

NEIGHBORHOOD NETWORKS

Moderator: Michele Higgs
March 10, 2009
3 p.m. EDT

Operator: Thank you for standing by and welcome to the Neighborhood Networks Monthly conference call. Today's conference is being recorded.

At this time, I would like to turn the call over to Ms. Michele Higgs. Please go ahead.

Michele Higgs: Thank you, Colleen. Welcome everyone, to the Neighborhood Networks March conference call. As you heard, my name is Michele Higgs and today I'm joined by Tracie Godfrey. We represent the team of technical assistance coordinators who work with you to address the needs of the Neighborhood Networks centers around the country.

Thanks for joining us today. You know, we here at Neighborhood Networks are firm advocates of the importance of hosting special events for your center. Your Neighborhood Networks center can be a wonderful resource for gathering support for the residents of your property.

Well, today we hope to help you learn how to create events that will get your residents engaged and excited and get your community to take notice. Our call today is entitled "Special Events, Fun with a Purpose."

Everyone enjoys a celebration. Why not put them to work to draw attention to your center?

Although special events require work, focus, organization, and energy, they can be a key component of your center's marketing plan.

Parties make people feel good and promote kinship in a community, whether it's a grand opening, a cookout, an ice cream social, a recognition ceremony, or a monthly birthday celebration.

Periodic gatherings at the property help residents celebrate themselves and create a cooperative spirit. Folks enjoy coming together to share a hot dog with their neighbor. Even if business is on the agenda, such as a health fair or a job fair, special events offer opportunities for residents to get to know one another as well as the special opportunity for community vendors to showcase their services.

Did I mention there's food? When people can't make time for a meeting, they will come out for a party. Why? Because that special event usually means there will be food.

Today we will talk about the art and science of special event planning. We have two special people with us to tackle that topic. We will hear from Linda Daley who is our communications manager for Neighborhood Networks. She is talking about the business and the mechanics of planning events. We'll hear from Emily Wright, the executive administrator of the Grand Forks Housing Authority in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Emily's been planning and executing community events that are successful, fun, and effective.

Let me also note that Linda and Emily came together last year for both Regional Technical Assistance Workshops (RTAWs) to offer a session entitled, "Planning a Successful Neighborhood Networks Week Event."

You should go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org to print out the PowerPoints from their presentation.

After clicking on the 2009 link under the green "Want More Information?" bar on the home page, go to the green "Related Information" bar and click on the 2008 RTAW.

Then run down the page to click on the words in red, "presentation materials" under either venue. Look for "Planning a Successful Neighborhood Networks Week Event" and you can print out the PowerPoints for your use.

Finally, we will hear from Paloma Costa, another one of Neighborhood Networks' finest, our training and special projects coordinator, who will tell us about our own upcoming special events, the Regional Technical Assistance Workshops, or RTAWs, and Neighborhood Networks Week.

But, before we commence with our call, let me welcome our newest centers to the neighborhood; there are six centers this month.

There's Loiza Gardens Computer Learning Center in Loiza Puerto Rico; CVCC in Norwalk, Connecticut; AHEPA 250-II Computer Center in Waterford, Connecticut; Saybrook Village Computer Center in Old Saybrook, Connecticut; Southern Hills Family Center in Washington, DC; and Norwood Village Commons Computer Center in Manchester, Connecticut.

Connecticut's really doing it up there, aren't they? Now let me tell you about the resources that are available to you through Neighborhood Networks.

I'm sure you're familiar with our toll-free information line, which is 888-312-2743, where you can talk with staff about the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, and learn all about resident surveys and creating success stories or hosting a special event for your center.

There's also the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org where you'll find out about what's current, learn about funding opportunities and special events, and connect with your peers.

I encourage you to try online networking through the Neighborhood Networks online message board where you can share information with other centers.

Be aware that it is not a real time resource, but you can post your information and revisit the board in a day or so to see what kinds of responses you've received. Go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and click on the online networking link to the right under the green banner labeled "Helpful Tools."

Let me also remind listeners that a transcript of this call will be made available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site in about two weeks. Look for it in the conference call archives at the bottom of the home page.

Last among our resources is the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool, also known as the START business plan. START is your online resource for organizing your center's activities and tracking the achievement of specific goals by recognizing the needs of your residents and applying the resources in your community to address those needs.

Your center can grow into a strong resource for your residents and community. As centers complete their START business plans, they can focus on the annual assessment, review their progress and commence their ascent through the Center Classification process.

Completing the assessment and having it approved by your HUD coordinator elevates your center to Certified Center Classification. You can visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site for

details on advancing through the Neighborhood Networks Center Classification process or contact the Neighborhood Networks toll-free information line for further information and assistance.

