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Urban Neighbors almost one year old

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OKLAHOMA CITY – Happy Birthday, Urban Neighbors.

The group was established in May in Oklahoma City to be a venue for socializing, addressing issues, and improving the living environment for downtown residents.

What began as a loose-knit group of concerned downtown residents led by Jeff Bezdek four years ago now counts about 100 members from downtown residents and non-residents alike, as well as businesses in and around the downtown area.

The group is registered with the Neighborhood Alliance of Central Oklahoma as an official neighborhood association.

Last fall Urban Neighbors held its first elections and Brett Price, a real estate broker with Sperry Van Ness, became president.

Price, a resident of the Park Harvey apartments, said Urban Neighbors keeps adding to a diverse group of people that includes many professions and ages.

“We’ve added quite a few people in the last three months,” he said. “It’s all about growing the organization and getting the awareness out and getting involved in the community.”

The group has also gotten face-time with city leaders including Roy Williams, from the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, and Mayor Mick Cornett at its monthly gatherings.

Price said he expects membership to continue to increase as several condominium projects come online in the next year and homeowners begin moving into downtown.

“The people that are really going to sink their teeth into this are the condo owners because they have a lot more of a vested interest,” he said.

Two new residents to the Block 42 condo project relocated to Oklahoma City from Oregon about four years ago.

Gayle Wilson and her husband, Mark Huston, lived in Oregon for decades, but a job opportunity brought them to the Sooner State. They moved into their condo

about a month ago.

Wilson said after living in the suburbs for years, the couple wanted to live in a more urban environment in Oklahoma City.

Wilson and Huston not only bought a condo at Block 42 but Wilson also went to work for the project's developer, Grant Humphreys.

Wilson said she first heard of Urban Neighbors while renting an apartment at the Montgomery and quickly joined. She said they were thrilled to have an organized group to help with everything from restaurant recommendations to information on downtown housing.

"For a newcomer to the area it's a really great way to meet people," Wilson said.

Apartment and condo developers have also benefited from having an organized group of downtown residents and potential residents.

Judy Hatfield, president and CEO of Equity Realty, has plans for a retail, office and condo project at 132 Dean A. McGee Ave. called the Carnegie Centre. Hatfield plans to live in the building when it is completed.

She said Urban Neighbors is a wonderful organization to bring together a diverse group with a desire to continually improve downtown.

"It provides community for the downtown neighbors, which is cool," she said.

"They're creating excitement about downtown and they're becoming a very vocal mouthpiece for downtown."

Hatfield said the group provides a forum for developers, businesses and residents to express concerns, address specific needs, and make sure they are all on the same page.

"If you don't live downtown it's difficult to understand how it works," she said.

"From a developer's perspective I really rely on the input from Urban Neighbors."

Price said while the group hosts fun events like socials and a bowling league, it also focuses on the business and quality of life downtown for all parties involved.

"We want to meet our neighbors but at the same time we really want to tackle some issues people face downtown," he said.

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