



Kelly Scanlon:

Welcome to this episode of Banking on Kansas City. I'm your host, Kelly Scanlon. Joining us on this episode is Dina Newman. Dina is the director of UMKC Center for Neighborhoods. In that capacity, Dina works to promote healthy neighborhoods through new forms of urban innovation. Welcome Dina.

Dina Newman:

Thank you, Kelly. It's good to be here.

Kelly Scanlon:

I bet a lot of people don't know that there's a UMKC Center of Neighborhoods. So what is it? What does it do?

Dina Newman:

So, the UMKC Center for Neighborhoods is housed in the Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design. And we are a one stop shop, if you will. It's a place where neighborhood leaders, advocates, and residents who want to build at a capacity of their neighborhood organization are able to come through our classes. And we offer a free 12 week training program for them.

Kelly Scanlon:

We're using the term neighborhood pretty loosely here, so that make sure we're on the same page because I bet a lot of our listeners have different definitions of neighborhoods. For some of them it might just be the couple of block area that they live in. So, how do you define a neighborhood and how many neighborhoods are in Kansas city by that definition?

Dina Newman:

So, we define neighborhood as where life happens. Quite simple. It's the place where we say you plant flowers in your garden on one day and then maybe on another day, you are harvesting those flowers to take to a neighbor down the street who has lost a loved one to age, disease or crime. A neighborhood is where you live, love, play, pray. It's simply home. In Kansas city there are over 240 neighborhoods, and again, it's how you define it. There are neighborhoods where there may be one house on the block and there may be many houses on a block, but we define it in our capacity as simply home where you live.

Kelly Scanlon:

How has that number held up over say the last couple of decades? Are we seeing that moving upwards as the city expands outward or?

Dina Newman:

That's interesting because we based the 240 on what we call the focus plan, it was a plan that was done over 20 years ago. And neighborhood planning at city hall are getting ready to redo the focus plan, so looking at the original 240 neighborhood associations, some have gone away, others have been created, so it's kind of a steady balance, we think, over the last 20 years. It's going to be interesting when that focus plan gets implemented in the spring of 2020, we'll be able to really see how much things have changed.

Kelly Scanlon:

In your role as director... And you are the first director, because the Center for Neighborhoods is what, three years old?

Dina Newman:

We'll be four years in April, we will have our fourth year anniversary. Yes.

Kelly Scanlon:

So coming up on four years, in your role as the director of the Center for Neighborhoods, how do you work with those 240 odd neighborhoods?

Dina Newman:

That's a good question, Kelly. So, neighborhood organizations are almost always [inaudible 00:03:14] volunteers. Very few are paid, very few have a brick and mortar facility. So these are neighborhood leaders, and advocates and residents who feel strongly about their community. They often meet in church basements, they meet in community centers, they meet at the police station-

Kelly Scanlon:

Very grassroots, it sounds like.

Dina Newman:

Extremely grassroots. And, they struggle to address the day to day challenges that they're facing in their communities. So the Center for Neighborhoods, we provide that platform, that place, the tools to equip, empower and engage these neighborhood leaders to be able to address these issues through the 12 week training program, which is free. It's open to all neighborhood leaders in Kansas city, Missouri. They're able to come through class. It's hard to work neighborhood one by one by one. So with this program, we take up to 25 neighborhood leaders at one point and go through this 12 week training.

Kelly Scanlon:

Yeah. And probably an added benefit of doing it that way is that the neighborhood leaders themselves get to know each other.

Dina Newman:

Absolutely. One of the things we are so proud of and that we really like is what we call sister neighborhoods. So as they come into class, we pair them up with a different neighborhood and from the outside looking in, it's kind of like maybe, I don't understand this pairing. And I give the example, there was a neighborhood that was primarily a white neighborhood up North, we paired them with a primarily African American neighborhood here on the East side. They got together, they kind of looked at each other and was like, "I'm not sure why we're"-

Kelly Scanlon:

A little leery.

Dina Newman:

Yeah. I'm not seeing the similarities. And as they begin to talk, one lady says, "Our neighborhood is aging out. It's kind of a bedroom community, lots of aging out." And then the East side neighborhood says, "Our neighborhood is the same." And they begin to talk and one said, "Well, we don't have sidewalks in our neighborhood." And the other neighborhood says, "Well, we're kind of rural and neither do we. Some of our kids are walking in the ditch to get to school." So immediately they begin to see the similarities and what was so beautiful, by the end of the 12 weeks, these two sister neighborhoods, the one up North was saying, she came to class and she says, "I will never... When I'm watching the news and they're talking about the East side." She says, "I will never look at that the same way because I now know people in that community. I know them firsthand, I know their challenges, I know their dreams and their hopes for their community and they will forever be my sister neighborhood." And that was just, it's beautiful. We love to see those connections.