START is easy to access and easy to update, just go to the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org and click on the link for the START business plan to the left of the home page.

Now, about our topic. To look at the process of special event planning from beginning to end, I've asked Linda Daley, our Neighborhood Networks communications manager, to give us an overview.

Linda, would you like to start us off?

Linda Daley: Sure. Good afternoon everyone. I hope everyone's having a great Tuesday. Emily, I know you're in the midst of a spring blizzard so I'm guessing your Tuesday could be better.

Today, I'm going to offer some tips and ideas that will hopefully help you plan a successful Neighborhood Networks Week event. It may seem like summer is months away, especially to you Emily, but now is the ideal time to start planning a Neighborhood Networks Week local event.

If I go too fast or you miss something don't worry, as Michele mentioned, the information I'll be sharing is adapted from a presentation I did with Emily at the 2008 RTAW and you can view the complete presentation on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

Let's get started. We're going to start off with a little bit about why you should host a local event and then we'll move into the how to host an event. When I'm done talking about the nuts and bolts and everything, Emily will share with you details of some events that she's organized and hosted.

So let's briefly talk about why you should host a Neighborhood Networks Week event. When HUD established Neighborhood Networks Week in 2000, it was hoped that centers would use the outreach opportunities provided by a national observance to showcase their results as well as the accomplishments of residents.

By showcasing these successes, centers demonstrate how they are a valuable community asset and increase awareness of the center with the community, potential funders, partners, and volunteers. An event not only shines the spotlight on your accomplishments, but also makes potential supporters aware of your needs.

If they know you need something, they might come through for you. HUD also hoped that centers would host an event as a way to strengthen community ties and express appreciation to all those who contribute to the success of their center and to the Initiative.

No center has the resources to do it all themselves; at least I've talked to staff at several centers and I've never come across one that says "we don't need any outside help."

Most centers rely on the generosity of partners and the hard work of volunteers to offer the programs and services that they provide. The Neighborhood Networks Week event provides centers with a chance to thank these individuals for their support, and a few kind words go a long way.

Since Neighborhood Networks Week was first observed, more and more centers are realizing that hosting a local event really has a lot of benefits and it really draws some attention to their centers. In fact, last year a record number of centers hosted local events.

Hopefully, that number will continue to increase with each passing year. So, now that we understand why it's advantageous to host an event, let's get down to business and discuss how you go about hosting an event.

I'm going to give you the key points and if you need any more information, check out the presentation we did at the RTAW online. You might also want to take a look at the Neighborhood Networks Week event planning guide.

If you've misplaced your copy, don't worry, the guide is also available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

The first step in planning an event is to pick the perfect event for your center. The key to attracting the maximum number of participants is to host an event that residents and community members want to attend.

For example, if your center is located on a senior property, make sure the event is of interest to senior residents. You probably don't want a bouncing house or face painting at the event. You also want to host an event that allows you the opportunity to showcase your center's programs, services, and successes.

Remember, the event should interest attendees but you do have an ulterior motive. You want to get recognition for your center and increase community awareness for your center and the Initiative.

When picking an event, you also want to know your planning and hosting capabilities. If you're the only one planning and you're going to be the door greeter and the setup committee, the hostess and the cleanup crew, you probably want to stay away from hosting a community block

party. That's fine, because you don't have to host a community block party to have a great event that accomplishes what you want to do, bring attention to your center.

An open house can be just as effective at showing off your center and expressing appreciation for all those that contributed to its success as a community block party. So don't feel like you have to host this huge event. Also, Neighborhood Networks created special event days and theme days. They are "Get Connected" day that features technology, "Do It For You" day that emphasizes self-sufficiency, and "Know Your Neighbors day" that focuses on building community and strengthening community ties. This gives you a starting point on what type of event you want to host.

If you want to do something to showcase the new computers that got donated to your center, you might want to participate in Get Connected day, host an open house to invite the donor who gave the computers, and recognize them. Hold a scavenger hunt that allows people to use the computers so the donator can see that their donation is being used and appreciated.

Next, you want to get help as there are a lot of components that go into planning a special event. Enlist the help of anyone who wants to help. It's a good idea to establish a committee and assign roles and responsibilities so everyone knows what they're doing and nothing falls through the cracks.

Another benefit of establishing a committee is that individuals on your committee may know someone in the community; they may know someone who knows someone who knows someone who would be willing to donate food or printing services or make t-shirts or banners.

So a committee is a good idea to get help and to promote your event. Speaking of donations, the next step is to solicit financial and in-kind donations from local businesses and organizations in-person.

A special event does cost money. It doesn't have to cost a lot, but it usually does cost something. If you can get help to defray some of those costs, that's fantastic.

