



# NORTHforce

A Newsletter from the City of Minneapolis

*Working together to build a better future for the Northside*

## Inside this newsletter

- Free business classes
- Pilot program brings new homeowners to the Northside
- Impact Mailing expands
- Dealing with blight

## About this newsletter

The Northforce Newsletter, launched in May 2007, highlights some of the City's efforts to improve livability in north Minneapolis.

To subscribe to this newsletter, visit the City's Web site at [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/subscriptions](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/subscriptions) and click on "Northforce." To view past newsletters online, go to [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north).

## About Northforce

Northforce is the City's coordinated strategy to address the challenges facing the Northside and integrates the work of City departments and community partners to address safety, health, housing, economic and infrastructure issues.

This coordinated strategy builds on the resources already being deployed on the Northside and uses new and creative ways to improve livability in north Minneapolis.

To learn more about Northforce, visit the City's Web site at [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/residents/north).

## City and school district working together to make it safer for kids to walk or bike to school

Forty years ago, when more than 50 percent of students walked to school, kids were leaner and healthier and schools were the anchors of the neighborhood. Today, less than 15 percent of students walk or bike to school and the result has been higher rates of childhood obesity, traffic congestion around schools, higher school busing costs and weaker ties between families and neighborhoods.

In an effort to change that, a task force of parents and City, School District and community leaders has been studying what it would take to get more kids to walk or bike to school. Thanks to their work, parents and students will begin seeing the first of many changes this year.

As a result of a grant, five schools — including Lucy Laney and Nellie Stone Johnson — are scheduled to get upgraded crosswalk markings on streets and new overhead crossing signs that are more visible to drivers. Electronic signs that warn drivers of their speed will also be placed in some school zones. In addition to these actions, Minneapolis Public Schools has hired a part-time coordinator to help implement the task force's recommendations. The City of Minneapolis has allocated funding to the School District for mini grants of up to \$1,000 each to help as many as 20 schools put walking and biking programs in place.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a national initiative that grew out of concerns *continued on page 3*



**Efforts are underway to make it safer and easier for kids to walk or bike to school this year. If more students walk or bike each day, children would see health improvements, schools would benefit from improved attendance and neighborhoods would benefit from stronger community ties and less traffic congestion around schools.**

## Home & Business Initiatives

### Impact Mailing embarks on \$7 million plant expansion in North Minneapolis

Although Impact Mailing could have saved money by relocating to rural Minnesota, the company opted to expand its current facility in north Minneapolis.

The firm, which produces newsletters and promotional mailings, recently finished demolishing an abandoned lumber facility next to its plant and is readying the site for construction of a \$7 million, 55,000 sq. ft. addition that will connect to its existing 130,000 sq. ft. facility at 4600 Lyndale Ave. N.

Impact Mailing could have gotten economic incentives through the State's rural economic development program but, instead, committed to stay in north Minneapolis despite the fact that it received no City subsidies. What the company did receive was enthusiastic support from Minneapolis elected officials and technical assistance from City staff.

Although Impact Mailing has publicly credited City staff for their diligence and valuable assistance, City staffer Carrie Flack noted that the help provided to the company simply represents "service as usual." Flack pointed out that, "Securing site plan approvals and finding creative solutions to problems that crop up during the redevelopment process are services the City provides to every business."

One of the problems that City staff helped solve involved a murky land title. Thanks to the combined efforts of City staff, lenders and others, the property's ownership issues were cleared up, the site was resurveyed and the deed was re-recorded.

After offering to help the company apply for grants and loans, City staff wrote a letter to the Small Business Administration verifying the site's location in a redevelopment area. As a result, Impact Mailing qualified for an additional \$500,000 loan at a lower rate than originally quoted.

City leaders laud Impact Mailing's commitment to keeping good jobs in North Minneapolis. The company recently doubled its workforce from 100 to 200 jobs when it bought a portion of a company that was downsizing its workforce.



### Northside Arts Crawl showcases talent

Recognizing that special events strengthen a business district's identity and make commercial areas more inviting, the City of Minneapolis once again helped support the Northside Arts Crawl with a \$7,500 Great Streets grant and held an interactive art activity for the community. The event, held July 26, showcased the talent of more than 200 Northside artists and performers.

