

Grassroots neighborhood groups take on city parks



Four presidents of Neighborhood Cluster Association groups (left to right) Jim Ebly, Lynne Wear, Larry Guidry and Nick Gonzalez gathered at the senior center at Perris Hill Park in San Bernardino recently to plug their groups' community clean-up project, which will take place on Make a Difference Day on Oct. 26. Rachel Luna — Staff Photographer

By [Michel Nolan](#), *The Sun*

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A grassroots movement in the community has started a groundswell of civic engagement — at its most basic level.

The movement is all about relationships — people interacting, community pride and an example of residents coming together in difficult times to restore a sense of community spirit and unity.

The “movement” is the Neighborhood Associations Council (formerly the Neighborhood Cluster Association) of San Bernardino, a nonprofit organization that divides the city into 60 clusters and works together to clean up neighborhoods, build relationships and create safer communities.

“Like Bobby Vega and the Urban Conservation Corps, for many years the Neighborhood Associations have contributed greatly to our community and surprisingly, many people are still unaware that they exist,” said Lynne Wear, president of the Muscupiabe Neighborhood Association.

Wear, whose group is roughly 50 members strong, said she’s seeing how much people care.

“Some people just assume that San Bernardino is a lost cause, but it inspires me when I meet others who have so much energy and spirituality and want to help,” said Wear, a retired UCR lab technician who activated the Muscupiabe group two years ago.

Jim Eble, Neighborhood Association president and head of the San Bernardino Valley College Neighborhood, said the association was founded by Freddie Spellacy and originally established to fight blight in neighborhoods.

“Our mission is to provide a means for residents to become involved in their neighborhoods, to meet their neighbors and make a difference together. Today we work with code enforcement and police as well as other city departments and local officials, keeping our neighborhoods safe and clean,” said Eble, 50, who is serving his third term as board president.

Of the city’s 60 Neighborhood Associations, only 20 are active — a challenge for those trying to make a difference.

“One of my goals is to keep the groups active. We’re always looking for volunteers to restart inactive groups,” Eble said.

In fact, teams of active volunteers are forging on and planning their inaugural neighborhood project Oct. 26 at Perris Hill Park on Highland Avenue.

The association is partnering with residents for the parks project. The goal is to have the Neighborhood Associations clean the parks and have area residents maintain them, taking pride in their community space.

Originally, Larry Guidry, vice president of the Arrowview Neighborhood Association, suggested the organization should start with cleanup of the city’s parks.

“I ride my bike through the parks on the north end of town and was concerned about all the brown areas because of lack of water.”

Guidry, who says it’s up to everyone to get involved, said he wanted to reach out to people who might help with the parks.

“Jim (Eble) liked the idea of the Association adopting the parks so it evolved into a National Make a Difference Day project. Hopefully, we’ll be able to do projects on a quarterly basis.”

Volunteers are asked to gather from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and bring gloves, rakes and brooms.

“Church groups, community groups, schools, the more people the better,” Eble said.

“The Neighborhood Associations plan to clean up flower beds, trim trees, rake, remove litter, abate graffiti, and power-wash and repair picnic tables,” Wear added.

Five neighborhood presidents make up the committee organizing the “Make a Difference Day” event, and include Wear, Debbi Matley, Juan Figueroa, Guidry and Charle Jacobs.

This will be a joint effort on the part of the Neighborhood Associations Council, residents, college students, and others in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department, the Graffiti Abatement Team, the Public Works Department and the SB Direct manager, who coordinated city resources,” Wear said.

City firefighters will be on hand with water and trash containers.

Nick Gonzales, who heads the Arrowhead Neighborhood Association, said the successful groups are organized and have been together as long as 17 years.

“The way to improve the city is to embrace the business and residential communities,” he said. “They are our assets.”

Association presidents do have monthly meetings, gathering on the first Saturday at the First Methodist Church, 33rd and G streets in San Bernardino.

“The cleanup is more of a vehicle for building relationships in the community, feeling safer, building self-esteem and feeling empowered,” Wear said.

For more information or to volunteer, call 909-915-5061.