If a business does donate or encourage businesses to donate, you might want to offer some sort of incentive such as allowing them to set up a table to distribute information, or recognize them on event posters or t-shirts.

You should also recruit volunteers to help host your event. The Neighborhood Networks Week event planning guide was just updated. It includes a volunteer recruitment flyer that you can post in your center or around the property to encourage people and invite them to help with the event.

Next, hammer out the logistics; this includes where the event will be held, what equipment you need, and decorations. Most events are either held directly at the centers or on the properties or in a common area. Then you want to create an agenda or a schedule, and invite speakers and presenters.

When inviting speakers ask them if they need anything, such as special equipment: a podium, microphones, projectors, anything.

You'll also want to create a guest list. It never hurts to invite local government officials to your event. They have a way of attracting the media, so extend the invitation. Inviting staff members of the local HUD office is always a nice gesture.

Once you've figured out your logistics – you know where you're going to have it and who's coming – you want to spread the word about your center. You can do this in a variety of ways. You could create a save-the-date postcard like Neighborhood Networks does for the RTAWs.

It doesn't have to be that flashy or a four color print job, it could be something simple that you could put in residents' mailboxes. You could create a flyer. You could post signs or posters in high traffic areas on the property and throughout the community or in the center.

You could post information to your center's Web site. If you don't have a Web site yet, do not worry. I'll put a little plug in for the Neighborhood Networks center Web site creation tool, which is on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

It's a great tool. If you can use Microsoft Word you can create a Web site. It takes about 30 to 60 minutes and the great thing about this tool is HUD hosts the server, so there are no fees.

So, you can get an online presence pretty easily and for free. I highly recommend checking out that tool.

You can also request a Neighborhood Networks Week banner form the Neighborhood Networks information center to display at your event. They're very nice banners and they allow you to showcase that your center is part of a larger national initiative.

When you're spreading the word about your center, don't forget to enlist the help of the media. One mention of your event on a radio show will get blasted out to potentially thousands of people for free and that's a good thing.

So if you can work with the media to spread the word that's fantastic. When working with the media, be sure you have a packet of information that gives them everything they need so they don't have to run down too much information.

You may want to create a press kit that includes a press release, a fact sheet on your center, and any success stories on your center.

There are Neighborhood Networks national materials such as the brochure. Also, there's a fact sheet on Neighborhood Networks Week in this year's event planning guide that provides some background information on why the observance was created and its history.

If you're thinking, "I don't have any success stories on my center," then I'll put in another plug. You have a success story if a resident took a class and got a job, or a student participated in your afterschool program and increased his grades and he got a college scholarship. Or if a partner donated new computers, or you have a great partnership that you just want to share, please feel free to drop me an e-mail and let me know.

I'd be happy to chat with you about it and if we write it up, it gets featured on the Neighborhood Networks Web site, which is a nice marketing tool that you could use to promote your center to your partners.

My email address is Linda, L-I-N-D-A dot S as in Sarah dot Daley, D-A-L-E-Y at Imco.com. Please feel free to drop me a line and let me know, I'd love to hear any success stories.

Okay, we were talking about working with the press. So you've created your press kit. The next step is to create a media list with the contacts of your local media representatives.

You want to be familiar with your media, know who covers what, and to whom to send the press kit materials. The more efficient you are with sending your information to the media, the better, because it gets to the right person quickly.

E-mail is usually the best way to submit media materials; editors like it. After you submit it, I'd only give them one or two days to sit with it before you follow up. Editors get hundreds of e-mails

every day and if you don't respond quickly, your e-mail is going to get buried under the other 700 e-mails that they get from other organizations wanting them to cover their events.

So send it via e-mail, give them a day or so, and then call back and just ask them if they need any information. If they have any questions, you can help them out, and gently encourage them to attend.

If a media representative contacts you, be responsive because they're usually working on a deadline. So the quicker you can get back to them, the better chance you have of them covering your event.

It's free advertising, so you want to use the media to your advantage. TARGET includes a whole section on working with the media and it includes sample media materials. If you misplaced your copy of TARGET, it is accessible on the Neighborhood Networks Web site.

You can access it online on the Neighborhood Networks Web site. So once you have planned the event, created an agenda, invited the speakers, and alerted the media, the next step is to attend to any last-minute details.

You'll want to confirm the speakers, run through the agenda making sure you have everything, and hold a brief volunteer meeting so everyone knows what they're doing.

If you're going to hand out certificates of appreciation, you want to prepare those and print them. Hang banners, decorate, and gather the information you're going to distribute at your event.

You want to do that because, again, you have an ulterior motive; you want to showcase your success and your center, as well as the Initiative.

