

Sexton Street Neighbors Bring Beauty to their Neighborhood

By: Madison Schulman

A resident of Sexton Street in New Britain for 26 years, Manny Sandoval is looking to revitalize his long neglected neighborhood with the Neighborhood Change Builders.

After eventually realizing that his house needed to look better, Sandoval decided it was time to put the work in. He said he was inspired by various homeowners in the neighborhood who always had their homes looking nice with plants and flowers.

Sandoval had first joined the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ), trying to work on a larger scale in neighborhoods such as North Street. The homeowner eventually decided he wanted to isolate his own street, and work solely in that neighborhood.

“I look[ed] at those two houses, I say you know what, those two houses look nice. I think we need to start doing something,” said Sandoval.

He then took initiative, fixing up his yard and backyard. Sandoval put small painted pots with flowers in them at the front of his house.

Once he finished with his own house, he decided to help the homeowners next door. Sandoval noted that once their house was done, the homeowners next to them wanted to make their house look nice as well.

The idea for the group came last year, but Sandoval said it actually came into effect this year.

Sandoval ended up contacting the rest of the homeowners in the neighborhood, and decided on a date to start working together. Since then, the group communicates through text, and decides when they would like to get together, calling themselves the Neighborhood Change Builders.

“We're all homeowners who are just slowly trying to make their homes a little bit better,” said Sandoval. “By everybody fixing up their own little area and making their own little spot better, that makes the whole block start to look better.”

The group of nine or ten homeowners focus on home improvements, specifically landscaping and repairs. Sandoval said they are trying to beautify their homes, while making the value go up in the process.

The Neighborhood Change Builders most recently collaborated with Neighborhood Housing

Services of New Britain, Inc. They were able to put multi-colored chrysanthemums, pumpkins, bales of hay, and planted bulbs around their neighborhood.

They also previously held a planting this past June, which ended with a cookout on Sandoval's property.

He said these events are a great way for people in the neighborhood to meet each other, and build that connection. Sandoval also added that the neighbors are starting to look at each other differently.

He said he figured people first need to start feeling that they're being heard, as well as being included and that someone is trying to beautify their neighborhood. Sandoval explained that these homeowners are used to having ugly homes, as they know they are just temporarily there.

"I'm trying to prove that we do have control over making things look better, and that if we do it together, we can make it better," said Sandoval.

Sandoval noted that the Sexton Street area has dealt with negative associations for a long time. The homeowner is now trying to change that.

"I want to make sure that we try to get that look away, we try [to] make it so they can see us in a better light now," said Sandoval.

He explained that the neighborhood has changed slightly over the years, but nothing to an extent where people take care of the area.

Sandoval said abandoned buildings that were used to sell drugs were previously knocked down, with Habitat for Humanity coming in to build various houses in the empty lot. However, the neighborhood still needed more attention, and still does today.

In order for the Neighborhood Change Builders to thrive and expand, Sandoval said at least 80 to 90 percent of homeowners in the neighborhood need to be involved.

He said that he realizes the bigger buildings are not owned by anyone who's living in the community, so that might be a challenge to get people involved. However, once everyone else gets involved, hopefully the people in those buildings will want to help out, said Sandoval.

Currently, immediate plans include more community cleanups, and small repairs/cosmetics such as painting porches. Sandoval and his wife Iris are also thinking about a mural project, possibly on North Street.

Sandoval said he hopes the group will grow to encompass the whole NRZ, and that the plan is to eventually grow bigger.

“To me, I think the Neighborhood Change Builders is hopefully [and] is going to be the next new way of connecting everybody together,” said Sandoval.