

11 Apr 2009

Edmonton Journal

JANE CARDILLO EDMONTON

Working hard for a neighbour-friendly community

Getting to know your neighbour can be as easy as a chat over the backyard fence. But what if your backyard is a balcony high above a busy street and small talk is limited to a brief elevator ride up to your skyscraper home? Enter the Downtown Edmonton Community League. With 200 members and a committed executive, the organization works at bringing a sense of community to a neighbourhood where highrise condos, asphalt streets and towering office buildings replace private backyards, playgrounds and sports fields.

MIKE APORIUS, THE JOURNAL, FILE

Our Urban Eden at 99th Avenue and Bellamy Hill Road

And while its membership may seem small compared to those of suburban community leagues, the downtown group is doing just fine, says league president Chris Buyze.

“We’ve gone from having 25 official members last year to over 200 this year,” says Buyze who, along with other executive members, finds creative ways of reaching out to the more than 12,000 people who call downtown home.

“We have a corn fest every September, we have a skate in January, we’re having a spring cleanup and pancake breakfast in May.”

League vice-president Thomas Rose says those kinds of activities make it easier for downtown dwellers to forge new friendships.

“It’s hard to meet your neighbours downtown,” says Rose. That’s where events like the annual cornfest come in handy.

“Last year we served about 300 cobs of corn, this year we’re aiming for about 1,000.”

Sobeys Urban Fresh donated all the corn. Both Buyze and Rose call the downtown grocery store the league’s biggest corporate sponsor. It’s a good place to meet neighbours, too, says Buyze. “Sobeys was such an important thing for us because it’s now become our de facto community grocery store and I’m much more likely to run into people.”

Sobeys is also providing the food for the free pancake breakfast that will kick off the city centre cleanup in May.

One of the best places for urbanites to get together is the downtown community garden. Our Urban Eden is located at Bellamy Hill Road and 99th Avenue. Affiliated with the community league, it has 28 plots where people can sow and till to their heart’s content. An expansion this year will provide another 14 plots. Both Rose and Buyze love to spend time tending their crops and chatting with other green thumb enthusiasts.

“It’s just a place to go on a summer evening and run into other people,” says Buyze. “Because everyone lives in secure condos and apartments, unless you go to (something like) the community garden, you don’t always run into people.”

The league also looks out for downtown residents in another way. It liaises with the city on developments planned for the area.

“There’s probably close to 20 condos being built in the downtown core right at this moment that are being put into council for (approval),” says Rose.

“We’re involved in all of it ... We have to decide whether or not it’s feasible, whether or not it’s going to blend into the rest of the city.”

Printed and distributed by NewspaperDirect | www.newspaperdirect.com, US/Can:
1.877.980.4040, Intern: 800.6364.6364 | Copyright and protected by applicable law.