

METLIFE FOUNDATION COMMUNITY-POLICE PARTNERSHIP AWARD WINNER

Cincinnati,
Ohio

Revitalizing Over-the-Rhine

CINCINNATI, OHIO

LEAD PARTNERS

Keep Cincinnati Beautiful

Over-the-Rhine Revitalization Corporation

Cincinnati Police Department



Renovated storefronts replaced vacancy and blight in the OTR target area as a result of the partners' work.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For years, Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood was home to some of the city's worst crime and blight. Yet in just three years' time, a collaboration between a variety of community organizations and the Cincinnati Police Department yielded radical reductions in crime and improvements to quality of life in the area. Community organizations that led the collaborative approach included Over-the-Rhine Revitalization Corporation, a subsidiary of the OTR Chamber of Commerce; Keep Cincinnati Beautiful, a non-profit dedicated to educating and empowering residents to take responsibility for improving their environment; and Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation, a non-profit development entity.

By leveraging their unique strengths and resources together with the police, these partners transformed problem properties and public spaces in Over-the-Rhine and significantly improved public safety. As one independent property developer recently said of the effort: "There used to be several streets in Over-the-Rhine that I would not feel safe walking or driving down. That is no longer the case today."

NEIGHBORHOOD BACKGROUND

Over-the-Rhine (OTR) is a neighborhood located in the heart of Cincinnati, just north of the Central Business District. It was established in the 1800s and named for its large German immigrant population. Once a densely populated, thriving neighborhood, the arrival of the Great Depression marked the beginning of a steady population decline. By the year 1970, the area's population had declined by 50 percent over the prior two decades, and vacancy and abandonment were apparent.

Art and murals helped beautify commercial areas while longer-term revitalization plans took hold.



Today, OTR is Cincinnati's poorest neighborhood, with 75 percent of the population living below the poverty line. In the 2000 census, its median annual income was measured at just \$11,363. Approximately 76 percent of the neighborhood's 7,600 residents are black, with the remaining a mixture of Hispanic, Asian, Native American and Appalachian descent.

Over the past several decades, OTR has known much violent crime and heavy drug trafficking and use, as well as the loss of many businesses and other economic resources. While the neighborhood is home to many prized cultural assets—such as the Music Hall, Ensemble Theatre and Pendleton Arts Center—crime and blight have long deterred many potential patrons. Affirming its distressed state, the National Trust recently recognized OTR for its many 19th century Italianate structures and simultaneously designated it as one of America's Most Endangered National Historic Districts.

PROGRAM STRATEGY & ACTIVITY

Creating a Structure for Community-Police Cooperation

At the outset of their work together, the OTR partners identified enhancing communication between police, residents and business owners as a top priority. Their guiding philosophy was that increased cooperation would help foster reductions in both crime and fear, which could in turn pave the way for redevelopment and investment in the area. In pursuing this goal, OTR benefited from the Cincinnati Police Department's (CPD's) commitment to Problem Oriented Policing, which

created official structures and standards for community-police cooperation and joint problem-solving.

The OTR Revitalization Corporation and CPD divided the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood into five Safety Sectors, a concept modeled on work done by Downtown Cincinnati Incorporated in the Business District. The Safety Sectors were sub-sections of the neighborhood, each with its own distinct characteristics and needs. For example, one such Safety Sector is the Findlay Market/Brewery Sector, unique for its produce-related economy and resident demographics, which contrasts with the Washington Park Safety Sector, rich in cultural assets for its proximity to the Art Academy and Music Hall.

All Safety Sectors hold regular meetings in which local residents and business owners are invited to speak with representatives from the OTR Chamber and Keep Cincinnati Beautiful as well as with law enforcement representatives that include Cincinnati Police Department officers, district commanders, captains and sergeants. In the early days, the meetings provided a new forum for residents to voice their concerns and share information about local public safety problems. In addition, they cemented positive community-police relations by enabling community members to help shape crime-fighting strategy as they pinpointed problem locations and discussed priorities with police.

Working in partnership, community members and police also used their Safety Sector meetings to craft action plans and

design projects that, with guidance from the OTR Chamber and Keep Cincinnati Beautiful, addressed many of the concerns raised at the meetings. All five of the Safety Sectors were awarded at least one City grant in recent years to support plan implementation. Grants received during 2005, for example, funded safety, clean-up and beautification projects, such as the installation of surveillance cameras, the creation of a police detail and the purchase of art supplies for mural painting.