Kelly Scanlon:

It makes getting up and going to your job every day totally worth it, when you see that kind of impact. So you mentioned this 12 week program, you bring 25 neighborhoods, you have the capacity to bring up to 25 together. What are some of the other things that you work on with these neighborhoods?

Dina Newman:

So, we have 25 people because our own capacity is somewhat limited. So it's 25 people, two people per neighbor.

Kelly Scanlon:

Okay. So about 13, 12-13 neighborhoods.

Dina Newman:

There you go. And that's important because you want to be able to do this hands on work. We have four main areas of curriculum and it's leadership and governance, and that's everything from what bylaws. Health and safety. And again, we're looking at what does a community look like from a lens of a culture of health? So it's not just individual health, but do you have a healthy community? There's technology and communications we focus on. Depending on the neighborhood, the digital divide is still very real. We have a computer lab where they're able to go and actually do that hands on work. And we've had people come in, sit down, pick up the mouse and go, "This is a mouse? This is what you call a mouse?" And we're going to do some deep dive, we're going to work. And, the fourth piece is planning and development. And that's everything from, my neighborhood is being gentrified, to my neighborhood I

have someone who wants to put in a gas station when there's one already across the street and help us get the tools that we need to challenge that.

Dina Newman:

So those are our four main topic areas and what we have found out, depending on what each cohort, we are on... Our cohort seven will graduate on Tuesday. So we will graduate-

Kelly Scanlon:

Oh, congratulations.

Dina Newman:

Thank you. Our seventh cohort and it's always fluid, the work. We have our curriculum, they come in, we work on that, but then maybe someone will say, "We really need help with X, Y, Z." And it's like, okay, so we have to pivot and we'll say, "Let's do a workshop on that particular topic." We've had bylaw workshops where we just kind of, in class, introduce the concept of bylaws and it's been like, no, we need to really do some deep dive work on that. So we'll have different workshops. We've had policing in the community workshops, we've had other workshops where they're just kind of coming in and learning how to do three-one-one, how to look at parcel viewer on the city website. So again, a lot of our work predicates on what the needs are of those neighborhoods leaders.

Kelly Scanlon:

On The leadership aspect of the training, does a part of that include engaging others in the neighborhood? And the reason I asked that question is that so often you might get a handful of very committed, maybe progressive thinking people in an area who want to learn about best practices, improve things, but then for whatever reason they can't get others on board. So, does the leadership address that. I mean, in so many ways we become a complacent society. I don't know if it's because we're too busy or what is the cause of that? But I mean, do you addressed that?

Dina Newman:

Absolutely. In fact, the red kind of goes through most of the neighborhood leaders that come through, particularly with our neighborhood leaders who are of a certain age. They've been at it a while and they are starting to see the most concern neighborhood folk who've come to the meetings, who are showing up. Suddenly those numbers are starting to go down and they're concerned and it's like, "Well does that mean that we don't have interested people? What's going on?" So we address that. And what we hear over and over is young people don't want to be involved. Well that's not necessarily true. What is happening, and we have found out, young people don't necessarily want to be involved in the way it's been done for years-

Kelly Scanlon:

The traditional ways. Come sit at a meeting.

Dina Newman:

Saturday afternoons, two o'clock, sign in. No, what they're telling us is let's do FaceTime live, Facebook live. I would love to be involved, but I'm taking care of my kids or I have a second job but I still want to be involved. And it's been interesting with some of our older leaders are kind of going... They barely can

text, so we're looking at ways of engaging them to this whole technology piece of, yes, you can still do your neighborhood meeting, but you're going to have to think outside the box because these younger people are looking at different ways. I tell the story, I went to a meeting where it was held at a laundromat and I thought that was so cool. The owner of the laundromat gave everyone four quarters, we all came in with one load of laundry, we all started our laundry together at the same time. As the laundry was washing, we were having a meeting. We did the time to put in the dryer, we all stop, put everything in the dryer, continued with our meeting and I thought that was so brilliant.

Kelly Scanlon:

Oh definitely. It sounds like you got a lot more than clothes cleaned up. Got your laundry done and solved some of the neighbors problems perhaps. We've talked a lot about the different programs and community building that goes on through the Center for Neighborhoods. What would you say makes it so unique?