### Grant enables Northsiders to take business classes free of charge

Thanks to a grant from the City of Minneapolis, free classes on launching or expanding a business are now available in north Minneapolis. Tuition will be waived for any entrepreneur who lives or owns a business in the 55411 or 55412 zip code areas. The classes, which are offered by WomenVenture, cover business fundamentals such as marketing, pricing, record keeping, financial management, sales and business law. Classes are held on Wednesdays from 6 to 9 p.m. at Northway Community Trust, 1501 W. Broadway.

WomenVenture is a non-profit organization that has been providing business preparation training to men and women in the Twin Cities for more than 30 years. Until this summer, however, those classes weren't offered in north Minneapolis. To create a pipeline of capable entrepreneurs who are ready to take advantage of available commercial space in north Minneapolis and support existing Northside business growth, the City awarded WomenVenture a \$22,000 Great Streets grant to bring their classes to the Northside.

In addition to the business classes, WomenVenture offers one-on-one consulting appointments on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the U.S. Bank branch at 1030 West Broadway. U.S. Bank, which played a leadership role in the West Broadway Alive planning process, constructed the new space for WomenVenture within their West Broadway branch office to further support revitalization and business activity in north Minneapolis. The ribbon cutting for WomenVenture's new space is set for 3:30 p.m., Sept. 18. For more information, contact Women Venture at (651) 646-3808 or visit [www.womenventure.org](http://www.womenventure.org).

## Pilot loan program is bringing new homeowners to north Minneapolis

Thanks to a new loan program — Minneapolis Advantage — the Northside is getting some new homeowners. To date, 41 loans have closed on homes — mostly in north Minneapolis — and another nine loans are being finalized.

The Minneapolis Advantage program was designed to help rebuild the housing market in the 18 neighborhoods hardest hit by mortgage foreclosures and lessen the impact of vacant and boarded buildings. The program offered qualifying buyers a \$10,000 interest-free loan that can be used to help cover down payment and closing costs. If the buyer lives in the home for five years, the loan would be fully forgiven. The money can also be used to make needed home repairs.

Because this is a pilot program, funding was limited to approximately 50 purchasers. Although all funds are tentatively committed, people who are willing to be placed on a waiting list can still submit applications. For information, call (612) 588-3033 or visit [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/minneapolisadvantage\\_home.asp](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cped/minneapolisadvantage_home.asp).

At the end of the pilot phase of the program, the City will evaluate the program's effectiveness and consider program modifications. The City is already seeking additional funding through the Federal Home Loan Bank to substantially expand resources.



**Recent college grad and intern Zak Schneider and STEP-UP intern Janay Henry met with City Coordinator Steven Bosacker and Deputy City Coordinator Jayne Khalifa.**

## Interns put their skills to work

This summer's group of city interns worked on special projects ranging from promoting sustainability to preparing for the Republican National Convention. This summer, the City of Minneapolis hired 50 STEP-UP interns who finalized reports, entered data, prepared PowerPoint presentations and answered phones while gaining valuable job skills and getting a preview of career options. STEP-UP recruits, trains and places Minneapolis high school students in meaningful jobs made possible by participating employers.

## Safety Initiatives

### Safe routes to school

*continued from page 1*

about the rising rates of childhood obesity and the need to create opportunities for children to be physically active every day.

In 2007, the City helped fund a task force to develop a plan for a collaborative City/School District program. The task force's soon-to-be-released report includes recommendations that call for:

- Making walking routes safer and more attractive,
- Increasing police visibility along routes,
- Involving the community in watching over students, especially elementary school kids,
- Increasing enforcement of crosswalk laws and speed limits near schools,
- Teaching bike and traffic safety to students,
- Promoting walking and biking within curriculum and through special events,
- Creating car-free zones around schools,
- Creating community bus stops,
- Installing more bike racks at schools
- Utilizing the City's Bike/Walk Ambassador Program.

The collaboration between the City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) is the first city-school partnership in the nation to participate in the Safe Routes to School initiative. The partnership makes it possible to implement policy and infrastructure changes and places it in a strong position to apply for grants to make the task force's recommendations a reality. The City and the School District are also one of the few partnerships in the United States addressing low-income students' mobility and safety needs — a national Safe Routes to School funding priority.

