

Good Neighbors = A Good Life

A column by Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (5/19/2010)

The For Sale sign went up next door, causing me to think about how important good neighbors are to your sense of community. Why does a home going up for sale warrant a column by the Mayor? Because having great neighbors makes for a better quality of life all across the community, just as having lousy neighbors can negatively influence your whole view of the city you live in.

Gene and Karen McNamara have lived in their home next door for almost 35 years, working hard, being involved in the community, and raising five wonderful children. Since we moved into town 13 years ago we've had the great pleasure of watching their family grow to include eight grandchildren, and they've been tremendously supportive of our son Kyle as he grew from a three year-old to a soon-to-be-driving 16 year-old. Karen and my wife Janis are gardening buddies while Gene and I help each other out and attend Centennial sporting events. We've hung together through good times and bad and they've enriched our lives immensely. We are so thankful that they are our friends and hold them up as a model for being so warm and caring to new neighbors moving in next door.

Deb O'Brien, my Circle Pines City Council colleague, also loves life on her Tanner Court cul-de-sac. Her neighbors get together on their quiet street and build a better sense of community in what she proudly refers to as 'The World's Greatest Cul-de-Sac'. Knowing and building a positive relationship with your neighbors is important to the quality of your life, probably ranking right up there with good health, a strong faith, a supportive family, and a positive outlook on your future.

Unfortunately, every neighbor isn't as great as Gene and Karen, and we don't all live on quiet cul-de-sacs. We've all heard tales of the neighbor with loud parties or the dog that doesn't stop barking, cars or junk in the yard, or just plain nasty behavior. I've written before about the lack of civility by some folks, and I often wish I could wave a wand and magically cause folks to live by the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". But making a neighborhood work doesn't involve magic – it's the result of hard work, good communication, and perhaps a little luck. Hopefully you can talk with the difficult neighbor and work it out – sometimes you need to get the city and police involved – and sometimes nothing seems to help the situation and you feel doomed and hope they just move out. These neighborhood conflicts can make or break your view of the community.

One of the biggest 'community' thrills of the year for me is greeting folks who participate in the Circle Pines Spring and Fall 'Recycling Days'. Over 250 households dropped off their excess stuff on May 1st, and I love to introduce myself, find out how long they've lived in town, hear about what they love (or don't love) about living in Circle Pines, and pick up some good ideas for moving our community forward. Residents like to know their mayor and I believe you build 'community' one relationship at a time, all across town.

I love my neighborhood and my city, probably in large part because I have had the good fortune to live next door to Gene and Karen. As they prepare for the next step in their Minnesota dream and move to their lake cabin full-time, Janis, Kyle and I wish them the very best. Lake country is getting some great neighbors!