So, you want to have some materials to spread out there. Finally when you think it's all over, it's not. Send thank you notes to speakers, presenters, volunteers, donors, partners, and anyone who helped host your event and made it a success.

Again, a few kind words of thanks go a long way. You want to follow up with any potential new partners, participants, reporters, and anyone who expressed an interest in your center.

Also, one last thing, we love to see photos of your event. Take lots of pictures of your event and submit them to neighborhoodnetworks@hud.gov and each year Neighborhood Networks creates a photo gallery of all the various center events.

It's nice to look through, see what everyone has done, and maybe get ideas for next year's events.

Okay, I think those are the planning highlights. If you have any questions or needs or if you'd like to review the presentation, it's online. The planning guide is a good source of information and TARGET is a good source of information for working with the media.

At this time if anyone has any questions or I don't know if, Michele, you wanted to hold those till the end.

Michele Higgs: I was going to hold them and let Emily's presentation layer over yours because I think it would be helpful. I will stop and see if anyone has questions because the information that you gave, particularly on reaching out and following up with the media might generate some questions.

So Colleen, do we have anybody on the line out there?

Operator: We do not at this time. If anyone does have questions, the question and answer session is electronic, please queue for questions by pressing star followed by the digit 1 on your touch-tone phone. If you're using a speakerphone, please be sure to turn off your mute function to allow your signal to reach our equipment. Once again that's star 1 on your touch-tone phone. We'll pause a moment to see - assemble a queue.

Michele Higgs: Okay.

Operator: Ms. Higgs, I'll turn the call back over to you; at this time, we have no questions.

Michele Higgs: Okay thanks. Linda, one thing I would like to ask you to do, would you give your e-mail address just one more time?

Linda Daley: Sure, it's Linda, L-I-N-D-A, dot S as in Sarah dot Daley, D-A-L-E-Y at Imco.com.

Michele Higgs: Okay good, because I'm certain folks will want to contact you. One last thing, when you mentioned TARGET, did you explain what that acronym stands for?

Linda Daley: No, I did not. TARGET stands for the Technical Assistance Resource Guides and Educational Toolkit. It's a comprehensive technical assistance binder that includes all kinds of information, from opening a center to program planning to evaluating your programs, to creating a budget, pretty much everything you need to know and we're still adding to it. So, it's a good resource.

Michele Higgs: Great! We want to make sure you got that out there. Okay, Emily would you like to tell us what goes on with your centers?

Emily Wright: Yes, thank you very much for giving a basic introduction to kind of the mechanics of planning the events. To get started, I want to talk a little bit about working with both residents and your staff to create a successful event.

I know in our office in Grand Forks we use event planning as a good team building activity. It's usually a time when we can pull everyone together and that includes your resident service coordinators, property managers, and volunteers.

Then, of course, any of your learning center employees, bring them together to share their ideas and to share their familiarity with the people who are either your residents or the people who use your learning centers on a regular basis.

When you do this, you ensure that you don't have ideas from just one person, and you can really cover all of the bases. The next step is making sure you cater the events to the needs of your residents.

At Neighborhood Networks, you want to ensure you have something for everyone. I think in most of our communities we probably have a star center, a center that stands out where the highest attendance is on a regular basis. Especially during Neighborhood Networks Week, it would be really easy to just do something big there every day and you could kind of guarantee that you'll have the attendance.

If you really branch out and make sure that you cover all of your locations, you're going to have better attendance at the center and hopefully you'll increase residents' awareness of what goes on, so that in future years they will be more active and have more participation in everything.

Another person who we tend to involve in creating our events is our resident representative on our board of directors. We're very fortunate to have this person, other learning centers or properties might have just a resident advisory panel or something along those lines.

Some of these names are educational; some just help the kids get out of the house for a while. Others provide opportunities that your residents might not be able to provide for themselves, whether it's a financial issue or they're physically unable, or whatever it might be.

On the elderly properties, our needs tend to be more for just the social atmosphere so this can certainly be something as simple as a bingo day. Maybe that's something you already do on a regular basis, but bringing in bigger prizes or something along those lines can increase participation.

You can also conduct big art projects, that's what we've done every year and I know Linda mentioned sending out save-the-date cards at some point. We've actually used our annual art project as the picture on our save-the-date feature.

So art projects end up providing something for next year. When you send out that save-the-date, you tend to have something that people can either remember you by or you that they can relate to somehow.

With the senior properties, we've also hosted events like a best pie contest. We have a lot of great older women who are phenomenal cooks. They get together with 10 or 15 of the residents and they'll pull together a pie contest.

Another possibility is a resident appreciation day. It's always great when we have a chance to appreciate our volunteers and our staff. I think for residents that's a big deal, too.

