WOULD YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

Encouraging folks in Kosciusko County to get to know their neighbors.

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Introduction

Kosciusko County is a diamond in the rough – an unusual nugget of economic force in an otherwise ordinary, rural, Midwestern setting. We, the inhabitants, are fortunate to have the thriving orthopedic and agricultural industries that sustain our local economy, even when the rest of the state and the nation are facing difficult economic times. These industries relocate a significant number of people from all over the country and the world, and they oftentimes settle into our community. They find the lakes beautiful, the schools excellent and the small-town lifestyle refreshing. But Kosciusko County is not succeeding in making these people feel welcome.

Recently, it has been brought to the attention of local community leaders that new residents feel Warsaw and Kosciusko County are pretty unwelcoming places. Newcomers have expressed that it is difficult to get to know people, and that neighbors, while friendly, don't go out of their way to welcome them to their new neighborhood and the community.

Our team determined that this issue is something that requires immediate attention in order to retain both current and future citizens in Warsaw and Kosciusko County and to enhance the quality of life for all residents.

Background

The "Would you be my neighbor?" project started as an idea to create awareness about getting to know your neighbors, providing neighborhoods with activities that they could participate in to create neighborly relationships and giving people new to the community the valuable information they need to become acclimated. The project, at first, seemed very broad and undefined. There were dozens of ideas for the specific neighborhood activities alone that could be turned into white paper projects. Our group needed to narrow our focus and define clear pathways on what to do to accomplish our goals.

The group was initially debating on whether or not the main focus should be a block party trailer that can be moved around from neighborhood to neighborhood with everything one would need for a block party included (i.e. a grill, corn hole game, tables, and chairs). We modeled this "Block Party Buggy" on a system used in one of the neighborhoods in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. The more we researched the liability factors, cost and ownership, the less feasible this project seemed at this point in time.

Our group was somewhat lost as to where to take our project, so we decided to do the best thing we could – we should ask the community what **they** felt was most needed to help Warsaw and Kosciusko County become a more welcoming, neighborly home. Two community forums were held, one on December 4, 2012 and another on January 8, 2013, where valued members of our community were invited to share their thoughts and opinions on what should be done to resolve this issue. Members of the Warsaw Newcomers group were specifically targeted, as their input was regarded as highly valuable in determining what is required to make those new to the area feel more welcome. (Please refer to Focus Group Attendees in the appendix of this white paper for a detailed listing.)

Attendees that had lived in Kosciusko County for a long time found it hard to believe that newcomers thought residents were unwelcoming. Their general feedback was that there should be a primary focus on an awareness campaign for established residents, because if local people realized how the newcomers felt, a change in behavior would occur. Newcomers also noted that a centralized location to find information for those new to the area was lacking. There are many sources of information; however no one has it consolidated it into an easy-to-read welcome packet.

Based on the community feedback, our team decided that we would focus our efforts on a two-prong approach – an "awareness campaign" (rather than focusing on specific activities individuals can do with their neighbors, such as a "Block Party Buggy") and a "welcome packet" worthy of distributing to newcomers to the area.

Details of the "Two-prong" approach

Welcome Packet

There is no use in reinventing the wheel. Our community is rich with informational resources like the Chamber of Commerce, MyWarsaw.net, the Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), the Warsaw Newcomers group, the Warsaw Parks and Recreation department, Kosciusko Economic Development Corporation (KEDCo), Warsaw Greater Ministerial Association (WGMA) and local libraries. While MyWarsaw.net serves as a community web portal in Warsaw and Kosciusko County, many newcomers to the area are unaware of its existence. The Chamber of Commerce has a welcome packet that includes a very detailed list of businesses, organizations and other information that is very useful to new residents, but they may not think to stop into the Chamber of Commerce to find this sort of information. Those new to the area need to be able to find information quickly and easily so that they can start to incorporate themselves into the community.

