

April 19, 2005

FamilyCircle

The New Spring Cleaning

Banish Germs, Bust Dust

FREE! 16-Page Calorie Counter

Delicious Shortcut Desserts
Bye-Bye Belly Fat!
A Better Body
In Just a Month

Red Velvet Cake
see page 132



Cheap Chic
from Your Favorite Catalogs



The True Secret of Great Sex

Achieve Your Dreams in 6 Easy Steps

USA \$2.50 Canada/Foreign \$3.50
www.familycircle.com



expanding your circle of friends

By Teri Cettina

Many of us would love to live in the kind of neighborhood we remember from our childhoods.

We knew all of our neighbors by name. Parents watched out for each other's children, and we sat on our front porches and talked late into the evening.

Even if we didn't have that cozy kind of upbringing, we probably wish we had. Despite our desires, neighborliness has taken a backseat to other priorities. Americans today work more, drive more and generally

Teri Cettina is a freelance writer based in Portland, Oregon.

move at a faster pace. As a result, we find less time to chat over the back fence or at the apartment elevator with our neighbors.

Fortunately, many people are now remembering the importance of community. Books like *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, by Robert D. Putnam (Simon & Schuster), have brought new attention to the concept.

Here are some simple ways to revive feelings of community in your neighborhood.

Neighborhood Basics

● **Use your front porch.** Many older homes were built with large front porches, reminiscent of an era when folks sat outside with glasses of lemonade and waved to passersby. If you have a front porch, set up a small café table and chairs or a cozy bench and watch how often neighbors stop to chat. If you're building a new house, consider specifying a sitting porch rather than front-door landing.

● **Take a walk on the wild side.** Cecile Andrews of Seattle, Washington, found an unusual way to meet her neighbors: doggie play dates. Cecile and her husband, Paul, own a little bichon frise named Maggie. While living in San Francisco, they were invited to join a play group for small dogs. "Now, whenever we take Maggie out for a walk, we invite neighbors with small dogs to walk with us," says Andrews. "It has been a fun and easy way to get to know people."

Spice up your get- together

"Just don't call it a potluck!" says Janet Luhrs, author of *The Simple Living Guide* (Broadway Books) and editor of the monthly newsletter "Simple Living" (www.simpleliving.com). Luhrs and a few of her Seattle neighbors had tried, unsuccessfully, to hold regular potlucks. So Luhrs got creative. "One year I papered the neighborhood with invitations to Janet's Summer Margarita Party and Barbecue, and my yard was packed tight with neighbors," says Luhrs. "We had a really great time, and many of us made lasting friendships with people we never even knew lived on the same block."

● Be resource-ful.

Colleen Langenfeld of Monument, Colorado, puts a new spin on the old-fashioned idea of a welcome gift for new neighbors. "I compile a list of useful information," says Langenfeld. "Sharing info about doctors, dentists, clubs and the like, as well as the names of local kids who can mow lawns or shovel snow, is a great way to greet new neighbors." If your block is filled with vintage homes, a list of plumbers, electricians and other workers who know their way around old homes is also a smart idea.

www.familycircle.com

Share and Share Alike

● Distribute the wealth.

Our backyard tree in Portland, Oregon, produces more apples than my family can eat. So I give bags of the best fruit to the neighbors and use the slightly bumped and bruised ones to make applesauce to share. In return, an elderly neighbor brings me homemade jam. Another hangs bags of homegrown zucchini, tomatoes and other goodies on our fence. Sharing what we grow is a great way to stay in touch with one another.

● Sow the seeds of

friendship. Community gardens are popular in urban areas like New York City, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. Neighbors who wouldn't otherwise have room for a home garden can sign up for plots in nearby collective gardens. Some community gardens donate edible plants to programs that help homeless or low-income families.

"These gardens can be developed on vacant neighborhood lots, unused city land or church property," says Yvonne Savio, program manager of the Common Ground Garden Program at the University of California's Cooperative Extension in Los Angeles County.

● **Create an open-door policy.** In many suburban neighborhoods, attached garages are a part of each home's architecture—and a barrier to neighborliness. If you routinely drive into your garage, close the door and go into your home, you might not chat with anyone for months.

Instead, consider leaving your garage door

open when you're home or working outside. The open door becomes a signal to neighbors that you're around and available to chat.

Beautify and Restore

● **Have a home-improvement open house.** Admit it. You've probably taken a peek in a neighbor's window to see how that kitchen remodeling job turned out. End the peep shows and encourage neighborly camaraderie by organizing a home-improvement open house. Designate specific open-house hours and let the fun begin.

● Declutter together.

You might not have quite enough clutter for an all-out garage sale, but your neighborhood as a whole probably does. So consider organizing a multifamily sale. Schedule ahead for a local charity to pick up any items that didn't sell at the end of the day. Celebrate your cleanup efforts with a block party.

Play It Safe

● **Organize a neighborhood watch.** Contact your local police or sheriff's department, or the national Neighborhood Watch Program (www.usaonwatch.org) for ideas on creating a safe program in your area. And make it a habit to tell neighbors when you're going to be out of town and who is authorized to enter your home in your absence.

● **Check in on your elderly neighbors.** If seniors don't have family nearby, offer to pick up a few items at the grocery store, rake the leaves or shovel their sidewalk. If

your elderly neighbors have adult children who keep tabs on them, ask for their phone numbers in case of an emergency.

Look at the Little Picture

● Set up reliable routines.

Sometimes it's the simple things—taking a walk at the same time each day—that help you get to know your neighbors. The more often you run into each other, the easier it is to strike up a conversation.

● Support local merchants.

Buy paint from a neighborhood hardware store and party invitations from a local stationer. Supporting small businesses creates a wonderful circle of goodwill and connection. These businesses may, in turn, make contributions to your school and sponsor civic beautification projects. **FC**

3 Great Good-Neighbor Sites

Check out these Web sites for ways in which you can revive feelings of community in your neighborhood:

www.bettertogether.org.

Go to the What You Can Do section for 150 suggestions on ways to build community. This Web site is sponsored by the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, a program of Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

www.communitygarden.org.

The Web site of the American Community Gardening Association offers info on starting and maintaining a community garden, along with state-by-state community listings and contact information.

www.syracuseculturalworkers.com.

The Web site of Syracuse Cultural Workers, a peace and justice organization, offers for sale a poster and bookmark called "How to Build Community." Suggestions include: turn off your TV, know your neighbors, look up when you're walking and talk to your mail carrier.