

## SECOND ANNUAL ARISE DETROIT! NEIGHBORHOODS RISING SUMMIT OFFERS HOPE AND IDEAS FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO CHANGE DETROIT

By Mary Chapman

Presumably, it's not easy getting folks to a work-like event on a frigid Saturday morning.

But these are trying times in Detroit, a teetering but ever-resilient city that, lest anyone forget, both led the nation's recession and saw the near-capitulation of its auto industry.

So stream in they did on this November Saturday, many fed up but determined, to ARISE Detroit's second annual Neighborhoods Rising Summit, a kind of best-practices exposition for neighborhoods. More than 400 attended the free event, sponsored by the Kresge Foundation.

The day-long collection of workshops, held at Wayne County Community College District's downtown campus, ranged from housing renovation and urban farming to neighborhood organizing and public safety. City council member James Tate even plopped himself on the hot seat, fielding questions about lighting, the city's possible slide into emergency management, and more.

"Our presenters, these are people on the front lines, on the ground level," said Luther Keith, the organization's executive director. "A lot of people don't know where to go, what to do. That's why we called all these experts together."

ARISE Detroit is the kind of outfit that could pull this off. It's a coalition of Detroit-based community groups banded together in hopes of making a bigger impact than each can accomplish separately. It largely grew out of a 2005 town meeting in which actor and activist Bill Cosby entreated Detroiters to cease blaming others for their woes, of which they collectively have aplenty.

The summit opened with prayer and rousing song (I Believe in Detroit City) by local singer JRenee -- imparting an old-church revival feel -- before segueing into remarks by representatives of Detroit Mayor Dave Bing's "Detroit Works" project, the city's in-progress plan to deal with acres upon acres of vacant land and property. As recent Census data revealed, the city now has a little over 700,000 residents; the 25 percent

plummet marks the largest percentage loss for any city with more than 100,000 residents over the last decade.

But as summit participant Henry Johnson put it: "The ones still here can learn something and make it better for ourselves, plus for the ones coming later."

The summit attracted others from all over Metro Detroit, including Leah Yankee, a Wyandotte resident and Michigan State University senior. She came to hear about urban farming and neighborhood organizing.

"I think it's good because the city or even the state can't do everything," she said. "Some stuff we can do ourselves."

The packed neighborhood organizing workshop featured representatives from entities such as Brightmoor Alliance, the Warren/Conner Development Coalition, Morningside Association, Next Detroit, and the City of Detroit. The panel offered up many tips on, how to form block clubs and get younger people and businesses involved. Warren Conner's Maggie DeSantis stirred the room by suggesting that such block clubs, as they now exist, are ineffective, partly because they generally don't engage contemporary tools such as social media.

A session on public safety focused on use of citizen patrols and other techniques to fight neighborhood crime, and included members of the Detroit 300, a grassroots crime-battling organization known locally for helping police track down suspects in some particularly heinous crimes. The workshop also touched on topics such as self defense, how better parenting can curb structural violence, and how to avoid potentially dangerous situations, including house parties with no adult supervision.

The entrepreneurship workshop offered expert advice on attracting, developing and nurturing businesses, getting into such minutiae as zoning laws and opportunities for sharing offices. One participant was Toney Gibbs, who is planning to move from suburban Oak Park to Detroit to start a new business. "I learned some good strategies that I think will help me out," he said.

The Adopt a Park forum got into neighborhood stabilization grants and how, by taking responsibility for a small park's maintenance, a group could demonstrate neighborhood pride and get a tax write-off, to boot. Such a program has spinoff effects, said panelist Dion Williams, community access manager for the City of Detroit. "Who wants to patronize a business that's by a messy lot?" he asked.

What with all the vacant land around, urban farming was an obvious workshop choice. Panelists discussed urban gardening, how to create neighborhood farmer's markets, government policies, and more. Moderators were Gail Carr of Urban Farming and Nat Van Noord of the Greening of Detroit.

Also well attended was the housing workshop, which included topics like how to fight neighborhood blight and foreclosures and develop new neighborhood housing. Moderated by Dalton Roberson of Community Legal Resources and Vanguard CDC's Scott Alan Davis, the session also went into practicalities such as how to seize abandoned homes, lot purchase versus adoption, safe grants, and establishment of community maintenance teams. "Nobody's going to drop in and save us," Davis said.

In these tight economic times, the home repairs workshop was particularly popular. The do-it-yourself session was moderated by Tim Addy of Handyman Ministries. "People can't always afford to hire help. There is a lot that people can do themselves," he said, like fixing a drippy faucet or a leaking toilet.

On the Engaging Youth panel were Al Taylor of the Peace Project; China Cochran, Life in the D; Terrance Collier, known as the rapping mentor; Horace Mitchell of the Hollywood Golf Institute, Brittany Smith, Young Detroit Builders; and Antoine Jackson of Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Mentorship was high on the list of topics. "All young people are great," said Collier. "We just have to make them believe it."

Summit attendees also learned how to plan their own communities' Neighborhoods Day, and how to use public relations, media and social media to publicize work and events.

Said executive director Keith: "This is about empowerment and encouragement. These people can go back into the neighborhoods and make a difference.

"We are the calvary."

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ARISE Detroit! is a coalition of more than 400 groups promoting volunteerism, community activism and positive media images to create a better Detroit. Learn more at [www.arisedetroit.org](http://www.arisedetroit.org), or phone 313-921-1955.