Some sort of a resident appreciation day is wonderful. These are also great opportunities for intergenerational activities. We frequently will have our younger kids or elementary kids from our afterschool program work at our elderly property. This could be a bingo night, but especially for the elderly residents, having that social atmosphere and hanging out with the younger kids is a great opportunity for them.

Our residents are also wonderful with the art projects and things along those lines. When it comes to the family properties, the needs tend to be more for healthy recreational activities, a positive environment for kids to learn and play. There is also a need to provide role models for the teenagers, so art projects might be where you involve more of your volunteers, and where you have more of the outside activities.

In addition, as far as planning your events go, this is a great opportunity to involve other nonprofits or service agencies in the community. They can use your events as a way to carry out their own mission. For example, last year we had volunteers in DePaul participate. DePaul had a new program and received funding to serve noon meals during the summer hours to kids who would normally have free or reduced meals in the schools.

So, they came to our property and serve noon meals. By the end of the program, we were serving about 50 meals a day to these younger kids and we got to the point where we were serving between 200 and 300 free meals that went out that week from that program alone.

That's something that was offered to our residents and it increased DePaul's numbers as well. So it was a great way for DePaul to carry out its mission. We hope that for future events, we'll be able to do the same thing where we can carry out our mission through our partner's work.

So, there are just some basic ideas about who we should pull together to create a successful event. The next step is all laid out in the event planning guide.

We've already talked about the first step, which is identifying an event committee. That's certainly essential. Last year, we had an event where people would work on their computers and they could earn points to earn a new or refurbished computer. That event was more catered towards the needs of job search and retention. So for that step, you may need to pick a smaller committee of two or three people.

When you're selecting a specific event, plan a general time table and the budget. Budgets are going to vary. For some centers, being able to spend \$100 on Neighborhood Networks Week or on a specific event is a big deal. Other centers are very large and their budgets are much more significant, so budget planning will differ depending on your individual centers.

The next step is soliciting support for your funds, your materials, and your volunteers. This is where I like to look at the benefit to those who are coming in to help us.

One of the biggest events that we've had over the last few years is the Best Pizza in Grand Forks contest. The first year we ended up having about 100 people come in; eight pizza places in town were represented. The pizza places served free pizza for everyone. We had a panel of judges and it just turned out to be a great event for everyone. So, you have a lot of free meals plus the pizza places got a lot of free press.

Our first year, we didn't have quite as much media coverage as we had hoped for; last year was our second year and we were very surprised by the attention the media gave us. We invited the food critic from the Grand Forks Herald, our local newspaper, to be on the judging panel. Simply

by getting the news out about a week ahead of time in his weekly food article, we were able to increase the visibility of the event.

We ended up having more than 300 people come and eat pizza last year. The pizza places were very pleased with it; they were the front page news the next day.

So they probably donated \$200, \$300, \$400 worth of pizza per pizza place and they got so much in return. If you were to look at the cost of an advertisement on the front page of the newspaper, it would certainly cost quite a bit more than that.

Another thing I like to do is create a poster, just a really simple poster that we put up in the complexes so that the residents have a list of the events for the entire week. Then the residents can pick what they would be most interested in. We try to invite all residents to all of our events, so that if we do have those "star" centers that really stand out, they might host our biggest events. Other people know that they're invited to the event, especially if they're in close proximity. The residents tend to come to the events even if they're not in their own location.

After that, you need to develop the specific details. You're looking at the length of the event, the speakers who are involved, or in the case of our pizza contest, we had to pick the judges we were going to have.

You can also host events where you're recognizing people for their volunteer hours or whatever it might be. Linda mentioned the invite list and the importance of involving your local government officials.

We happen to be a college town so whenever we do anything we try to involve people from the university. Also, when you invite the government officials it's a great opportunity for them to connect with their constituents.

So they're usually, at least in my experience, happy to be involved or at least recognize the event somehow. Again, any time you can connect with your media personalities on a personal level and get them involved in the events you're going to have a better turnout.

I know we've had our morning radio show hosts who have served at some of our events, helping as judges or whatever they may be needed for and they've been phenomenal at getting on the radio the next day and talking about how great the event was.

That's wonderful recognition and a really positive form of public awareness for our organization. The next piece is reconfirming all of your participants.

If it's appropriate, get speaker biographies and have an early walkthrough of the site. It is important to have someone involved in the event planning who is a detail-oriented person.

Little things will come up and you need to make sure that you plan for those things. I talked about our pizza contest a little bit earlier, that's a scenario where we were in a room that could hold about 150 people.

