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Community leadership conference coming up

By [Georgia Pabst](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Nearly 1,000 grass-roots community leaders from across the nation will come to Milwaukee this week for the four-day Community Leadership Institute sponsored by NeighborWorks America.

The program is designed to help residents strengthen their skills and share ideas on ways to improve their communities.

NeighborWorks America is a national nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., that was chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1978 as part of the Community Reinvestment Act, which encourages financial institutions to reduce credit and lending discrimination in low- and moderate-income areas.

The organization was created to provide financial support, technical assistance and training, and to bring people together to make their neighborhoods safer and improve the quality of life, said William Caplan, marketing director for the training division of NeighborWorks.

Today, 240 local organizations are part of the NeighborWorks America network, he said.

Locally, Select Milwaukee and Housing Resources Inc. are part of the network. Elsewhere in the state, the Neighborhood Housing Services of Beloit, Neighborhood Housing Services in Richland County in Richland Center, Neighborhood Housing Services of Southeastern Wisconsin in Racine and Neighborworks Green Bay are all members.

The leadership institute opens Wednesday and runs through Sunday at the Midwest Airlines Center.

A total of 1,835 rooms have been booked in the city for the meeting, according to Dave Fantle, vice president of public relations for Visit Milwaukee. He said Visit Milwaukee had worked hard to try to attract multicultural groups.

The institute features a wide range of workshops and seminars that discuss topics such as building leadership and getting people involved in small-town and urban areas; working together and dealing with foreclosures; stabilizing neighborhoods in tough economic times; strengthening organizations; making "green" a priority; fund raising; organizing; and using art as a community building tool. There also are workshops on youths, how to develop young leadership and how to get adults and youths working together.

Each organization that attends brings a team of eight neighborhood residents who receive training and then return to their neighborhoods to implement some of the ideas and strategies they have learned, Caplan said.

"These are not the leaders of their community, but residents who work on the day-to-day business of knowing their community and working to make it better," he said.

Part of the leadership institute also includes mobile learning labs, which include tours and discussions of Milwaukee neighborhoods.

On Saturday afternoon, those attending the conference will take bus, bike or walking tours of 14 neighborhoods, said Raymond Schmidt, executive director of Select Milwaukee.

"This will give people a chance to leave downtown and get to learn firsthand what a number of Milwaukee organizations are doing successfully or being challenged to do," he said

Among the 14 neighborhoods that are on the learning labs list are commercial revitalization in the Silver City and North Avenue Gateway areas; the collaborative efforts in Clarke Square; the grass-roots efforts in Walnut Way; and the cultural diversity and community activism in Sherman Park.

At the end of the institute, each team will create an action plan so they take back what they've learned to their communities, Caplan said.


A dinner will be held Friday night, and the eight recipients of the Dorothy Richardson Award for resident leadership will be honored. The award is named for a Pittsburgh activist and pioneer in the community-based development movement.

Schmidt said Jeannetta Simpson-Robinson, the late founder of Career Youth Development in Milwaukee, also will be recognized.



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