



Keeping Neighborhoods Vibrant and Strong

Most of the people in Connie Barrett's neighborhood own their own homes. They work hard to maintain their property by making sure their houses are painted, the grass is cut and hedges are trimmed. The fact that people care about their neighborhood is one of the things the 74-year-old Kansas City woman likes about the area of Southeast Kansas City where she's lived for nearly 20 years. So, when the retired grandmother received two city citations this year because her grass was too long, she was embarrassed.

It wasn't that Connie didn't care about the appearance of her yard, but she doesn't own a lawnmower and can't afford to buy one. And at her age, she either has to ask a relative to come over and cut the grass or hire a neighborhood kid to do the job. For the last few years she's managed to keep her grass trimmed by borrowing a mower from a neighbor or from the Swope Parkway Elmwood Neighborhood Association (SPENA). The Association has a tool lending program which allows neighborhood residents to check out lawn care equipment to maintain their property. But the tools weren't always available, and their only lawnmower wasn't always working.

That's why Connie was excited to hear that her neighborhood association was one of 46 selected to receive grants this year from United Way of Greater Kansas City's (UWGKC) Neighborhood Self Help Fund. The grants awarded this year total \$45,323. SPENA is receiving \$1,000 from United Way. Cynthia Canady, president of SPENA's Board, says the Association will use the money to buy two new lawnmowers, three weed eaters and a chainsaw for their tool lending program. She says neighborhood residents will be able to check out the tools for four or five hours at a time, to use on their own property or to clean up vacant and abandoned properties that are sprinkled throughout their area.

Canady says, "Many of the people who live in our neighborhood have been here for 30 or 40 years and they really care about our neighborhood. A lot of them are seniors who have trouble maintaining their property on their own. We often enlist services of youth who are doing court-ordered community service or volunteers from local colleges to help seniors, but the volunteers need the tools to do the job. Having these new lawnmowers and other yard tools purchased with money from United Way will help a lot."

Leaders of Fox Town West Neighborhood Association were also excited to hear they were receiving a grant from United Way. They are using their \$687 check to buy two new lawnmowers, a couple tree trimmers and shovels that neighborhood youth can borrow to shovel sidewalks when it snows this winter. Neighborhood Association president Marquita Henry says, "We have a lot of renters who want to keep their places up, but they don't have the tools to do so and can't afford to buy them. We'll make these tools available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Borrowers will have to leave a driver's license, neighborhood membership card, or something else of value so we can be sure the tools are returned."

This is the third year United Way has awarded Neighborhood Self Help Fund grants, after reviewing applications from 57 organizations serving urban neighborhoods across the metro area. This year's grants range from \$200 to buy and distribute fire extinguishers to low-income neighborhood residents, to \$3,000 for maintenance and mowing of vacant lots that impact property values in the neighborhood.

Joining UWGKC as partners, by financially supporting the Neighborhood Self Help Fund this year, are CitiCards, H&R Block Foundation, Commerce Bank, Hallmark Corporate Foundation and the Edward F. Swinney Foundation (through Bank of America). Although she has never met anyone from any of the organizations, Connie Barrett says she appreciates their support of United Way and the Neighborhood Self Help Fund. She says the new equipment will make it easier for her to keep her property neat and trimmed, like the other homes in her neighborhood.



Connie Barrett wants to keep her Southeast Kansas City property looking nice. Since she doesn't own a lawnmower, she appreciates having the opportunity to borrow one from her neighborhood association. She is happy to hear that United Way is giving the association money to buy new mowers and other lawn care equipment, which she will undoubtedly be borrowing next spring.



Cynthia Canady oversees the tool lending program for the Swope Parkway Elmwood Neighborhood Association (SPENA). She says their one, and only, working lawnmower has been in heavy demand this year.



Neighborhood association presidents Cynthia Canady (L) and Marquita Henry (R) say there's plenty of room in the SPENA Neighborhood Association's tool shed for the new mowers and other lawn care equipment they'll be buying with money from United Way.