

# Before the Barbeque: Community Building and the Arts in a Mixed-Income Chicago Neighborhood

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## Looking for Directions Near Cabrini-Green

**A**t lunch break in the Dominick's food court, a well-dressed gentleman rustled a newspaper and crunched on a salad. In another booth an elderly woman stared ahead. Soon she was waving as a middle-aged woman approached her table. They embraced one another and reminisced about growing up in Cabrini-Green.

"You know about all the changes happening here," the middle-aged woman said while gesturing west. "Well, I was trying to tell someone who hasn't been here for awhile how to get to Seward Park and he got lost 'cause everything's changed!"

"That's for sure," the older woman replied, "I hardly recognize this area anymore!"

What some refer to as "changes" or "opportunity" and others dub "homelessness," the Chicago Housing Authority calls the Plan for Transformation, a 1.6 billion dollar HUD-backed contract to rebuild or refurbish 25,000 units of public housing by 2009. Under its guidelines, CHA vows to demolish all properties that are more expensive to repair than replace, including all fifty-three high-rise buildings of Cabrini-Green. This so-called "notorious" community, shaped by forty years of media denigration, building neglect and an enduring neighborhood spirit, will soon be replaced by private, mixed-income developments run by management contractors selected through a competitive bidding process.

Just as those concrete monoliths once dominated the skyline, cobblestone town homes are now quietly reclaiming the street. Of the eight developments that have already been built, six skirt the edges of Cabrini-Green. Since Near North is the most developed and emergent of all the project sites, these "Squares" and "Villages" and

"Parks" are part of a big test. As one Chicago newspaper put it, "If upper income Chicagoans won't go for mixed-income housing at that Near North site, the odds aren't good elsewhere" (Grossman 2002).

Brochure packets geared to entice market rate buyers speak of "private parks," "dining options" and "beautifully landscaped yards and streets." Moving to Near North, however, is more than signing a hefty check and heading out to shop at Pottery Barn down the road. It is a step to becoming part of one of the most quickly integrated communities in the country: a decision that necessitates new neighborhood identity, resident coalescence and personal investment for long-term success.

Management in these mixed-income developments is faced with the task of constructing an environment that

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can foster a sense of community. In Near North, threatening space needs to be redefined and activities planned to provide opportunities for market rate, affordable and public housing residents to come together. Although these efforts can help facilitate resident interaction, in the end, the key to true connection lies within the choice residents make to greet each other, to be honest with one another and to invite a neighbor over for supper.

Three years have passed since North Town Village—the first site to evenly integrate market rate, affordable and CHA residents into the development plan—broke ground. For more than a year, residents of radically different social, economic, racial and cultural backgrounds have been living beside one another, not only in the development, but also throughout the surrounding area of Near North.

The following ethnographic report presents the current community climate in North Town Village and Near North by examining the ways residents of different socioeconomic backgrounds interact with one another and use public space. In Wali et al. 2002, researchers found that participation in informal arts activities enabled people to overcome the social barriers of gender, age, race/ethnicity and occupational status. Because such activities fall outside traditional non-profit and commercial art endeavors, they facilitate meaningful community-building experiences in innovative ways. Building on this research study, the current report analyzes informal arts activities in North Town Village and Near North as potential mechanisms to stimulate resident interaction. Lastly, it depicts how Near North residents, organizers and workers define their community and visualize people connecting with one another in the coming years.

## The Changing Project

This research was conducted through an internship with The Field Museum's Urban Research and Curriculum Transformation Institute at the Center for Cultural Understanding and Change. Originally, its purpose was to work with Holsten Real Estate Group—the private developer of North Town Village and other mixed-income housing developments in Chicago—to chronicle the artistic strengths and interests of market rate, affordable, and CHA residents through focus groups, interviews and surveys in the community. Using the findings of Wali et al. 2002, Holsten hoped that this data would assist them in facilitating opportunities for cross-income interaction. Their original intent with this internship project was to train four North Town Village residents to conduct arts-interest asset mapping through focus groups, interviews and surveys in their community. However, when it became clear that the scope of these project goals

exceeded what could be accomplished during the nine-week research period, the intern began to shift her ethnography to more of a focus in the surrounding area than in the development. New research questions were considered with themes centered on building community, the arts and use of space.

