



# **BUILDING BLOCKS**

Rediscovering the Art of Neighboring

# **NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK PARTY KIT**

**AN EASY HOW-TO GUIDE  
TO ORGANIZE A NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK PARTY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

A neighborhood block party is the opportunity for neighbors to get together, meet each other, have fun, and maybe work together on a common activity.

## **10 REASONS TO HAVE A BLOCK PARTY**

- To have fun – no excuses or reasons are needed to celebrate.
- To provide an opportunity to know your neighbors and where they live.
- To establish friendships.
- To increase that sense of belonging to a community.
- To learn a little about each other and know who might need a little extra help from time to time.
- To meet neighbors on your block that might be able to help you with a gardening problem, or lend you that needed ingredient for your recipe.
- To encourage neighbors to look after the neighborhood.
- To help with safety/crime prevention by knowing who lives where and who does not.
- To increase security by knowing each other's schedules.
- To develop an opportunity to meet some of the old time neighbors and learn about your community history.

## **PLANNING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD BLOCK PARTY**

Things to consider when organizing your event.

### **1. GETTING STARTED**

- The idea of a neighborhood block party is to bring neighbors together. It's a good idea to find 1 or 2 neighbors to help you with the event.
- One can take the "Lone Ranger" approach, and it can be a great event. However, it may make it more difficult to find someone else to organize it next year.
- The first step is to create an Organizing Committee. It is important to include everyone in the decisions about the event.
- If this is the first time you may want to send out a flyer to explain what a Block Party is, encourage attendance, perhaps share some of the benefits, get opinions on how to handle the food, and possible dates and times to have the event.

- Enlist as many neighbors as you can to help out. Someone can type the flyer; someone else can collect them. You may want to ask some kids to drop the flyers in the mailboxes.

## **2. TYPES OF BLOCK PARTIES**

Which type of block party will work best in your neighborhood? Try not to go overboard, it can make people feel the event is too much work...Keep it Simple!

- Barbecues - organizers purchase all that is needed and neighbors provide the money; - everyone brings his or her own meat.
- Picnics -- everyone brings their own meal;
- Pot luck - everyone brings one dish;
- Catered -- everyone shares the cost and the food is purchased.

## **3. HOW BIG TO MAKE IT**

- Start off with a smaller event rather than a large one. It can always grow, but it is hard to shrink it.
- In selecting who to invite, use natural neighborhood boundaries where possible (i.e. end of the block). If you are planning a street or cul-de-sac party, you need to invite everyone from that area.
- Decide early and make it clear in your flyer if this will be a block party restricted to those on the street/block or whether people can invite friends/relatives (if yes how many).

## **4. LOCATION**

- A neighbor's backyard
- House
- Garage (rainout)
- Common room in a condo unit
- Alley \*\*
- Street \*\*
- Park \*\*

\*\* Because these locations are on public lands, an application or permit may be required. Safety needs to be an important factor in planning!

## **5. CITY APPLICATIONS AND PERMITS**

- If you want to close down a street or re-direct traffic, your city may have application requirements.
- Permits may also be required if the event involves a public park, alcohol consumption, sound-amplifying equipment, etc.
- Remember that at the end of the function, public sites need to be cleaned and left in good condition.
- Look online at your city's website and call city hall to obtain more information about the requirements where you live. Often if you search "block party" on the website, you will find policies and additional resources.

\*\*\*Don't let obstacles stand in your way...It is worth it!\*\*\*

## **6. THE TIMING TO GET THE EVENT PLANNED**

- For a first time block party, distribute the first flyer requesting feedback 4 to 5 weeks before the event.
- Adjustments may need to be made if a neighbor already has an event of their own planned.
- Once the Committee has looked at all the suggestions, the final flyer with date, time and what to bring should go out 3 weeks before the event.
- Mid-May to end of August is a good time.
- A weekend date or holiday is often the best times for the event.
- Have an alternate rainout day planned, just in case.
- Keep in mind who lives in the neighborhood when setting the hours for the party.
- If young children or seniors are living near the party area plan to finish by 9:00pm.

## **7. GETTING THE WORD OUT**

It is important to keep neighbors informed. Here are some ideas:

- Flyers can be used with a request to drop back their suggestions for the event in your mailbox.
- Information can be gathered from your neighbors by going door-to-door. This adds a personal touch and people often offer to help.

- A casual approach can be used to inform neighbors as you see them out working in their yards.
- Neighbors can be called on the phone. (If you don't know your neighbors, a reverse directory telephone book can be used. They are available at libraries.)
- Make an extra effort to get your new neighbors out to the event.
- To reach neighbors in Townhouses, apartments and condos, it is best to approach the manager. They will let you know how to get in touch with the residents.
- Take every opportunity to talk it up in the neighborhood as often as possible prior to the event.

## **8. ROLE OF THE ORGANIZERS**

- Make decisions about the set up.
- Act as a greeter at the event.
- Introduce new neighbors and help them make connections.
- Make sure the clean-up is done. (You may wish to inspire clean up by rewarding the children with a prize.)

## **9. SET UP**

- Set up a **sign-in book** for records for the next year, and it can help develop a contact list for the neighborhood.
- **Nametags** can be a great help.
- Decide what you want neighbors to write on their name tags (e.g. -first and last names, house numbers).
- Line up **tables** for the food and have a few **garbage cans** available.
- Decide whether you will coordinate or everyone will bring their own **Tables and chairs Plates, cutlery and cups, Beverages**. If using **barbecues**, who will bring them?
- Institute a bathroom policy "everyone to use his or her own", so that home security is maintained.
- Decide if **pets** are allowed.
- Be ready to oversee the **clean up** after the event.

## **10. ACTIVITIES DURING THE EVENT**

What should we do during the event?

- Visit and eat. Over the centuries, food has always had a very social component in societies.
- Games for kids (some organized, some they can plan themselves).
- Take time to introduce one another and point to one's house. This can be done in a game format
- Encourage the talent in your neighborhood to come forward such as musicians, magicians.

## **OTHER WAYS TO GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORS**

- Christmas gift exchange
- Garden tour party
- Neighborhood garage sale
- When in doubt, ask your neighbors for ideas.

## **FINAL REMINDERS**

- Neighbors should observe security precautions by keeping back doors locked and equipment in sight.
- Remember when setting up tables and chairs that emergency vehicles may need access.
- You may wish to post signs the day before the event to remind everyone to remove cars for events involving street closure.