Resident Empowerment

Empowering residents to share responsibility for their neighborhoods' safety has been a consistent theme in all of the partners' work. Beyond organizing work led by community organizations, the Cincinnati Police Department's Citizens on Patrol program has been an important tool to advance resident involvement in the maintenance of public safety. To date, 22 resident volunteers in OTR have been trained by the police, and they now conduct an average of three patrols each month during which they note and report suspicious activity. The visible presence of the patrol helps not only to deter crime but to increase residents' feelings of comfort and safety in the area.

Another important organizing vehicle was an awareness-raising marketing campaign run by the OTR Chamber which aimed to enhance resident problem-solving capacities and vigilance. The OTR Chamber hung signs throughout the neighborhood denoting drug-free zones and distributed "You Are the Eyes of Over-the-Rhine" cards that provided information on available

public clean-up services. As another part of the campaign, the City offered seminars for residents on such topics as Community-Police Partnering, Litter Prevention and Terrorist Awareness.

Through grant funding from the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, private corporations and property management companies, the OTR Chamber also supports a collaborative effort by law enforcement, community residents, property owners and local businesses called the Drug Elimination Task Force. With an explicit goal of disrupting drug markets, this program deploys off duty and retired police officers, selected based on merit and police skills, to conduct undercover operations driven by tips from residents and business owners. The improved community-police relations in OTR have been critical to the Task Force's success, given that residents and local merchants provide much of the information needed for operations and arrests. The off duty and retired police detail has earned a great deal of respect and recognition from the community, which further bolsters trust and engagement across institutional lines.

The OTR Chamber also helped policing efforts through the establishment of the Hot Spots Hotline initiative, which provided OTR residents, workers and property owners with the opportunity to anonymously report crime through calls to a hotline. All of these calls get automatically directed to an answering machine that allows callers to leave an anonymous tip, or if they prefer, to request an officer return their call.



Multiple community and city agency partners shared resources and volunteered time to clean up vacant and blighted spaces.

MAKING VACANT SPACES SAFE PLACES

The OTR partners used the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to guide their safety strategies. CPTED became a tool through which they considered ways to modify physical spaces to minimize opportunities for crime.

As the OTR partners analyzed problem spots through the CPTED lens, they hit upon a number of opportunities to create neighborhood greenspaces while also improving safety. This was their approach in tackling crime in a vacant lot adjacent to OTR's Findlay Market, Cincinnati's only original public market still in operation, where second, third and fourth generation family members continued to operate stands that originally opened in 1855.

Bordering the market's southern end was an abandoned lot, situated between an apartment building and a parking lot meant for Findlay Market shoppers. In utter disrepair, the lot had become a hub for illegal dumping, prostitution and drug sales. Local residents avoided the area and market shoppers feared to park their cars nearby.

Keep Cincinnati Beautiful formed a partnership with the Findlay Market Corporation and the Brewery District / Findlay Market Safety Sector to coordinate a "greening" of the abandoned lot. They brought in the City of Cincinnati's Department of Public Services to cut down the overhanging vines and enlisted myriad volunteers who worked tirelessly to fill the lot with fertile soil, flowering plants and shrubs. These volunteers came from other partnering organizations such as Friends of Findlay Market, The Ad Club, Give Back Cincinnati, Hamilton County Master Gardeners and IMPACT OTR. To enhance the area's stability while the transformation occurred, the Cincinnati Police Department increased foot patrols in the area.

Soon, the once-neglected, crime-ridden lot became home to a carefully landscaped butterfly garden, with open lines of sight through to the next street. The beauty and openness of the new space assured market shoppers, while the criminal element moved out and on.

In the Mulberry and McMicken Safety Sector of the neighborhood, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful and its partners used a similar greening strategy to address a series of neglected city steps along Mulberry Street. The steps were surrounded by dark overgrowth that pro-



Young people in OTR played important roles in cleaning up the neighborhood and creating public art.

vided a protective cloak for the drug deals and prostitution that flourished amidst the neglect. With a Safe & Clean grant funding the efforts, local residents provided volunteer labor and helped to recruit professional in-kind services such as landscaping design and supplies. Trees and excess brush were torn down, as were several dilapidated buildings, providing clear visibility along the steps. As a result, both residents and police patrols could easily survey the area and opportunities for hidden criminal activity were minimized. While the overgrown green space was eliminated, the steps were landscaped into terraces in a re-greening effort where residents planted a series of small gardens.