The following questions were designed to provide Holsten with an understanding of the assets and limitations in Near North as a context for facilitating neighborly interaction within the development:

- What is the extent of market rate, affordable, and public housing resident interaction in Near North and North Town Village?
- How is public space used and perceived in Near North and North Town Village?
- What arts opportunities exist in Near North?
- How do residents, organizers and workers perceive Near North and North Town Village, and what visions do they have for the future?
- How do residents, organizers and workers foresee people of different social, economic, racial and cultural backgrounds interacting within Near North and North Town Village?

A variety of ethnographic techniques were employed to provide breadth and meaning to the data collection. Initially, participant observation and informal, open-ended interviews were conducted in North Town Village and Near North. At the request of Holsten, informal interviews with mixed-income residents were not conducted in the development itself. Community reconnaissance provided a list of arts-based groups in the area and informal interviews were conducted with group members. Snowballing was used to ensure informant diversity. Later, participant observation continued while semi-structured interviews were employed to follow-up with previously interviewed informants.

## North Town Village: A Community Metaphor

In a way, North Town Village serves as a metaphoric model for community interactions and spatial perceptions and arrangements in Near North. Both communities contain residents of different social, economic, racial and cul-

tural backgrounds living close together, many of whom have not found effective long-term means of connecting with one another. Just as space is racially and economically divided in the north and south sectors of North Town Village, space remains generally divided between the community north of Division Street and east of Clybourn Avenue (commonly perceived as the Old Town neighborhood) and south of Division Street and west of Clybourn Avenue (Cabrini-Green). The general lack of structured and integrative adult activities in both areas is compounded by the fact that there are few community spaces to publicize events that do occur.

When residents, workers and organizers in Near North heard the name “North Town Village,” they responded in different ways. Some said, for example, that the housing development was “nice and quiet” and they “respect developers who can incorporate mixed-income into their plans.” Many respondents indicated that they “thought about living there.” Others, however, perceived the development as having “too many rules” and wondered “Why they don’t have community meetings for residents where they can tell each other what’s on their mind?”

Fostering a sense of community, however, is not as simple as holding meetings so residents can “tell what’s on their mind.” North Town Village, a 58 million dollar experiment in mixed-income housing and a potential model for similar developments across the nation, has much at stake if it should fail. In order to ensure its positive perception—an important factor in attracting and sustaining market rate buyers—safety and cleanliness hold priority over social planning.

Throughout the summer, development security routinely inspected the area and discouraged large, unstructured social gatherings by disbanding groups of bicycle riders, shooing people off the freshly cut grass and investigating the activities of mingling groups. Although safety is an important concern in a neighborhood bounded by Cabrini-Green, it is not the only factor in producing a sustainable, mixed-income environment. In a study of seven mixed-income developments across the country, Brophy and Smith (1997:6) found that among income groups, “benefits...will be achieved only if there is, in fact, interaction.”

Ever since opening in 2001, North Town Village

staff have managed two community rooms and organized monthly social events, which are often oriented towards children. Despite these efforts, the community rooms are kept locked except for condo association meetings and events sponsored by Holsten. In addition, residents have expressed disappointment in missing many of these activities because of poor publicity. In one conversation, a resident explained that he walked by an event happening in the community room that he “didn’t know about.” He complained that there is “no publicity here.” When told that there was a bulletin board outside one of the community rooms, he retorted that “no one goes over there” and that he didn’t understand “why they can’t put things on trees like they do in other places.” He regretted having missed so many events because he wants to “get to know people.”

Throughout the summer, on the one publicly accessible bulletin board outside a community room, fliers for CAPS meetings, burglary notices, parking permit warnings, condo association meetings and firework prohibition statements were posted instead of social activities. During the nine weeks of this research, public adult-oriented social events, which could facilitate the discussion of resident dissatisfaction, did not occur in North Town Village.

