



UIC Neighborhoods *Initiative*

Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities and a Stronger University

Spring 2000

The University of Illinois at Chicago

Dowell Comes Back to the Neighborhood

A desire to inspire individuals toward involvement in their communities led Pat Dowell to her new position as executive director of the Near West Side Community Development Corporation (NWSCDC).

"I've always believed in the interests of African-American communities and believe in the power of individuals working within a group to make positive changes in the environment," she professes.

Dowell, who joined the NWSCDC in November 1999, isn't a stranger to the Near West Side. Her work in the late '80s as a community liaison with the Chicago Office of Planning and Development during the Bears stadium proposal and United Center development introduced her to the community. It didn't take long for her to realize the neighborhood's potential.

"One thing that makes a community interesting is if local residents are committed and active in shaping their

environment," she says. "The Near West Side has a lot of community and resident participation. It was there in 1987 and still is."

Dowell came to NWSCDC after spending a year as executive director of Public Allies, a youth development program. Prior to her tenure with Public Allies, she was executive director of the Mid-South Planning Development Commission, where she spearheaded a project that focused on restoration of Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood.

A native of New York City, Dowell has called Chicago home for 22 years. She plans to carry on NWSCDC's existing mission, which includes continuing efforts to revitalize the Near West Side by "maintaining focus on affordable housing, home ownership and replacement housing to ensure it continues to be a positive development in the community, and to attract new retail into the area," she says. Dowell adds she is especially interested in working on projects that help bring community members together. "I also

want to work on ... what I call people-building activities, such as block clubs, so people can work on smaller issues, not just the ... brick and mortar."

And the more individuals involved within the community, she says, the better. "I'm attracted to communities that have the energy to make things better ... and where the potential exists to bring

different resources to bear --- the public sector, private sector, academic institutions, etc."

In that regard, NWSCDC is proving a great fit for Dowell. "I'm excited to be back in the neighborhood. It's good to be able to work with many of the community leaders I worked with in 1987, as well as new faces," she says.

GCI, UICNI Revamp Websites

Visitors to UIC's Great Cities Institute (GCI) website (www.uic.edu/cuppa/gci) will notice something new: a more user-friendly, attractive format. And by mid-spring 2000, UIC Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) will roll out its own revamped website (www.uic.edu/cuppa/gci/ui_cni).

GCI's new site, which was uploaded in January 2000, is the result of a year-long revision process, during which GCI consulted outside professionals for advice on the website's new look and format.

"We wanted it to be more organized and more

interesting to look at," says UIC communications consultant Helene Berlin. She adds that the array of available information will "enhance GCI's ability to consult with other researchers and funders of research."

That choice sparked UICNI's decision to redo its site, because each website can be accessed via links on the other's site. "We wanted to match the graphic and visual format of GCI's site since we're both connected," explains Heather Persky, UICNI research assistant.

The "meat" of GCI's website, according to Berlin, is the Programs page (found in the Home

Page index). Within that page are six links, three of which correspond with areas researched by GCI fellows: community development, metropolitan sustainability, and health and human development. UICNI also can be accessed from the Programs link. In addition, visitors can access via the home page index the GCI annual report, press releases and publications, and working papers. A search mechanism also is in the works.

UICNI is organizing its new site around six areas: general information about UICNI; news and events; UICNI projects; publications; UICNI participants (staff, research

assistants and community those of community visibility and give them partners); and links to partners. Such links will increased access to UICNI. other websites, including both enhance partners'

COPC Plans Midwest Meeting

Colleges and universities are considered hotbeds of human, intellectual and institutional resources. That's why the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1994 instituted the Office of University Partnerships (OUP), which administers the Community Outreach Partnerships Centers Program (COPC). Since its inception, COPC has awarded approximately 100 grants to colleges, universities and consortia across the country, enabling these institutions to harness their resources to help revitalize distressed communities.

Projects are designed jointly by COPC grantees and neighborhood groups, and have focused on issues such as job training and counseling to reduce unemployment; youth mentoring programs; and financial and technical assistance for new businesses.

Grantees must address at least three of the following issues: local housing, infrastructure, economic development, neighborhood revitalization, health care, crime and planning. In addition, grantees must match between 25 and 50 percent of the grant amount, depending on the activities the grant supports.

UIC's COPC grant has funded initiatives such as the City Design Center, Great Cities/Great Careers and the Affordable Housing Consortium. In turn, the success of these projects helped UIC garner a Joint Community Development Grant, also administered by OUP.

Realizing the potential of strong partnerships like these, midwestern COPC grantees, along with individuals from other university/community partnerships, decided to meet in December 1999 while attending the Winter Forum at UIC's Great Cities Institute.

"We wanted to have a way to come together for mutual assistance," explains Jerry Watson, director of neighborhood partnerships at DePaul University.

Attendees at the December meeting discussed issues including how to keep programs going after partnerships end, how to strategically deal with bureaucracy and politics, and how to address race/diversity issues.

The meeting was so productive that plans are underway for a midwest regional meeting for spring or early summer 2000 that will include all midwest COPC grantees. Watson is the meeting's co-coordinator.

"We want to provide a learning opportunity for partners to look at a variety of different areas regarding their projects," Watson says. Specifics are still being discussed, but Watson says the goal is to provide a user-friendly format for discussing issues such as funding and sustainability of projects, partnership building and best practices.

"Rather than structure the meeting around lectures and panels, we see it more as a format for attendees to interactively share information," he states.

For more information on the Midwest Regional COPC meeting, contact Watson at 312/362-6539 or jwatson@wppost.depaul.edu

Changes Come to Neighborhoods Initiative

Mayfield Moves On

Loomis Mayfield has stepped down as UICNI coordinator to concentrate on research and writing. He will continue his involvement with selected UICNI projects through summer 2000. Nacho Gonzalez will serve as interim coordinator.

"It has been great to be involved in this partnership," says

Mayfield, who holds a Ph.D. in history, "and I look forward to having time to write about these experiences."



Loomis Mayfield (pictured on right) contributed strong ideas at the meetings to revise UICNI's mission statement

UICNI project director Wim Wiewel notes that Mayfield "has really increased UICNI's national visibility through his presentations at conferences and his articles. We thank him for his efforts."

UICNI Revises Mission Statement

Part of any organization's success is maintaining awareness of changes that evolve naturally over time. As the new millennium approached, UIC's Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) administration realized that changing times called for a reevaluation and revision of the organization's mission statement. The goal: to produce a mission statement that both accurately describes where UICNI is in the year 2000, as well as where it plans to go in the next decade.

To accomplish this, UICNI staff, along with community partners and members of the UIC faculty, held several meetings during which they revisited UICNI's history and mission in light of the changes that had taken place over the last five years.

"They were very productive meetings --- everyone was very enthusiastic about reevaluating our mission," says Nacho Gonzalez, UICNI interim coordinator. "We all came away with better conceptions of the Neighborhoods Initiative."

And the result of that hard work: a mission statement that more accurately captures UICNI's essence and purpose.

UICNI Mission Statement

The University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative, a long-term partnership of community institutions and UIC faculty, staff and students, seeks to enhance the quality of life in adjacent and underserved neighborhoods. The NI works to develop a culture of partnership that benefits both the community and the university. It serves as a clearinghouse for information, a broker for potential research, a provider of technical assistance and an administrator of collaborative projects. By marshalling university, community and external resources, it promotes collaborative and multidisciplinary efforts to respond to critical community needs. The NI enacts UIC's mission as an engaged university in which teaching, research and service respond to its local, metropolitan context.