But, we had a great big beautiful courtyard so we figured we could fit 150 people out there. So capacity was not a concern at that point until the rain came. Then we had to come up with a last minute plan for what do we do now, how do we fit this many people in here, or how do we move them out a little bit quicker.

So always be sure to look at all of the possibilities, for as you know, in North Dakota and Minnesota we certainly have more weather issues than some other areas might have.

But even if your weather is sunny and gorgeous all the time, the day of your event tends to be the day when the weather's will be at its worst. So be sure you're ready for any possibility.

The next piece, step five, is holding a volunteer orientation session. I found that this was something that people who are really closely involved in the event need because they might miss details that they don't realize they have to share with the others ahead of time.

But, your volunteers who haven't been to every meeting or haven't been as closely involved need that information. If you have things written out for the volunteers ahead of time so they know exactly what their job is, the details of what they need to do, that's very helpful.

Also, certainly, is the recognition for the participants. I wanted to mention always sending out thank you notes. That is certainly a big deal. You need to make sure that they know, volunteers or donors or whoever, that they are very much appreciated and that you would like to have them involved next year.

The agenda of the events itself, fits in again with the information that you want to provide to the volunteers. Make sure everyone knows how long they're needed in a certain place and exactly what they need them to do.

Just figuring out all of the details is pretty essential. The final step is getting to the site early on the day of the event so that you can ensure that everything is in place and operational. Just make sure that you have everything covered.

You know when it comes to technology, which we all work with, it's a situation where if something's going to fail, it's going to happen about 20 minutes before you're supposed to get started. So do your best to have things set up as far ahead of time as possible. To really get things going smoothly, run through them a time or two.

If you have people who are supposed to help out, always send out reminders ahead of time so just in case they've forgotten, you can remind them that the event is going to occur.

Michele Higgs: Emily, thank you. You've given us quite a lot of information to go with here and I do have a question for you. What types of special events can you do that will cross all age groups from seniors to youth?

Emily Wright: The events that cross all age groups, you mentioned a little bit earlier, involve food and that's something that we've noticed quite a bit too. Where there is food, people will come and that's why the pizza event was certainly a big deal.

It was a people's choice award so it was just a matter of them being able to vote on each pizza. There were a lot of pizza places were involved, and there was a lot of community interaction.

Everyone likes to eat so that was a wonderful opportunity. Something else that we've done is intergenerational Wii. The kids, the little kids, and the teenagers will come over and they'll actually play Wii games with our elderly and disabled population.

That works out great because the kids end up teaching the elderly. It's a great way for elderly people who maybe can't bowl or play baseball any more, but know all the rules, to play using Wii.

Michele Higgs: Yeah, that could be a hoot

Emily Wright: Yeah, it's a lot of fun.

Michele Higgs: That is great. Now let me ask one more question, this one's for both of you. How would you say you measure the success of an event? Now I know Emily you said you had follow up from the media and that kind of thing.

But, if you can't do surveys with everybody, how do you know whether you hit the mark with your event, and Emily I'll start with you.

Emily Wright: Well I think right after the event it's all about the buzz within your community. I personally like to get out there and talk to the residents and see if they enjoyed it or not and if they would like to do it the next year.

I think that's a big deal and if they say they wouldn't, ask them what we should change to get them more involved. So, I would say that's the first step, connecting with them right away.

Then bringing it up again later, maybe six months down the road, to see if they still remember it and they still enjoyed it. But, your participation numbers are always the biggest way of looking at the success.

Michele Higgs: I see, Linda would you say the same thing?

Linda Daley: Yeah, I would say attendance. The attendance level certainly will let you know. Also, if you got media coverage, I think that signals a success because you just got your center free advertising to thousands of people.

I also would think if there was a spike in center use, if the amount of users went up and the amount of people enrolling in programs and just visiting the center. You could easily measure that.

Michele Higgs: I got it, thank you ladies. Well what I'm going to do now is ask Coleen if we have anyone on the line with questions for you. Coleen?

Operator: Once again, audience, it is star 1 to queue for questions. We currently have no one queued for questions.

Michele Higgs: No one's on the line yet? Okay. In that case, I'm going to introduce our final speaker and that's Paloma Costa. As I mentioned, she is also on the Neighborhood Networks staff as our training and special projects coordinator. She's going to talk a bit about our own upcoming events. Paloma?

Paloma Costa: Well I wanted to thank Linda and Emily for giving us some great information about the benefits and ideas for Neighborhood Networks Week.

It may sound like a lot of information for those who are new to Neighborhood Networks, but I wanted to reiterate there is a lot information that's available online to assist you with planning an event.