Compounding the problem of locked community rooms, there are no accessible outdoor social spaces designed to facilitate resident interaction, such as grass with benches. There are large, grassy areas with colorful flowerbeds and circular pathways, but these do not include benches or places to sit and enjoy the space. Children are shooed away if they are caught playing on the grass or riding their bikes along the pathways.

Despite a lack of planned, adult-oriented activities or publicly accessible space, residents still find ways of interacting with one another within the development. While the north side of the complex, bounded by the YMCA, usually remains quiet until cars roll into the garages after work, the south side of the complex, bounded by Cabrini-Green, is usually rich with unstructured community interaction. In response to the southern area of the development, one of the security guards exclaimed, “there’s always stuff happening. A lot of people who live over there came from the Greens and so their friends are still over there and they come in to see them.”

Throughout the summer, I observed residents of

North Town Village forming their own social spaces within the built environment. Groups of adults congregated on the stairwells, and adults and children sat with one another on the south side curbs. Children played baseball and rode bikes by the fences opening to Scott Street where they were able to disperse quickly if reprimanded by the security guard. Most people interacting in groups on the south side of the complex were public housing residents.

Observed interactions on the north side were infrequent and included mostly market rate residents. Once a woman and a man talked while leaning against their cars. Their conversation lasted five minutes, and then they went their separate ways. Another time, two women walked around the garden path a few times before going into a town home.

Brophy and Smith (1997) found that some mixed-income developments have succeeded in drawing higher-income groups, but have not succeeded in making these groups involved. As a result, such developments “seem to have minimal interacting and neighboring” among these residents and the subsidized groups (16). During the nine-week research period, the only observed interactions between market rate and public housing residents outside of Holsten events were in the center of the development and often involved dogs. A few times, a public housing resident talked briefly with a market rate resident on the corner of the traffic circle while playing with the dog. When asked whether she had much contact with public housing residents, one market rate resident replied, “I mainly talk to the ones that interact with me and my dog.” An affordable housing resident, who bakes brownies for incoming families, lamented, “Overall, people of different income groups don’t talk to each other.”

A residents’ association and more structured, adult social activity, especially events centered on food, could aid residents in getting to know one another. A public housing resident exclaimed “I wish they could plan something big, like a barbeque.” He added that he “doesn’t really know anyone here who’s not from Cabrini” and that made him think that “there aren’t a lot of people who were not from Cabrini who live here.” A market rate resident confessed that she would love to have more adult-oriented activities in North Town Village. She emphasized that since she does not have children, she never goes to

children-oriented social activities. She stressed that she still wants to get to know public housing residents, many of whom have children.

During the brief research period, there was one sponsored community event: the Out of School Party. Despite being geared toward children, some adults were enthusiastic and eager to help make the event a success. An hour before, three public housing residents and one market rate resident and his daughter came to offer their assistance with the preparations. Throughout the party, female public housing residents ate food and talked with one another while their children participated in the report card raffle, played games with one another and ate. Since the children wore nametags with their addresses, it was evident that most of the attendees lived on the south side of the development. At one point, a market rate resident brought her dog over to the party, played with the children and talked to a few of the public housing women.

At the end of the event, one of the women in attendance started emptying the trash. The event organizer exclaimed, “You don’t have to do that!” The woman continued to tie the bags and replied, “I want to help in anyway I can. My kids are participating in your event, so I will help out, and I will at the next one too!” The event made the woman feel a part of the community, and through it, invested in its welfare. Upon dispersal, many residents claimed that the event was “fun” and that “we need to have more of these,” reactions that reveal a community inchoate and underline the need for increased social planning.

## Spatial Perceptions and Resident Interactions in Near North

Unlike North Town Village, where all residents are new to the development, residents in Near North are separated by the length of time they have lived in the area. One public housing resident explained “They call it in the neighborhood the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ residents.” While some residents have lived in the area for “ages” and have established social networks, others are moving independently into newly built town homes and condominiums, often constructed on the sites of demolished “old” resident homes and landmarks. In one interview, a longtime Cabrini-Green resident gave a walking tour of the way “this place used to be:”

See where those town homes are over there? That's where Oscar Meyer was, and over there where those new homes are, that's where Cooley School was. And on the other side of Larrabee, where those new homes are, there used to be buildings there. And see over there, those brick buildings? That's where I grew up. I heard they're tearing those down to build new town homes.



photograph of graffiti saying "Cabrini" by Deirdre Pfeiffer

Many Cabrini-Green residents maintain that they accept all these changes "as long as everyone is provided a place to live in the community." As indicated in the CHA's Plan for Transformation, all residents lease compliant as of October 1, 1999 will be allowed to "eventually" move back into their communities of origin. According to resident testimony, however, many families are being persuaded by CHA officials to take permanent Housing Choice Vouchers to use in apartments elsewhere in the city, a decision that denies them the right to return.