The gardens are now deemed safe enough by residents to be used for quiet reading and reflection, as well as for the occasional cocktail party where residents and guests enjoy excellent views of the city. The clean up has also catalyzed other rehabilitation and development in the area; new construction along Mulberry recently reached an all-time high and appears to be on the rise. Once again, a greening effort combined with strategic law enforcement proved to be a strong remedy for crime in OTR.



Pictured from top: Flowers, landscaping and art helped transform OTR’s “crack alley” into an “Imagination Alley” of which residents could be proud; Murals provided an opportunity to beautify the neighborhood, prevent graffiti and share residents’ pride in Over-the-Rhine.

All tips and complaints are addressed and the ensuing results reported monthly at the five different Safety Sector meetings.

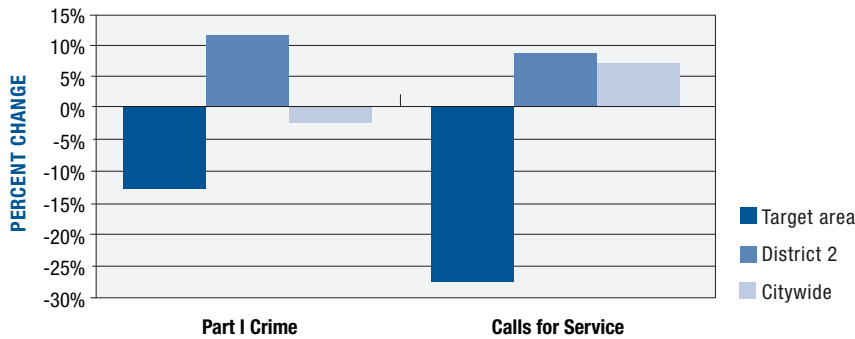
Targeting Problem Properties

Beyond organizing residents and improving community-police trust, the OTR partners knew that their strategy also needed to include changing the physical landscape of the neighborhood—in particular the properties and blocks that were perpetual crime magnets. In collaboration with the police, the OTR Chamber started by hanging ‘No Trespassing’ signs on over 700 selected properties, an effort which significantly reduced the number of individuals entering or loitering in the areas for illicit purposes. Controlling this behavior reduced the opportunity for criminal activity and helped restore security in problem areas.

Looking to more long-term solutions, the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) became another key partner in the effort to disrupt and eliminate crime. When reviewing arrest data, calls for service, Hot Spots Hotline crime tips and the concerns community members raised in Safety Sector meetings, it became apparent to the police that several specific locations were generating the most trouble. 3CDC became a lead player in reducing crime in these areas, having already set its sights on some of these same locations because the visible presence of criminal behavior was frightening away potential developers and reinvestment opportunities.

With this combined recognition of a problem, the police increased patrols and took a zero tolerance attitude towards criminal behavior in and around the identified problem properties. As a result, crimes that would have normally produced a warning or citation now instead resulted in an arrest. 3CDC, the police and the OTR Chamber additionally solicited City agencies to help reduce access to vacant buildings in close proximity to these locations, to enhance litter control efforts and to survey and intensify the enforcement of building code compliance. 3CDC then set out to purchase problem properties from the owners, relieving them of what had become a heavy burden of liability under increased City and law enforcement pressure.

Change in Part I Crime and Calls for Service: 2005–2006



Part I crime and calls for service decreased in the OTR target area from 2005 to 2006, while crime increased or declined far less in other districts (see District 2 comparison) and the city overall.

On a monthly basis the OTR Chamber, OTR Revitalization Corporation and the Cincinnati Police now meet with 3CDC to brainstorm ideas for ways to improve the safety of the properties purchased by 3CDC and their development partners. Simple tactics, such as erecting a fence in a building’s backyard to block a potential escape route, have had a tremendous impact on crime. Moving parking signs and meters was another tactic, one that helped stop drug dealers from strategically parking their cars so as to block views of open air drug sales.

Designing Safer Spaces

Imagination Alley was originally a small, blighted park located in the heart of OTR on Vine Street, a major thoroughfare from the downtown business district that leads to the university and hospitals. With thousands of cars traveling this route each day, drug buyers and sellers had easy access to one another. Furthermore, because of the many side streets, the area also provided easy escape routes and hiding places when enforcement actions were taken. As the cause of near constant calls for police service (over 1,700 in the year 2004 alone), it had received the nickname “Crack Alley.” In the five-block surrounding area, there stood 15 boarded-up and abandoned buildings.

