

Community development's golden rule: Come together

BY OMAR CARRILLO TINAJERO
AND MATT KINSHELLA
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS

Omar Carrillo and Matt Kinshella work for Neighborhood Partnerships, an Oregon nonprofit that brings opportunity to people with low incomes.

Oregon has a history of ingenuity and innovation. We have worked hard to come together and build communities and public systems — roads, schools, cities and towns — that sustain us.

Yet, that central lesson of coming together is often forgotten.

Let's remember it. It may be the only way we can get out of our current affordable housing crisis.

We're told that the late '80s was a time of decay for inner city Portland. A series of disinvestments shifted the landscape of once thriving communities. Portlanders were concerned that the city would become a place where few people would want to start new families.

So, some of the leading minds in community development got together and crafted a new plan. Through the efforts of the Oregon Community Foundation, Neighborhood Partnerships Fund — now known as the nonprofit Neighborhood Partnerships — was started.

The first step 25 years ago was to bring together corporate and neighborhood people to drive community development in local regions. A network of community development corporations (CDCs) was started in Portland and throughout Oregon. Under the stewardship of Neighborhood Partnerships, the CDC effort succeeded in providing housing to many people who could not otherwise afford a place to call home. By 1998, two nonprofit housing developers grew to 16 and produced more than 3,500 homes.

But about that time, it became apparent that Oregon was facing a housing market that was becoming increasingly unaffordable for more people. Public, particularly federal, investments continued to decline. And the booming real estate market was pricing

CDCs out of the development business.

Neighborhood Partnerships recognized an opportunity to bring people together in different ways than it had done at its inception. Fifteen years ago, the Oregon Individual Development Account (IDA) Initiative was started, and five years after that the Oregon Housing Alliance was formed. Then and now, both confront shrinking opportunities for members of our communities in very different ways.

The IDA Initiative focuses on building assets among community members with low-incomes through a matched savings plan. Individuals make a plan to buy a home, start a small business or get an education. They then save their own money, engage in skills building, and at the end of their process receive up to three dollars for every dollar they save. Asset building was — and still is — thought to be one of the most effective ways to tackle generational poverty.

In a different way, the many members of the Oregon Housing Alliance have secured more than 40 major victories for affordable housing policies in the state. Millions in lottery-backed bonds have been secured, protections for those facing foreclosure have been put in place and barriers for those with Housing Choice (Section 8) vouchers have been removed.

The IDA Initiative and the Housing Alliance are built on the foundation that Oregonians' ingenuity can only be harnessed if we come together.

Now, 25 years after Neighborhood Partnerships' founding, our communities face more challenges.

Across Oregon, both urban and rural communities are identifying the lack of available, affordable, and accessible housing as a primary barrier to community vitality. Last school year, nearly 20,000 school children in Oregon were homeless at least

once during the school year. A worker earning minimum wage in Oregon has to work more than 10 hours a day, seven days a week, just to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Oregon.

For various reasons, the market is unable to meet the region's housing needs, and the nonprofit housing providers are overwhelmed with demand. This problem creates barriers to equity, as communities of color, people with disabilities, the elderly, and other historically marginalized groups are affected at higher rates.

How will we all respond?

A milestone like a 25th anniversary compels people to look back, but it also causes us to look forward.

Historical lessons and research show our neighborhoods must come together to invest in asset building programs. Our coalitions need to expand and diversify the voices at the table. We must ensure that underserved communities, grassroots and emerging leaders are well represented. We need true consensus on the strategies and approaches private, public and nonprofit partners will follow to tackle the housing crisis in our state.

More than ever before it is becoming obvious just how interconnected we all are. Coming together isn't just the best way to innovate solutions to pressing problems — it's the only realistic way.

The saying "history repeats itself" is often used in a negative way. But as we sit here today we look forward to repeating a history of working together to ensure all Oregonians have a safe, decent and affordable community to live in.

Neighborhood Partnerships is hosting a conference on Oct. 29 and 30 to discuss the future of affordable housing and asset building in the state. Visit NeighborhoodPartnerships.org to learn more.

I AM NOT A POET

15 ^{OF} Street Roots Poetry & Art
YEARS

Genesis Redux

by Dharma Bum

The first man
Urban and wild
The hum of traffic
The music of the city
Rivers of asphalt
Canyons of concrete
This is the jungle
This is Eden
Under skies of wonder
We stand at the crossroads
With Infinity below our feet
As we wiggle our toes in a dream.

Order e-books and print copies at
iamnotapoet.org or
streetroots.org/iamnotapoet

alberta co op
grocery

small carts
big hearts



good.local.food

1500 ne alberta st.
albertagrocery.coop

503 287 4333
open to all 9am- 10pm daily



Kristina Wright | Real Estate Agent
Bellmoore Realty
503/479.5764
Kristina@PortlandHomeGal.com
"Like" on Facebook @ Portland Home Gal

- a knowledgeable marketer
- with a designer's eye
- a professional photographer
- and a responsive agent

All wrapped into one person




Want to learn more
about your vendor?
Find your vendor's
profile, and others at
news.streetroots.org