Lewis and Ward (2004) estimated that 90 percent of recent voucher recipients wind up in low-income minority neighborhoods on the south and west sides of Chicago. During the 2003 Hearing on HOPE VI and the Low Income Housing Crisis, Attorney William Wilen of the National Center on Poverty Law testified that only 11.4 percent of public housing residents will be eligible to relocate to mixed-income communities. Consequently, many residents see public housing redevelopment as a process that provides homes for the rich

while taking away their own. At a Cabrini-Green town hall meeting, an eighteen-year old life long resident declared, "We're sitting on prime land. People don't realize this and take [housing choice] vouchers. Cabrini was built to be torn down. People think we're coming up and out when we leave but we're walking into hell. We're going to be on the streets."

Faced with an uncertain future, some residents have begun both aggressive and passive efforts of reclaiming redeveloped space. Everyday new graffiti tags appear on trashcans, walls and benches at the recently refurbished Seward Park and on the construction barriers and new brick walls of area town homes. Vandalism such as broken windows and stolen building supplies has also occurred. Other residents assert their right to space passively. During one observation, two women brought their lawn chairs and sat and talked on the stoop of a partially constructed town home all afternoon. In another instance, a man brought his lawn chair right up to a condominium construction site and sat in front of it on the sidewalk all day. The next morning, his chair was still there. Cabrini kids playing baseball at the YMCA often jump the fence and cut through North Town Village,



photograph of "keep away" graffiti by Deirdre Pfeiffer

laughing as they elude the snacking security guard.

Despite an active assertion of rights to space, there are still general demographic spatial divisions in the Near North community. Often these divisions are self-created and not enforced, such as spaces that residents avoid out

of fear. One public housing resident confessed that he never went into Stanton Park because it was “dangerous.” He said, “I’ve lived here all my life and I’m scared to go in there!” Other times residents are discouraged from entering spaces where they look like they do not belong. For example, some market rate residents admitted to being stopped by the police upon entering Cabrini-Green and warned that it was “a dangerous area” and they should “stick to the main roads.”

Just as public space is segregated in the community, interactions between market rate, affordable and public housing residents are demarcated. During the research period, Cabrini-Green residents had cookouts, greeted one another on the street, played basketball and gardened together, while market rate and affordable residents barbecued on their town home balconies, socialized on a dog walk and played baseball in Seward Park. The only observed interactions that cut across socioeconomic class were those that occurred between market rate adults and public housing children under the tenets of a tutor-mentoring association or through religious volunteer work.

Even though extensive adult interaction across income groups has yet to transpire, there are public places in the community that represent and serve all residents. Just as the traffic circle in North Town Village serves as an integrative space, market rate, affordable and public housing residents use Dominick’s, the YMCA, the Near North Library and Seward Park. These spaces serve as community publicity hubs with bulletin boards displaying subjects as diverse as safety, arts, housing, meetings and neighborhood events. Although the YMCA isolates residents that cannot afford the membership fee and Dominick’s is a commercial environment, the library and Seward Park are places where all residents are encouraged to meet, play and simply “be.”

The 2001 Urban Land Institute Policy report stresses that “community facilities...can play an important role in creating and sustaining mixed-income communities. In the best cases, these facilities are an integral part of the community and create a place where residents can convene, learn, and get to know one another” (Myerson 2001:2). The Near North Library is an example of one such facility. As a librarian who works there explained, “Ever since we’ve opened, it’s been a mixed group attending. This is one of the few places you can go where every-

one is welcome.” During the research period, people of different social, economic, racial and cultural backgrounds were observed sitting at tables in the main area of the library and chatting with one another while waiting for the ten-minute internet station. The librarian added that what makes the space different from other places is that it “doesn’t have a certain goal.”