Originally we proposed to have a physical packet, providing brochures and documents that people could pick up at various public locations, such as the library, the City building, the Chamber of Commerce, schools and the Kosciusko County CVB. There was also a suggestion to create a thumb drive with an electronic copy of the packet pre-loaded that could also be distributed to various locations. We could gather the literature and files from the different sources and create the packets out of materials already available in the community. The Chamber of Commerce document required some quick updating and needed to have information specific to newcomers added to the contents. Our team did finish the task of performing these enhancements. (Please refer to section one of the appendix for a copy of the updated document.) However, when calculating cost and ownership of such an operation, and the physical size of the piece, the idea of a hard copy packet and/or thumb drive proved to be costly.

It was decided to create a website or webpage within an existing site to host a list of resources, both website addresses and pdf documents, where newcomers to Warsaw and Kosciusko could find the tools they need to familiarize themselves with the community.

Awareness Campaign

"Would you be my neighbor?" is the official title of not only our KLA project, but also the awareness campaign itself. One gentleman comes to mind when you think of neighborly warmth: Mr. Fred Rogers.   "Won't you be my neighbor," the song Mr. Rogers sings at the beginning of each episode of *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood,* is copyrighted. However, "Would you be my neighbor?" is not. Nostalgia is a very powerful tool. Utilizing similar phrasing to everyone's favorite neighbor's theme song takes them somewhere in their mind. Everyone knows who Mr. Rogers is, and almost everyone has some sort of emotional attachment to the show, ranging from fond memories of watching him as a child to watching him as a parent side-by-side with their child. We want that warm fuzzy feeling to be associated with acting neighborly in the real world, specifically in Warsaw and Kosciusko County. Thus, our title was born.

When people move to Warsaw, Indiana (or other even smaller towns in the county), they expect certain behaviors from residents. Television and film have portrayed the Midwestern small town as a step back in time, a trip to an era where people were always out and about and overly welcoming. Unfortunately, Warsaw is not Mayberry, and it is not customary to bake your new neighbor an apple pie and deliver it to them the very day they move in. However, we took this idea and ran with it. To accompany the "Would you be my neighbor?" feel-good spirit, we chose a 1950s theme to the visual aspects of our awareness campaign. We decided to utilize nostalgia of a bygone era and cheeky humor to grab the attention of passersby.

The campaign consists of multiple methods of reaching our target audience of established residents. We intend to utilize print, web and radio to spread the awareness of being a good neighbor.

Print

Billboards, slim jims (a double-sided, singe-page brochure) and postcards will be the print portion of the campaign. The print items would all share the same "Would you be my neighbor?" branding. (Please see the slim jim and billboard mockups in section two of the appendix.) We wanted to not only provide a visually stimulating piece, but also a useful one. The postcards and slim jims give people ideas about what they can do to engage others in their neighborhood. They also list helpful links for people looking for things to do in the area. We intend on using the United States Postal Service's "Every Door Direct Mail" option to target densely populated locations throughout Kosciusko County with postcards. (Please see the specific targeted areas and associated cost in section three of the appendix.) The billboards will also be utilized in multiple locations throughout the county – we do not want to limit the campaign only to Warsaw and Winona Lake.

Web

"Would you be my neighbor?" has a Facebook page where people can go to learn about how to be a good neighbor and to share their neighborly experiences. Similar messaging is featured on the site. We want to give people ideas and inspire them to act. There can also be web banners designed to promote our campaign on other established community websites. If the possibility arose in the future for a "Would you be my neighbor?" website, we have confirmed that www.wouldyoubemyneighbor.com is available for use.

Radio

We plan to have a 30 second radio spot that would be featured on 107.3 WRSW at key times of the day. This spot would have a call to action for starting a neighborhood activity and sharing it with the community through our Facebook page.