Dina Newman:

Well, first of all, the Center for Neighborhoods was co-created by Senator Kiki curls and Dr. Jacob Wagner, who was a professor at AUPD. So, that in itself [inaudible 00:12:35]. One of the most unique things, that I think is important, is we operate from an ABCD lens.

Kelly Scanlon:

What does that mean?

Dina Newman:

Asset-based community development lens. Many neighborhood organizations know the problems. They're not surprised, they know what's going on. And, in some cases over the years, they've almost been rewarded for the challenges and when I say that, I'm saying so there are grants tied to the challenges. How bad can it be? How many X, Y, Z are your challenges? And then we can fund that. We're flipping that on its head because we're saying, you already know the challenges, let's look at the assets of your community and assets are people, places and things-

Kelly Scanlon:

And how do you leverage those?

Dina Newman:

And how do you leverage? So let's flip that. And we're looking at an example would be, if your neighborhood struggles with health issues, if there's a high incident of high blood pressure, for example, is there someone in the community who maybe is a retired nurse, who would be interested on a Saturday afternoon just to take blood pressure checks? Those are assets that we are encouraging our neighborhood leaders to kind of think outside that box. We do asset mapping. They come into class, they get a map of their community and day one we say, "List your assets." And always fun that first day because they'll circle the bank, they'll circle church, churches chicken, which can be an asset-

Kelly Scanlon:

Or high blood pressure.

Dina Newman:

There you go, there you go. And then by the end of class, that map looks totally different and they're saying, "Oh, okay, my asset is Mr. Jones who's been in my community for 30 years and Mr. Jones, he may never come to a neighborhood meeting, but my goodness, his yard is gorgeous." He's an asset. So we'd love looking at the maps before and after and just kind of seeing that aha moment when they realize, Oh my goodness, okay, we can address some of our issues looking through that ABCD lens.

Kelly Scanlon:

Yeah, with resources that we have right in front of us that we just weren't considering before.

Dina Newman:

Absolutely.

Kelly Scanlon:

And, so the message that I hear you saying is that, some of our listeners today who may not think of themselves as leaders, but they want to be more involved in their neighborhoods and aren't aware of a platform for doing so, they should just contact you directly and you can help them. If there's not an existing platform in their neighborhood, then you can help them build that perhaps or get others involved, join them in their efforts and if there is one involved, you can make the introductions.

Dina Newman:

Absolutely, absolutely. Cohort eight will begin in the spring. We've been very blessed and fortunate that we really haven't had to do a lot of recruiting, it's kind of word of mouth. We've had neighborhood leaders who graduated from our program and then they've sent in a new group. At first, we were kind of like, why do you keep sending people? But then it makes sense, they're building their bench. We've had, just again, word of mouth open to everyone in Kansas city, Missouri. If someone is interested in cohort eight, please reach out to us, let us know that you're interested.

Dina Newman:

We ask two things. One thing is that there's at least two people. Life happens. 12 weeks, one night a week for three hours. That's a long time. But I will say we provide a really great meal, we have classes on campus because for some neighborhood leaders, they've never stepped foot on a college campus. UMKC is an urban serving university and we're right in the heart. So we want to provide that experience. And then we ask that if you are not a current president or board member, that you get permission from those who are in charge. The last thing we ever want to do is have splintered groups. So we want everyone to be able to come together and work together because whoever comes through our class represents that neighborhood association. Whether that's at a city hall meeting, whether that's an event. So we want to make sure the leadership that's in charge is aware of this and really supporting.

Kelly Scanlon:

You mentioned that you're coming up on your four year anniversary, so you're still relatively new at this, but I know that you have some great stories to share about some of your successes. You actually told a couple of them earlier. But talk to us about that impact, some of the stats that you can tell us about and perhaps a couple more stories.

Dina Newman:

So, what we say is when the neighborhoods have success, that's our success. And, we've had neighborhoods who, again, have received funding. They've never applied for a grant, and they've come through and applied and received not one, two, three grants. There was a neighborhood leader who came through and he said, he told me he says, "I just wanted to continue the work and I had to figure that out." He started a radio show on a little radio station called Welcome to the Neighborhood and on the show he brings in neighborhood leaders to talk about the work they're doing in their communities. When they come through class, they are told they have to do a project and we don't tell them what the project is, but they have that 12 weeks to work on it. Some of the successes are those projects that have come to fruition. Sometimes it's simple as, I want to increase our membership. I know of a neighborhood association that came in and there were five people meeting, there are now 25. From the outside it may not look like big numbers, but that's huge.