One homeless woman, who came to the library everyday to arrange her papers, write in her journal and create poetry, admitted it was one of the only places in the community where she could just “be.” Kids came to the library when their parents wanted them out of the house and would use the phone there to call them when they wanted to come home. In a neighborhood where public meeting space is scarce, the library provides two conference rooms, which can be reserved free of charge. Groups as diverse as a performing arts troupe, condominium associations and social activists use these rooms regularly. People also meet one another at the library to talk or eat lunch outside together on the wrought iron benches.

Similarly, Seward Park is a “place for the whole community...both the new and old,” as one park official explained. Not only do neighborhood kids use the park as an after school hangout where they can play basketball and jump rope, but it also serves as a neutral space where adults can meet and talk to one another. Often adults were observed sitting and talking on the surrounding benches near the entrance to the park. Men brought their lunches and talked to one another until late afternoon. Others were observed slouched in the benches, napping. Women primarily used the park as a play area for children, but would also socialize with each other while their children chased one another down the slide. The playground was one space in the neighborhood where market rate and public housing women were frequently observed interacting.

Seward Park is one of the few places that offer free arts programming to resident children and adults of all ages and backgrounds. One organizer explained that she wanted all of the people in the community to be able to rehearse and perform together in her group. Many residents see the open, non-threatening nature of Seward Park as an ideal location where different groups of people can be brought together to meet. One public housing res-

ident, describing a community meeting she would like to have for all residents of Near North, stated “And if I was gonna pick a place to meet, I’d say the park, because it’s a neutral place, and I’d meet right out in the open.”

## The Arts and Building Community

Asked to identify a way that residents could be brought together in Near North, a dance instructor and a Cabrini-Green resident suggested “through a strong arts program.” Indeed, in transitioning public housing neighborhoods, the informal arts could be used as a mechanism for residents of different backgrounds to get to know one another. As defined in Wali et al. 2002:2, informal arts are “popular creative activities that fall outside traditional non-profit and commercial art experiences.” Such activities range from spontaneous and self-produced art to that created within structured environments and sponsored by organizations. In their survey of informal art activities across the Chicago region, researchers found that these endeavors “build both individual identity and group solidarity,” linking participants across a cultural continuum (Wali et al. 2002:2). Not only did these activities bring people of different social, economic, racial and cultural backgrounds together, but they also facilitated feelings of community identification and investment among participants.

In Near North, residents had different perspectives on the extent of arts involvement in their community. Although one resident stressed that there was a “huge art community in the area,” another insisted “there definitely aren’t groups of people who come together and do art in the area.” Most responses indicating that arts were believed to be in the area came from market rate residents, while most opinions to the contrary came from public housing residents. Yet, many of the formal arts activities involving children and informal arts activities involving adults were observed in Cabrini-Green. This discrepancy between public housing residents’ perceptions and participation in arts activities is due to lack of publicity about the arts. Over half of the interviewed individuals who defined themselves as artists lived or worked in the area south of Division Street, an area composed predominantly of public housing developments. Two of the three arts organizations that regularly involve mixed

socioeconomic groups of adults and children are situated in this area.

Unfortunately, many of the activities of these arts organizations are unpublicized and performances are not widely attended by community residents. Instead, housing relocation, fear and crime are publicized. Such factors contribute to the perception that “arts don’t happen here,” a statement often followed by the assertion that Cabrini-Green residents “have other things to worry about.”

Besides not being effectively publicized, many of the observed informal arts activities in Near North involved illegal activities such as graffiti. Out of the remaining art activities, most were composed of public housing children and market rate adults or volunteers incorporated under the structure of an after school, summer or tutor-mentoring program. Often, these activities were affiliated with a religious organization, such as the Moody Bible Institute. Other activities consisted of artists working independently or under the auspices of a paid arts program, such as the Old Town or Wells Street art fairs.

