

Two-state neighborhood conference planned

By Tim Johnson

tjohnson@nonpareilonline.com | Posted: Sunday, September 21, 2014 12:00 am

Neighborhood associations, community organizations and business and civic leaders are collaborating to hold the first-ever Iowa/Nebraska (IN) the Neighborhood Conference, “Celebrating Strong Empowered Neighborhoods.”

The two-day event will be Oct. 10-11 at Metro Community College’s South Omaha Campus.

“It’s really open for anyone in Pottawattamie and Douglas counties who is concerned and wants to make their neighborhood a better place to stay,” said Barbara Johnson, director of community building for NeighborWorks Home Solutions and a presenter at the conference.

Steve Carmichael, Council Bluffs’ chief building inspector and a co-presenter at the conference, sees it as a positive exchange of ideas.

“Anytime there’s a free flow of ideas – especially when you go across state lines, both on the business side and the government side – I think there’s ample opportunity for people to learn something,” he said.

Activities will begin Oct. 10 with four tours at roughly the same time in Omaha and Council Bluffs. Three will have bus transportation with “limited walking,” and the fourth is a bicycle tour.

“Council Bluffs Historic Tour,” from 5 to 6 p.m., will feature four historic districts surrounding downtown Council Bluffs. The tour will end at Dixie Quicks, but participants will be on their own for supper.

“Blending Old with the New,” 5 to 6 p.m., will focus on the Dahlman Park area of Omaha, taking riders past Sokol Auditorium, Grace University and historic homes and churches, as well as recent additions and renovations, to show how new businesses, housing and architecture have been successfully integrated in the area. A free dinner will follow at Chef Hattam Catering Co.

“Mural City: The Great Walls of Omaha,” from 4 to 6 p.m., will feature murals by local and national artists. Participants will be on their own for dinner at the Pizza Shoppe.

“Bike Tour of Omaha,” 4 to 6 p.m., will begin at 14th Street and Mike Fahey Street. Participants can bring their own wheels or rent bicycles at nearby Green Street Cycles on their own.

On Oct. 11, activities will start at 7:30 a.m. with exhibits opening and registration and a continental breakfast running from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m., followed by opening remarks from Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert and Council Bluffs Mayor Matt Walsh.

The luncheon keynote speaker will be Gus Newport, a nationally renowned community activist who encourages neighborhood planning from the “bottom up, not top-down.” Additional workshop speakers include neighborhood advocate and Creighton University Law Professor Kate Mahern and Empowerment Network President Willie Barney.

Morning and afternoon breakout sessions will cover a range of topics from increasing neighborhood involvement to urban agriculture to urban design. Carmichael will present a session jointly with Jay Davis, Omaha’s assistant director of permits and inspections. Davis will talk about Omaha’s new online permitting system, and Carmichael will talk about differences between Nebraska and Iowa’s landlord and tenant laws.

Exchanging ideas is nothing new for the co-presenters.

“Jay and I speak four or five times a week,” Carmichael said. “These things between the government entities go on every day. What we’re hoping is (the conference) will be able to spur ideas for the general public and the businesses. I would encourage people to sign up and go.”

Neighborhoods associations might get ideas, or city officials might learn how to do things more efficiently, he said.

Registration for the conference is \$30 until Sept. 22, when it goes up to \$35. Up to 35 scholarships are available for Pottawattamie County residents. Those in need of scholarship assistance may contact Barbara Johnson at bjohnson@nwhomesolutions.org or (402) 451-2939. For more information or to register for the IN the Neighborhood Conference, visit intheneighborhood.org.