the art graphic design programs. As a part of the "Blank Canvas" project, the Jesus House will be taking part in an educational promotion aimed at encouraging area youth to stay in school. The Jesus House continues to be an asset of the West side.

The 2010 Census is here!

➢ Starting **March 2010**, census forms will be delivered or mailed to your household.
➢ It's only 10 questions and takes 10 minutes.

COUNT ME IN

Why fill out the form?

✓ The Census affects the number of seats Illinois has in the U.S. House of Representatives.
✓ The Census helps allocate over $400 billion Federal dollars annually.
✓ Complete the form and mail it back to make sure our community gets our fair share of Federal dollars for schools, roads, hospitals, job training, child-care and senior centers, and more!

The Census is easy and safe!

• By **law** the U.S. Census Bureau cannot share respondents' answers with anyone----not the IRS, not the FBI, not the CIA nor any other government agency.
• Visit www.2010census.gov for more information.

To learn more on how you can help get the word out about the 2010 Census in your community or organization, please contact Jered Ulschmid (Peace Corps Fellow at East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging) at julschmid@eciaaa.org.

A Message from Val

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

I am a proud westside resident and this revitalization effort is important to me. I live here, I work here and I volunteer here. I have seen a lot of change over the years and I want you to know that this effort is honest and genuine. With local residents leading the way, **there is meaningful change happening on the Westside of town.**

But it can't succeed without your help and support. Our neighborhood is full of wonderful resources. Individuals with talents and time to volunteer, families that have been here forever, and businesses and organizations that make our community function. If we can all do what we can to help each other and our neighborhood, imagine what we can achieve!

Only a few of our projects are highlighted in this newsletter … there is much, much more! Stay connected to the good news by getting on our email list and receiving the WestWord, becoming our friend on Facebook, or stopping by our office at Allin and Washington Streets.

Your involvement with the WBRP gives hope and creates change. Ready to help?

Volunteer! Not only do you help a worthy cause, you get to know your neighbors. Giving your time makes our community a better place to live. If you need volunteers, post a flyer at the WBRP office. If you have time and talents to offer, give us a call and we will try to connect you to a meaningful opportunity.

Donate! We are conducting a fundraiser right now to support our office and our programs. Contributions of any amount are truly appreciated. Invest in where you live and make a donation today. Just stop by the office Monday – Friday from 10am – 3pm or mail in a check made out to the WBRP.

Support! Tell a friend or a neighbor about something you learned in this newsletter. Let people know you care about your community. The Westside has a lot to be proud of and we are taking charge of our future.

I hope to see you all at the ribbon cutting on Saturday at 10:30am. Or stop by the garden sometime and say hello!

Valerie Dumser
WBRP Board President

Attachments

1. American Planning Association: Strategic Plan Award Announcement

2. West Side Community Gardens Beautification Award Announcement

3. Saturdays at the Garden Grant

4. 100 Fun Things Handout

5. City of Bloomington Police Patrol Area Map

6. City of Bloomington "Offenses by Patrol Area for August 2010"

7. Direct Mail Campaign Letter

8. West Word, 1st Issue