Since these arts-related community groups and activities garner the most publicity, they strongly influence participation in and perception of arts in Near North. For instance, when asked to identify artists, arts groups or activities in the area, residents would refer to churches such as Moody Bible, after school programs or established arts organizations like Old Town Triangle Association, justifying statements that “the churches do a lot of arts in the area,” “a lot of kids do art in summer programs or after school,” and “Old Town is where the arts are.”

In addition, residents who participated in informal art activities such as gardening, hair braiding, martial arts, songwriting, poetry composition and cooking did not consider themselves artists. Although these endeavors were observed among market rate, affordable and public housing residents alike, participants expressed that it was “silly” to do these activities with other people, let alone in an organized effort to purposefully bring together groups from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This is due to the fact that these activities are not considered legitimate art according to traditional definitions of art.

Three of the observed arts groups in the community actively engaged residents of all backgrounds in

their activities. Of these groups, two were churches and one was a grassroots children's program. One of the churches was located north of Division Street in Old Town, while the other two groups were located south of Division Street in Cabrini-Green. While the church in Cabrini-Green sought to bring market rate and public housing residents together through dance, and the children's program brought together artists of all backgrounds to instruct public housing youth, the church in Old Town incorporated a variety of art-related activities into its programming.

Based on the belief that their community was "very artistic," that the arts "brought residents of all backgrounds together," and that all art is "a form of worship," the Old Town pastor sought to incorporate adult arts activities into all aspects of her church. For instance, perceiving that there was a "lack of free exhibit space" in the community, the pastor opened up the sanctuary as a space for local artists to exhibit visual art. Some of the artists on display sold their paintings and others were offered opportunities to exhibit in a variety of venues in the city, such as the African American Cultural Center. The church also sponsors Sunday jazz worships once a month. The pastor explained, "Musicians sit in on the service and respond to the community with music, it's all improv jazz." Characterizing the community as creative and artistic, she thought it was a good idea to incorporate the skills of her parish into worship. At the services, which attract residents of different races and ethnic groups, parishioners are given simple musical instruments and are encouraged to "dance and play."

Lastly, the church encourages performance groups to use their space to work or perform. Currently, two theatre groups rehearse in the space. The student pastor commented that she was looking for a theatre group to do a program for teenagers and was working on establishing a stronger music composition program. She added, "Parishioners have started coming to me saying 'I know someone who could do art in the church,' which is wonderful because it means that they're taking ownership of arts into the space. That was the original intent in the first place because art is worship, whether it has spiritual intention or not."

Following the research period, CCUC staff conducted an arts-involvement survey in North Town

Village to assess opportunities for arts-related resident social activities. Residents declared they are involved in everyday traditional arts activities such as tap dancing, acting, directing, painting, jewelry making, photography, creative writing and ceramics, as well as woodwork, quilting, cross-stitch, flower arranging, singing in the church choir, drumming and crocheting. Twenty-five percent of surveyed residents admitted that they were "very interested" in engaging in these activities within a group in North Town Village. Just as the jazz worship program used the arts to bring residents of different backgrounds together in a parish, so could mixed-income communities develop arts programming to facilitate interaction among their residents.

## Marked by Transition

In addition to facilitating interaction among disparate groups of people, market rate, affordable and public housing residents could also use the informal arts to create safe spaces as a means of overcoming misconceptions about each other and initiating dialogue about the changes in their community.

Before a performance by Chicago Dance Medium in Seward Park—a free, outreach dance program open to all residents—the choreographer took the stage. A banner draped across the space read "BITTERSWEET CHANGES." She pointed to the hanging and explained that the dancers had thought of this title for their performance "because there are so many changes happening around here and some are good and some are bitter."

Members of the audience nodded in agreement. Throughout pieces entitled "Transition," "Cold, Cold Feet" and "New Beginning," buildings were torn down and rebuilt, bodies invaded each other's space, and people sprouted upwards from the floor. Eventually each person grabbed a member from the audience and brought them onstage to dance. In the end, the performers held hands and trailed out of the space.