The Neighborhood Networks event planning guide can be found under the 2009 Neighborhood Networks link from the main page of www.neighborhoodnetworks.org. It is right under the 2009 RTAW link that Michele mentioned earlier, where you can access Linda and Emily's presentation for the RTAW.

Neighborhood Networks Week 2009 will be held August 3rd through 8th and we are encouraging all Neighborhood Networks centers to host at least one event that week.

Linda and Emily mentioned a lot of different ideas but there are resources in the event planning guide that will give you ideas for different theme days such as “Do it For You Day,” Get Connected Day” and “Know Your Neighbors Day.”

This site actually provides information about activities that you can print out and distribute to your residents for Neighborhood Networks Week. Within the next few weeks, there will be information about Neighborhood Networks Week events and a way to register online on that link that I mentioned.

Once you register, something new this year that we added is that you will have something pop up and give you access to additional resources only available for those who register their Neighborhood Networks event. So, we are encouraging you to register your event and also participate in national events, which will be announced on that page as well.

Neighborhood Networks Week is only one of our events this year; we also have the RTAWs. We have some great workshops such as the one Linda and Emily participated in a few years ago where people can hear information about operations, programming, and funding for Neighborhood Networks centers.

This year we have two RTAWs to be held in Dallas at the end of April and in Philadelphia July 15 through 17. Information about those events, including registration and travel information, will be available on www.neighborhoodnetworks.org by the beginning of next week.

And of course, if you have any questions please feel free to give us a call at the Neighborhood Networks information center at 888-312-2743. Special projects and training staff will be more than happy to assist you with the RTAW Neighborhood Networks Week.

Michele Higgs: Is that it?

Paloma Costa: That's it.

Michele Higgs: Okay, thank you so much and I think that there is information, as Paloma noted, on the Web site with the dates and what-not of the upcoming events.

As the events get closer, you will find even more details. I'm going to ask Coleen if we have anyone on the line. Has anyone called in with a question?

Operator: Ms. Higgs, it appears there are no questions at this time.

Michele Higgs: Okay, thank you much. In that case, I have one and Emily I'm going to give this one to you because you did mention using volunteers to help with the planning and execution of a special event.

How do you go about selecting volunteers? Are these folks who show up at the center all the time, or how do you know where to start in selecting volunteers to help you?

Emily Wright: Well I think when you're selecting volunteers it depends on the job. As far as creating the event and being closely involved in all of it, it tends to be the people who have been around more.

Maybe they are working with your afterschool program or what we see a lot of is people who come in with other agencies.

So they already have that human service aspect, or for whatever reason, they have invested in the project as well. That tends to be a little bit easier when you're dealing with someone who might actually run the show or be closely involved in the planning.

But as far as the details, usually there are some pretty small jobs where you can bring in almost anyone to do them. You know, there's always cleanup at the end of the night, so I don't think you have to be too picky when it comes to who can volunteer, it's just a matter of setting up jobs that start at the smallest responsibilities. So maybe that's where you let your kids be involved, up to some pretty heavy responsibilities where they're actually doing the media work or providing the materials and the programs themselves.

Michele Higgs: So you are able to have your volunteers take pretty significant roles in the work that you're doing for these events.

Emily Wright: Yes, absolutely. Again, it depends on the skills of the volunteers themselves but we also have other partner organizations that are providing volunteers. Being a university community, we're pretty lucky. We have a lot of kids; I shouldn't call them kids, we have 23, 24-year-olds who are a month away from **graduating and** will be teachers at that point.

It's great to pull them in and use their expertise, it is good practice for them to work with our kids, and also it's very beneficial for us as well.

Michele Higgs: So, it's a plus for them and a plus for you.

Emily Wright: Exactly; there needs to be a benefit to those who are giving financially or of their time. So, you need to look across the board to benefit everyone in the process.

Michele Higgs: Okay, gotcha. Now one other question was about your followup with the media. Is there a specific person who works directly with the media all the time or is that spread out among a couple of people?

Emily Wright: Well at our office that happens to be me, so it works out pretty well. But again, depending on the size of your organization, some might actually have someone who is in charge of marketing or PR.

At a lot of centers you just have your learning center coordinator and that's your staff. In the past we had our learning center coordinator write a lot of the press releases and handle basic information.

For us it's been easier; I've been the connection to the media throughout the year so they recognize my name a little bit more. I would say that if it's a choice between using a learning center coordinator or a volunteer, it is better to have that name recognition.

So, if you have someone who you know is going to stick around longer, that's certainly helpful to have your learning center coordinator handle the PR as opposed to having a volunteer who might be gone in a few months.

Michele Higgs: Okay, that's sort of what I was trying to get to, whether it was an individual who's going to be around for a while and who would be known by the media contacts.