Kelly Scanlon:

They weren't there before.

Dina Newman:

Exactly, and now they're 25 engage neighborhood leaders in that community. We've had successes where we received a call from a very prominent organization and said, "We have a board seat available and we would like you to recommend one of your cohort graduates to sit on our board." That is a huge success for us-

Kelly Scanlon:

Oh, having a voice on a board. Yeah, that is incredibly huge.

Dina Newman:

An impact that we were very surprised, pleasantly surprised. Our neighborhood cohort members who've gone through, and I will say we've had over 165 neighborhood leaders representing more than 60 neighborhoods in three and a half years, they collectively have received over \$1 million in funding.

Kelly Scanlon:

Wow. What attracted you to this kind of work? I mean, we've been talking about your work, but we haven't really talked about what attracted you to it in the first place. I know in your background you've been very involved in the Ivanhoe neighborhoods, so what drew you?

Dina Newman:

Huh, Kelly. Well, I've been doing community engagement work, just didn't know that's what it was called, for as long as I can remember. My grandparents raised me in small town in Southeast Kansas. Very, very, very poor but that sense of community was always there. I left, graduated from high school, went off to college. Got involved, no matter where I was at, in community work. Ivanhoe really kind of pushed me more into this work because, again, it was a community where we had challenges. I went to go work on a grant through the Robert Wood Johnson foundation, on how to address childhood obesity in that community. And what came out of that, it wasn't just about childhood obesity, it was about environmental policy barrier changes that were happening in this community and I was so, so fortunate to be able to do some of the work there. I started the farmer's market, I was able to teach people how

to grow their own food because we were in a food desert. And I remember when this job came up, when the Center for Neighborhoods came about, I just thought, Oh my gosh, if I've been able to do this in one community, how amazing would this be to be able to do this citywide? And I tell Dr. Wagner, who I work with almost on a daily basis, this is my dream job. To empower the neighborhoods to do that work.

Kelly Scanlon:

And how do they go about contacting you? Is there a website that would be best to go to?

Dina Newman:

There is a website. It's info.UMKC.edu/cfn or send me an email, Newmandi@UMKC.edu.

Kelly Scanlon:

And if that is a mouthful or is that too fast for you to write down, go to the show notes for this show and we'll make sure that we get that included in the show notes. What do you see as the best thing that Kansas city neighborhoods have going for them right now? What's encouraging to you?

Dina Newman:

That's a good question. We have new leadership in city government. There are folks who've taken position to... Before him we're really out there in the community doing some of the work. So they know firsthand some of the work that's happening on a grassroots community level. And what I like is what I've termed grass middle, you have the... Grass roots and you have that top down. And then that middle, that sweet spot, that grass middle spot is what I'm calling it, where our neighborhood leaders are uplifted to that place where they kind of meet that top down. And that's where some of that messy hard but sustainable work happens. We're seeing that and we're very excited about that. We're seeing neighborhood leaders, we're seeing young people come in and saying, "Okay, let's look at it from this lens." And these are opportunities, young people are coming with opportunities, some of them. There in the corporate world and they have companies that can come with a group of volunteers to do a neighborhood cleanup. So we're seeing some of that happen.

Dina Newman:

I don't know, we're at a good place right now where people are starting to recognize the power of the voice of the community.

Kelly Scanlon:

Yeah, and as you said before, so often what you read in the news is, it's serious, it's of concern, but it's one part of it, and when you can build the kind of platform and opportunity to have your voices heard and your actions make a difference that you are doing here, that's a great positive sign.

Dina Newman:

Absolutely.

Kelly Scanlon:

Dina, thank you so much for all you do for Kansas city's neighborhoods, and to lift up Kansas city and so we really appreciate you being with us on this episode of Banking on Kansas city.

Dina Newman:

Kelly, thank you for having me.

Joe Close:

This is Joe Close, president of Country Club Bank. Thanks to Dina for coming on this week to share the inspiring message of UMKC's Center for Neighborhood development. From urban innovation to creating healthy neighborhoods, to organizing for impact, they're out there every day hitting our city together. At Country Club Bank, the people of Kansas City are family to us. As we grow stronger together, so does this city we all share and love. By building a stronger sense of community through strengthening our neighborhoods, we lift each other up as the collective us is transformed into the fabric of our own town. As Dina said, "When our neighborhoods have success, that's our success." Together we can create a better Kansas City, a stronger Kansas City. Thanks for tuning in this week, we're banking on you Kansas City, Country Club Bank, member FDIC.