Funding

Now that we have discussed our plans and the scope of the project, we must discuss the most important part of making this project a reality – funding. Early on, our group decided that it would behoove us to meet with the Kosciusko County Community Foundation (KCCF) to discuss options available to us. The KCCF is a valuable resource in our community, as they help individuals and organizations achieve their goals of donating funds and acquiring donations. We had many general questions about grants, non-profit organizations and funding options. Representatives from our group met with staff members of the Foundation twice to discuss what was available to us for our KLA project.

The KCCF strongly recommended that we align with an existing non-profit organization in the community. Grant makers and businesses interested in sponsorship opportunities often require an established non-profit organization be involved with their transactions for tax write-off purposes. Large corporations can utilize both advertising funds and philanthropic funds to sponsor different community initiatives. Grant makers base their funding decisions on the reputation and foresight of the project and the non-profit organization applying for the grant.

Not only would the chosen non-profit serve as a figure head for "Would you be my neighbor?", it would also take on financial responsibilities of housing and managing the funds once they are awarded. Our team could determine how much of the funding needed to go to which areas of the project, but ultimately the Board of Directors of the non-profit organization would have to approve the spend.

Our group approached several organizations in the area including the KCCF, OrthoWorx, the City of Warsaw and the Warsaw/Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce to see if our mission aligned with any of the organizations' initiatives. It was not an easy task to find an organization that could take on the added responsibility of this project. Eventually it was determined that the Warsaw Community Development Corporation (WCDC), a non-profit arm of the Warsaw/Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, would serve as the optimal organization to host our project. Though the WCDC focuses on Warsaw, it is controlled by the Warsaw/Kosciusko Chamber, which allows countywide implementation of the project. Mark Dobson, President and CEO of the Warsaw/Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, provided our group with a letter of intent to support the "Would you be my neighbor?" project. (Please see section four the appendix for a copy of this letter.) The first part of our mission to find funding was complete.

The next challenge that arose was, "What's all of this going to cost?" Our team diligently researched multiple resources within our community regarding cost for printing, billboard advertisement, radio, design and distribution options. (You will find the breakdown of specific cost for each portion of our awareness campaign in section five of the appendix.) The welcome packet, at this time, cost nothing to update and host on the Warsaw

Newcomers website. If printed welcome packet materials were to be produced in the future, cost would need to be researched.

Lastly, our group targeted businesses and organizations in the community that could potentially serve as sponsors. Those listed with dollar amounts have given a verbal confirmation of their participation. (You will find the list of businesses and their committed dollar amounts in section six the appendix.) The list is not all encompassing; our group plans to contact additional companies to acquire additional funding. Sponsors, depending on the dollar amount given, will have their logo or name appear on our slim jims, billboard, postcards and Facebook page. Those at the gold, or highest, level will have their logo featured. The silver level donors will have their name written in a list. Donors at the gold level will also have their names listed at the end of our radio spot.

Implementation

Our group has initiated implementation of several aspects of this project. We have already engaged businesses and organizations within the community regarding design, publication and funding of our materials. Below you will find information detailing our current status and future direction of the "Would you be my neighbor?" project.

Welcome Packet
As stated above, our team updated the information packet previously provided by the Chamber of Commerce. We also assembled a list of useful websites beneficial to newcomers to Warsaw and Kosciusko County. We then identified the Warsaw Newcomers website (www.warsawnewcomers.com) as a perfect location to host this information.

Upon meeting with the Newcomers, it was determined that they would update the resources page on their website to include the links we suggested and a pdf of the informational packet. (Please see a copy of the webpage in section seven of the appendix.) Not only would these items be housed on their site, but they also offered ownership of the informational packet, agreeing to update it yearly. The Newcomers are very happy to accept this role, and they look forward to maintaining this information in the future.

Awareness Campaign
The "Would you be my neighbor?" campaign requires solid design aspects in order to have a recognizable brand. Our group has engaged 1Eighty Design to create our signature "look" for the print and web portions of the awareness campaign. 1Eighty Design also designed the "Would you be my neighbor?" logo that we use throughout our campaign.

