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## Community leaders hold idea summit

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City and neighborhood leaders from three Midwest cities tackled a proactive approach to community development at the 2nd Annual Neighborhood Summit that ended Friday in Omaha.

The summit included representatives from Omaha, Kansas City and Des Moines. The goal was to build relationships among local businesses, law enforcement agencies and residents.

"No person is an island," said Margie Magnuson of the Joslyn Castle Neighborhood Association. She emphasized the overall aim is "to be good neighbors."

The conference began with a tour through Omaha's historic neighborhoods, including south Omaha, Field Club, north Omaha and Ford Birth Site. A networking luncheon followed at which community leaders shared successful programs and discussed problem areas.

Participants also received a Good Neighborhood Training packet from the Kansas City Neighborhood Resource Center and Livable Neighborhoods program.

"It is important to look to other cities for ideas," said Magnuson, who later reviewed the benefits of a code enforcement program during a workshop.

The Joslyn Castle group implemented a neighborhood "scanning" project that trains volunteers to note housing code violations, poor sidewalk conditions, vacant properties and vehicle violations using a pocket-size device.

Joslyn Castle and Gifford Park are two Omaha neighborhoods that tested the program this year.

A report from a May 2005 study from the Joslyn Castle neighborhood showed that 58.8 percent of the code-violating properties partially or completely fixed the problems associated with their homes.. The study focused on 51 homes in the area that were rated again.

Other neighborhood associations such as Capitol East in Des Moines allowed teenagers to use the scanning program.

"This way they could witness the bad elements of the neighborhood themselves," said Maureen Van Syoc, president of the Capitol East group.

Community leaders at the conference also discussed the potential to extend code enforcement to local businesses to ensure that neighboring storefronts enhance the community's image and reconnect businesses with the community.

During the two-day summit, presenters spoke in four workshops about building a sense of community, home ownership, public safety and code enforcement.

While the summit doubled the number of participants this year, some say it still has more growing to do. Noting the "social capital," in the community, Van Syoc said she would like to see a specific focus on neighborhood associations in 2006.

This year's event was organized by Commercial Federal Bank. Sponsors included Destination Midtown, the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Midwest Housing Equity Group.

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