Emily Wright: Certainly with the media it's a big deal to make sure that they know who you are, and that when the e-mail or phone call comes in, they want to listen to it and respond to it.

Michele Higgs: There was something else that you said and that was getting the buzz within the community, what's happening on the ground, as to whether activities were accepted and appreciated. You know walking around and talking to people is a good way to find out what's going on, you know seeing them face-to-face.

Emily Wright: Right.

Michele Higgs: I kind of liked that. Coleen I'm going to ask once more if there's anybody on the line.

Operator: We do have a question from Lee Harrison from the Bayview Apartments.

Michele Higgs: Hello Lee.

Lee Harrison: Good afternoon, how are you?

Michele Higgs: Good.

Lee Harrison: Good. You know I didn't really have a question, I just wanted to comment on the quality of the content on the call today, I think everybody did a really good job and had some great information. And I, for one, appreciate it.

Michele Higgs: Our thanks to Emily and Linda.

Lee Harrison: Thank you both. How are you? I think I know Linda.

Linda Daley: Hi Lee, how are you?

Lee Harrison: I'm well thank you.

Linda Daley: Good, good.

Lee Harrison: Well we certainly will be putting some of your suggestions into action.

Linda Daley: Well good. Well, you guys are very successful at hosting events.

Michele Higgs: Thank you so much for your comments, we appreciate that.

Lee Harrison: Okay.

Michele Higgs: Coleen?

Operator: And Ms. Higgs, at this time, we have no further questions; I will turn the call back over to you for any closing or additional comments.

Michele Higgs: Okay, my colleague, Tracie has a question so we're going to let her put that out there.

Tracie Godfrey: Hi, my question is for either of you regarding co-sponsors for events. How do you suggest we get local businesses like churches or schools or other organizations involved in an event? Oftentimes, the center just doesn't have the budget for the kind of event they want to run.

Michele Higgs: Would that be Emily?

Emily Wright: Yep, that's fine. Again, that goes to looking at how it can benefit them and what they can get out of it. So that's where I like to start out pretty far ahead of time and look at the goals of the organization, if it is a church or another service organization or even a business.

Look at what they are trying to get out of it. With our pizza contest, for example, we knew that we had to set up media coverage if they were going to donate that much food. So it was essentially not free advertising, but their donation that was getting the advertising for them.

Again, with other service organizations, other partner agencies, it's the same thing, how can we cater an event to their needs? As long as the event also benefits our residents, we'll both end up getting something out of it.

So, it's letting go of our preconceived ideas and taking their ideas first and then catering the event to those ideas.

Michele Higgs: Linda, anything on that one?

Linda Daley: No, I think Emily said it quite well.

Michele Higgs: Okay, great, thank you much. Coleen, if we have any other questions?

Operator: Not at this point, Ms. Higgs.

Michele Higgs: Okay. Well actually, we're getting close to the bottom of the jar here so I am going to say thank you. Thank you to Emily, thank you to Linda, and thanks to Paloma and Tracie for joining us today.

I think this has been a great call with a lot of good information. Yet, the RTAWs are coming and Neighborhood Networks Week will be here before you know it.

Next month's conference call, which will be Tuesday April 14, 2009 at 3 o'clock pm, will be on the topic *Building a Board*, and that will help you learn how to approach building a board of directors for your organization.

Now, don't forget all of the resources that are available to you through the Neighborhood Networks initiative. Aside from the Neighborhood Networks information line which is 888-312-2743, there is the Neighborhood Networks Web site at www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Before I get off of that topic, let me tell you again where you can find the information from Emily and Linda's presentation.

You would print out their PowerPoint from the Neighborhood Networks home page by clicking on the 2009 RTAW link under the green "Want More Information?" bar. At the home page, go to the green "Related Information" bar and click on the 2008 RTAWs.

Scroll down the page and under the words in red, "Presentation Materials" under any venue look for "Planning a Successful Neighborhood Networks Week Event," and then you can print out those PowerPoints for your use.

Now you heard about the two great events; Paloma's given you some details. The RTAWs will take place in Dallas, Texas April 29 through May 1 and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania July 15 through 17.

Neighborhood Networks Week is August 3 through 8. With all this good information that you've received today, I'm sure you're ready to begin planning your events.

Don't forget the toll-free number to register. Again, I want to thank Emily and Linda and Paloma and Tracie, and I want to thank all of you for joining us today, please come back and listen in on Tuesday the 14th for *Building a Board*.

Thanks everybody. Take good care and we'll talk to you next time.

Operator: And ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude today's conference call. We thank you for your participation. Have a great day.

Michele Higgs: Thank you ladies.

Emily Wright: You're welcome, thank you.

Linda Daley: You're welcome.

END