"Change" is a word deeply embedded into the identity of Near North. Most recorded perceptions of the neighborhood dealt with its transition. Responses included comments such as "it's all changing so fast," "a lot of people are moving" and "they're always building around here!" Most of the positive responses referred to

development opportunities, incoming high-end retailers and improvement of living conditions, while negative responses forecasted widespread homelessness and community dispersion among relocated public housing residents. Walking along Hudson past half-vacant Cabrini-Green mid-rises, a resident shook her head and muttered "People used to live in these buildings."

Environmental change, however, does not lead to community inaction. Most residents are engaged in activities that fight, propel or document the restructuring of the neighborhood. One public housing resident organized others in the area to plant gardens around Cabrini-Green, in part to spite speculators and developers. "People don't want us coming together," he explained, "because that would mean that there's a community here, and they don't want to think that because they want to tear the place down!" Similarly, the Cabrini-Green Local Advisory Council president ran in 2002 under the slogan "Election 2002, We're Here to Stay."

In contrast, other residents want to do everything they can to push the transformation, or what they call "beautification" of the neighborhood. One neighborhood association official was thrilled to see the cobblestone drawings of North Town Park, a Holsten development planned for the Cabrini-Green site. She confessed that she could not wait to see what other "exciting additions" will be made to the neighborhood, stressing that people now view Near North as "emergent," which is profitable to the area.

Others seek to understand and document the changes, rather than fight against or support them. In two instances, an artist gave Cabrini-Green children cameras to take pictures of meaningful places in their neighborhood. In one case, a cultural map was constructed of landmarks that the children considered part of their identity, such as a fast food stand, an elementary school, a church and a playground. Both artists hope to permanently exhibit their pictures in the neighborhood, capturing the way things were in a community slated for demolition.

When asked what their vision was for the area, most residents expressed that they wanted market rate, affordable and public housing residents to connect with one another. Many suggested ways that they thought people could best get to know each other. Some residents emphasized the need for a community space for people to be

able to meet and participate in activities with one another. "There's not enough space for community activities around here," one resident exclaimed. A Cabrini-Green official said that they were trying to reopen the Lower North Center, a place that "people can just go to." One artist looked forward to a center that a downtown church plans to establish in Cabrini-Green as a "place for people to connect."

Others trust that community events will be the catalyst through which residents will come to know one another. One woman stressed a need for community meetings where "people can get out their anger and cry and get out their stereotypes about one another." Another woman explained that when she lived in St. Louis, she "saw mixed-income housing there and they made it work [because of] people's willingness to break down myths." She asserted that if people overcome their misconceptions of one another, they will "live in a changed way."

Some people thought that residents would be able to get to know one another best in events centered on food. Although one resident wanted there to be a "big community barbeque," another envisioned a sit-down dinner where market rate, affordable and public housing residents would be forced to eat with one another.

Instead of organized events, most people stressed that residents need to take the initiative and invite each other over for dinner. One resident said, "I'm not going to say a certain event can be held that will bring this community together...community is created when people treat each other in the best possible way." Residents agreed that it was "just saying hi" to each other and "having respect for one another" that leads to community cohesion. In another example of how the arts can bring people together, children in one summer program drew a mural entitled "Connect to Respect." At the end of sessions, they would all hold hands and say, "One hand is to give, the other is to receive. One hand is to receive, the other is to give. Respect, love, and consideration for everyone!"

Despite holding different opinions about the means through which people should connect, most residents agreed that people have to start getting to know each other now, before it is too late. A Cabrini-Green resident explained, "We know how to be a community. We have to

teach the yuppies how to do it. You have all these yuppies minding their own business, not knowing who their neighbors are, but you never know when you're gonna need someone!"

## A Disclaimer

Although a variety of perspectives are presented in this report, it does not represent all of the residents in Near North. Most of the people interviewed were met within a community space or organization, factors that indicate a resident's use of and investment in a place. Many market rate residents did not seem to use the community except to sleep and eat. During rush hour in North Town Village, people would drive through the development and into their attached garages. It was difficult to find the spaces in the community that these residents used. A more discreet methodology, such as a survey, would be better suited to account for the perspectives of these residents. In all, more information was obtained from "old" rather than "new" residents, an indication in itself of differences in availability between the two groups.