Minneapolis has a strong program for making improvements for walking and biking. In the coming years, the City will manage projects that invest \$6 million in bike paths, lanes and sidewalks, \$200,000 in bike racks, \$198,000 in safety upgrades at six schools and \$900,000 in the Bike/Walk Ambassador Program.

The bike/walk ambassador program, which aims to encourage people to bike more, walk more and drive less, debuted Aug. 17 with a special event at St. Anthony Main. In addition to four adult ambassadors, four MPS high school students will work as youth ambassadors. They will be reaching out to people under age 18 and serving as peer mentors to encourage kids to consider biking and walking to and from school.

## Livability Efforts

### Minneapolis accelerates efforts to remove blighted properties

Recognizing the detrimental impact that blighted properties have on neighborhoods, the City of Minneapolis keeps a watchful eye on vacant and boarded homes and removes the homes that pose the greatest threat to neighborhood stability.

Over the past four years, the City has averaged 25 to 35 demolitions per year. In 2007, the City escalated its nuisance abatement actions and demolished 50 properties. This year, Minneapolis will be able to demolish nearly 100 properties that are beyond repair thanks to an additional \$1.25 million in funding from Hennepin County aimed at stabilizing neighborhoods hard-hit by foreclosures.

Following the funding approval, Minneapolis Regulatory Services staff did field surveys of 370 properties on the City's list of vacant and boarded buildings. Through a careful screening process that assesses each home's condition, historical value and renovation cost, they identified the properties that were the best candidates for demolition. By the end of this year, 96 unrecoverable homes on that list will come down. Ninety of those homes are on the Northside.

Efforts to restore neighborhoods don't stop with the demolition of blighted homes. A maintenance plan has been put in place to guarantee that the vacant lots will be well-maintained. Each lot will be graded and seeded for grass, and City staff will inspect the properties weekly for the next year to ensure they are well maintained by the owners. If there are violations related to rubbish, snow, grass or weeds, orders will be issued so City contractors can perform the cleanup work at the property owner's expense.

The City's efforts to stabilize these neighborhoods go beyond removing boarded and vacant properties. Efforts to restore a healthy housing market in north Minneapolis include: rehabilitating homes, promoting reinvestment in neighborhoods, taking steps to retain current residents and working to attract a healthy mix of stable residents.

As part of this effort, the City has increased funding for the Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program, developed a pilot home loan program (see page 3) and coordinates closely with non-profit partners to quickly acquire and rehabilitate foreclosed or boarded and vacant properties to get them back in the hands of stable homeowners when possible.

## You Can Help

### Be an election judge

Due to the exceptional interest in this year's presidential election, more than 2,000 election judges are needed to work at Minneapolis' 131 polling places. Election judges open and close the polls, register and sign in voters, distribute and collect ballots, operate voting equipment, and record and certify vote totals. To be an election judge, you must be eligible to vote, willing to attend training and able to work on Nov. 4. To learn more, call 311, visit Room 1B in City Hall, 350 S. 5<sup>th</sup> St. or view [www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/elections](http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/elections).

## Coming Up

### 4PAC Garage, Craft and Bake Sale

- **Saturday, September 13**

9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Hamilton School, 42<sup>nd</sup> & Dupont Ave. N.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Precinct Advisory Council (4PAC) is sponsoring this event to raise money for crime prevention programs and activities that promote cooperation between police and the community. Residents and local organizations can rent a space for \$20 to sell their own items or donate clean, gently used items for 4PAC to sell. For more information, call (612) 588-5025 (evenings) or e-mail [dagnaultv@4pac.org](mailto:dagnaultv@4pac.org).

### 4<sup>th</sup> Precinct Advisory Council (4PAC)

- **Tuesday, September 16**

6:30 p.m. - meet and greet / 7 p.m. - meeting

1925 Plymouth Ave. N.

Northside residents and businesspeople are invited to the 4<sup>th</sup> Precinct to meet officers, get an update on precinct activity and hear a presentation from Hillary Freeman with the Offender Re-Entry Program. Attendees may also bring addresses of problem properties. For an agenda, call (612) 673-2947 or e-mail [mary.rainville@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:mary.rainville@ci.minneapolis.mn.us).

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