The "Would you be my neighbor?" Facebook page has also been created. Feel free to visit it at https://www.facebook.com/wouldyoubemyneighborkosciusko?fref=ts. (You can also find a hard copy sample in section eight of the appendix.) We intend to publicize this site on our written materials and in our radio spot. The goal is to encourage members of the community to post images from their neighborhood activities and suggest ideas on how to involve people in future activities. We will also link people to valuable resources in the community through our Facebook page.

Conclusion

Warsaw and Kosciusko County offer residents a safe, beautiful and affordable place to call home. It is our duty as members of the community to ensure that EVERYONE feels welcome upon their arrival and throughout their stay in our county. When newcomers to the area and current residents feel that they serve an important role as a part of the community, everyone and everything benefits. Strong ties and opportunities for personal growth guarantee the success of not only the residents themselves, but the community as a whole.

Our project offers the community a method of forming connections and relationships that will build its strength. We have only scratched the surface of the potential ideas and events that could fall into the "Would you be my neighbor?" campaign. Throughout the development of our project, we were introduced to great ideas for future white papers and community enhancement initiatives. (You can find a list of potential future white paper projects in the appendix of this paper.)

If we were to be granted the prestigious Jean Northernor Project Proud Award, we would graciously use the funding to compensate 1Eighty Design for the hard work dedicated to our awareness campaign design. We would then use the rest of the finances, to purchase the rights to our 1950s image and begin the printing process for our slim jims so they could be dispersed to several businesses and organizations in the community. Funding from sponsorships would cover the remaining aspects of our campaign.

We would like to thank the Kosciusko Leadership Academy (KLA) and Project Proud for the opportunity to better our community. We have learned a great deal not only about Kosciusko County and its inner workings through the KLA class, but also how to create and maintain a community project in its entirety. Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEES:

December 4, 2012
Pam Chesterfield, Warsaw Newcomers
Ivone Daffre, Warsaw Newcomers
Dr. Craig Hintz, Superintendent, Warsaw Community Schools
Mary Kittrell, Executive Director, Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Stephanie Overbey, Communication & Program Director, Kosciusko County Community Foundation
Brenda Rigdon, Development Director, Kosciusko County Community Foundation
Kathy Stutzman, Public Relations Manager, Warsaw Community Public Library
Cindy Urash, Warsaw Newcomers
Rosario Venegas, Warsaw Newcomers

January 8, 2013
Pam Chesterfield, Warsaw Newcomers
Mary Heminger, Realtor, Remax Rainbow Realty
Elisa McPherson, Warsaw Newcomers
Dave Rank, Winona Lake Grace Brethren Church
Billy Smith, Warsaw Community Church
Cindy Urash, Warsaw Newcomers
Rosario Venegas, Warsaw Newcomers
Laura Weller, Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Terry White, Winona Lake Grace Brethren Church
Josh Gordon, Assistant Vice President Business Banking, Tower Bank

WELCOME PACKET:
Please see attached – Section 1

SLIM JIM & BILLBOARD MOCKUP:
Please see attached – Section 2

USPS DIRECT MAIL:
Please see attached – Section 3

WCDC LETTER:
Please see attached – Section 4

BUDGET:
Please see attached – Section 5

SPONSORSHIP:
Please see attached – Section 6

WARSAW NEWCOMERS RESOURCE PAGE:
Please see attached – Section 7

FACEBOOK PAGE:
Please see attached – Section 8

FUTURE WHITE PAPER PROJECT IDEAS THAT CORRELATE TO WOULD YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?:

- Complete the "Block Party Buggy" mobile block party trailer
- Establish the Warsaw Newcomers as an official non-profit organization
- Create physical copies and/or thumb drive copies of welcome packets to distribute to local businesses and organizations where newcomers go to find information (i.e. the library, schools, churches, Chamber of Commerce, Kosciusko County CVB, etc.)
- Create a "Would you be my neighbor?" website
- Create a "Welcome Buddy" system at the schools so new students feel welcome