Research results obtained from North Town Village represent a more partial portrait of the area than a conclusive report. Observations were made while walking through the development and at one Holsten-sponsored community event during the project period. Rarely was research conducted in the development after 7:30 p.m. While some mixed-income residents were interviewed informally in the community, future research would need to contact a greater sample to elucidate informed assumptions about their perceptions and use of the development, as well as their visions for the future. Additional research is necessary to make conclusive remarks about the use of space and extent of residents' interactions in the development.

The informal arts network in the area was tapped into only midway through the summer. With time, more arts activities and artists may have been discovered. Also, many of the residents were confused by the terms "arts" and "informal arts," and responses may have been limited as a result. A more inclusive word is needed in order to convey the breadth of creative activity.

## Some Things to Consider

In "Building Communities Inside and Out," Kretzman and McKnight (1993) stress the importance of using spatial and individual assets to strengthen a community. Management and residents in North Town Village and Near North need to use their assets as tools to break down community-building barriers, such as infrequent interaction among residents of different backgrounds and the lack of neutrally publicized, accessible public space. Not only does North Town Village contain large, well-kept spaces for community activity, but also residents are eager to get to know one another and participate in development events. In order to use these assets to strengthen the community by facilitating resident interaction—a crucial factor in sustaining mixed-income communities—management should work to increase the accessibility of community spaces and provide more events through which market rate, affordable and public housing residents can meet one another.

Holsten could allow the community rooms to be open to all residents and make the garden area on the north side of the complex a central, recreational space. Benches could be installed around the circular paths for residents to use to socialize with one another. Since residents revealed that people do not inspect the bulletin board outside the existing community rooms and have complained about ineffective event publicity, a small, covered bulletin board could be set up near the benches. This notice board could be used to inform residents of not only safety concerns, but also of events happening in the development and the Near North neighborhoods. Also, a small "resident of the month" section could be included so people would be able to meet one another indirectly and feel a part of their community.

In addition to planned children's activities, Holsten could use part of its \$4,000 resident social planning budget to arrange for at least one social event a month geared toward adults in the community. Since many residents agree that "food brings people together," such events could include a community cookout or an evening "wine and cheese." Also, Holsten could use the results of the arts-interest survey to provide opportunities for residents to express themselves creatively with one another.

It is hoped that Holsten Real Estate Group will use the information presented in this report to provide residents with opportunities to get to know one another and become invested in their environment, and that such research may also serve other mixed-income housing developments throughout the city. Although safety is an important consideration in a development surrounded by public housing projects and dependent on market rate investment, stability will only be obtained when residents can come together and overcome stereotypes about one another. A climate that fosters mutual respect and community investment is surely the most stable living environment.

In Near North, the community assets of existing multipurpose public space and informal arts activities need to be publicized effectively to provide a means through which old and new residents can come together. In order to move beyond the racial assumptions embedded by the neighborhoods “Old Town” and “Cabrini-Green,” the area bounded by Chicago Avenue, Halsted Street, North Avenue, and Wells Street could be publicized as “Near North,” an inclusive term without preconceived class or race compositions. Producing and distributing a community guide would clarify the geographic placement of the changing “Near North” community and supply descriptions and pictures of all public places, groups, and events. Arts groups seeking participants, volunteers, audience members or artists to use their space would be included. The guide would not only be distributed to the established community hubs of the YMCA, Dominick’s, Seward Park and the Near North Library, but also to the six surrounding mixed-income communities of Orchard Park, Renaissance Park, North Town Village, Old Town Square, Mohawk North and Old Town Village.

Residents of Cabrini-Green who have lived in the area for almost fifty years must be respected to form a new sense of community identity. In order to overcome stereotypes and understand their neighborhood’s history, residents need to be exposed to the meaningful stories, people and places of the area. Community associations could arrange walking tours led by longtime Cabrini-Green residents. Myths could be dispelled and historical identity validated through such tours, which would not only be a step towards creating a connective present, but

also a means of preserving and understanding a rich past. As a lifelong Cabrini-Green resident said, “Thank God we’re so different from one another so we can learn from each other. What I don’t know, you can teach me!”

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