

Ferdie J. Deering

Communities Find Neighborliness Can Make Successful Comeback

NEBHORLINESS is making a comeback, in spite of contrary forces that have all but destroyed many neighborhood ties.

Neighborhoods debilitated by forced busing of children to schools across town are being drawn back together by the impact of crime, much of which is committed by school dropouts.

Other neighborhood associations have been formed to mobilize residents' influence to work out zoning and racial problems, fire and police protection, lighting and streets.

This is local government at work, and results may come more quickly and be more acceptable than edicts handed down from Washington, or even the state capitol and city hall. Once banded together, neighbors find many ways to work for mutual benefit and to help each other in fun and trouble.

Real estate men sometimes advertise "Home for Sale," when they mean "House for Sale". People can buy a house, but they must make a home. In a larger sense, the same is true of communities. Developers can build long rows of houses, but they don't become a neighborhood until people make them into one.

The much publicized "flight from the inner city to the suburbs" may be motivated by a desire to live in a better neighborhood, but this is not always the outcome.

At the same time, the old neighborhood may suffer. Complaints are heard that leaders have moved away, leaving the less prosperous to face deteriorating homes, frustration, burdensome taxes and growing crime problems.

But there also are success stories

of neighborhoods where those left behind worked together to protect and improve their property. New leaders rise up to activate love of home and neighborhood among those who are left.

For more than a decade during the 1940s and 1950s, The Farmer-Stockman magazine and Oklahoma State University Extension Service conducted a Rural Neighborhood Progress Contest in which a total of more than 400 rural communities took part.

Just as often as not, the winners were neighborhoods which spent little money while uniting their efforts to do much with what they had. Community spirit, not dollars, is the key to good living anywhere. Neighborhood desire will provide money.

A few weeks ago, in an address to historians, Gov. David Boren observed that national and state governments have become too large and unresponsive to individual citizens. He said one problem is obtaining a consensus of what people want.

"We must look toward smaller units of government where people become more closely involved with finding solutions to some of their problems," the governor said.

The neighborhood, wherever it is located and no matter how large or how small, how rich or how poor it may be, offers our greatest opportunity for people to start taking back power of government that has been usurped by bureaucrats.

Anybody can be a good neighbor, if he wants to be, and any community can become a good neighborhood, if the people living there want it to be one.