

UCOM COMMUNICATOR

Summer 2022



Listening, growing, and building
community together

UCOM Core Values: Community Enrichment

by Dr. Bruce Roller, Executive Director

Our Community Carnival recently brought together scores of people from throughout the community. Providing some social activities that are open to all offers people opportunities to meet their neighbors and enjoy time together through shared interests. Language barriers and skin color, gender and age differences all dissipated for a couple of hours. As one volunteer said, "I'm here for the children. Just to see the little ones playing games and having fun together makes me so happy." Many of our organizational partners were able to talk to people one-to-one about their particular services to our community. Mary made a connection for health care and supplemental food for her dog when she talked with the people from C-Snip and the Humane Society. People across a broad spectrum got to know each other a little better as their children played in the bright sunshine.

Doris likes the community gardens, not just for the good food she grows to eat and share, but for the



opportunity to listen and talk with other gardeners about ways to make our vibrant community an even better place to live and work. Monthly gatherings of the gardeners offer even more connections as people share victories, challenges, and solutions for their individual gardens.

Spontaneous dancing with her boys and seeing their jubilant faces added to Elizabeth's enjoyment as she got to know Amber and her teen sons at Meijer Gardens' amphitheater. Kent District Library, The Steve and Amy Van Andel Foundation, and Meijer Gardens supplied ten tickets for them to see *Amos Lee with Neal Francis*.

Through UCOM's membership in Together West Michigan we also offer a place for natural leaders in our community to make their voices heard on policy issues like neighborhood safety, mental health, and affordable housing. Putting their voices together with hundreds of people from more than twenty institutions creates an organizing effort not easily ignored.

One of UCOM's three core values is community and these are just a few of the ways we ensure that UCOM's neighbors have opportunities to continue to enrich all of us.



“Community Listening” and Growing Together

by Shawn Keener, Program Director



Earlier this year, UCOM invited 20 neighbors from diverse cultural backgrounds to gather quarterly and share their thoughts and hopes for the future. “Getting to know our neighbors” and “building a

stronger support system” were just some of the important concerns voiced by the new advisory board.

Many in this group have been impacted by UCOM programs and have also given back in wonderful ways. “Becky’s” family shops at the pantry and comes every year for free income tax assistance. “Mandy” has been using the pantry and volunteering for 11 years. She loves our cooking and financial literacy classes, and the senior commodity program helps her live on a fixed income. “Tamara” remembers being referred to UCOM as a new mom in need of formula. She has been coming ever since and has made some wonderful Vietnamese dishes for past UCOM events. “Daniel” and “Amy” are both members of the walking club and avid gardeners. They help tend UCOM’s plots in our Marquette Park community garden. “Melanie” enjoyed our cooking classes so much that she taught one herself, sharing some delicious vegan recipes.

“Belinda” recently volunteered at our community carnival. She joined our exercise classes, and her husband worked with our employment service program to look for a job.

When asked about UCOM’s food programs, the group had high praise for both the farm stand and the pantry. “I leave with a cart full of food.”, “The pantry has a nice appearance.”, “There’s something for every palette.” “It gives us a healthier way to eat.”

This neighborhood is not without its problems; rising housing costs, inadequate access to transportation and general safety concerns were a few identified by the advisory board. However, despite the challenges facing this community, it is seen by its residents as a compassionate place with UCOM playing an important role in providing a needed support system. UCOM’s neighbors are so resilient! We look forward to learning more from this group. We are so much richer when we work together to build a stronger community.





**September 22,
5:30 - 7:30 pm**

Riverside Park -
Riverbend Shelter

**Lawn games, live music,
food trucks and more!**

Free admission!

**Celebrate the harvest and
support UCOM programs!**



Harvest Gathering
a picnic in the park

YOU CAN HELP!

1. Join our recurring donors in supporting UCOM each month!
2. Help us build! UCOM has a small drywall repair that needs to be done in our new building space before we can use it!
3. Attend our Fall Event and invite friends!
4. Spread the word about UCOM. Share this newsletter with a friend!
5. Volunteer! UCOM needs office volunteers, drivers, clothing pantry assistants, and more. Call Shawn

UCOM

resources for living | hope for life

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