To address these problems, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful took the lead in transforming the park from a community liability into a community asset, one that would: (1) encourage social interaction among neighbors; (2) promote pride in the community;

and (3) discourage littering, loitering and drug crimes. To this end, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful wrote two grant proposals in conjunction with the OTR Chamber that resulted in funding for new landscaping of the park, as well as funding for the addition of planters, benches, lighting and trash cans. These improvements were part of an effort to apply Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to the area—in essence, to change the physical environment to reduce opportunities for crime and send a message that disorder would not be tolerated.

The Art Academy of Cincinnati, which in 2002 had already begun efforts to improve the park through community art projects, was brought on as an additional partner. The school relocated to the immediate area in 2005 and with support from numerous grants, helped plan, design and install a new mosaic arch at the park’s entranceway as well as several wall mosaics. Further aiding the revitalization efforts, the Art Academy hosted a session for various community stakeholders to discuss long-term planning for Imagination Alley, enabling residents to voice their concerns and design suggestions.

Informed by the results of this meeting and its own goals for beautifying the park, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful led clean-up efforts, including purchasing materials and supplies, hiring landscaping professionals and serving as a liaison between City agencies which contributed to the park transformation (including the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, Cincinnati Parks, the Hamilton County Sheriff Department, and Neighborhood Services). Keep Cincinnati Beautiful also helped locate and coordinate volunteers to participate in clean-ups and ongoing maintenance. In addition to local residents, volunteer teams included Architecture & Design students from the nearby Miami University and General Electric employees.

Keep Cincinnati Beautiful continued to improve the surrounding area by partnering with youth from the community to

Police District 1, which encompasses the partners' target area, was the only district in the City of Cincinnati where there was a significant decrease in crime from 2005 to 2006. Part I crimes including murder, aggravated assault and burglary declined by nearly 19% in District 1, while Part I crime went up in many districts and declined less than 2% in the City overall.

create moveable murals that were placed on abandoned buildings bringing beauty and hope to the neighborhood. To stabilize the area and build resident confidence as the effort was underway, police visibility was increased through added foot patrols. In addition, the City focused services on the area to ensure that building code, health code and litter violations along Vine Street were addressed in a timely fashion. Again, the OTR partners' efforts to deploy a diverse array of enforcement and beautification resources simultaneously created the desired effect—Imagination Alley became a safer, more stable asset in the neighborhood that eventually required less police attention.

PROGRAM IMPACT

Public Safety Impact

By 2006, Part I crimes (including murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny and auto theft) had declined in OTR by 22 percent and Part II crimes (non-aggravated assault, vandalism, sexual offenses, drugs, family offenses, and disorder offenses) had declined by 15 percent. In 2006 alone, the Over-the-Rhine Chamber Drug Elimination detail made over 1,200 arrests that resulted in the confiscation of drugs and cash worth over \$379,000 and an accompanying 99.7% conviction rate. Police District 1, which encompasses OTR target

area where the partners' work took place, was the only district in the City where there was a significant decrease in crime from 2005 to 2006.

Not only did crime decline, but so did calls for service as perception of public safety increased and residents observed less illegal activity outside their front doors. OTR residents are now enjoying an improved quality of life and are trusting more in their law enforcement partners. As one local resident reported: "Drug dealers used to stand on the corners like they owned them. Now they know the police will talk with them, so they just move along."

This sentiment is confirmed by another resident. "Over-the-Rhine is a totally different neighborhood. We no longer have shoot-outs in our parking lot or drug deals going down outside the office. The area has actually become rather serene."

As residents have witnessed firsthand the significant improvements made to the neighborhood's public safety, their willingness to support police efforts has further strengthened. Whereas in 2004, there were roughly 185 residents engaged with their local Safety Sectors, in 2007 that number is now closer to 350. Safety Sector contact lists are growing as is regular attendance at meetings.

Community Development and Building Impact

The partners' beautification efforts and 3CDC's development projects are also responsible for improved safety in OTR. The purchase and closing down of a problem store brought a newfound peace and quiet to a street previously beset by drug dealers and users, the open consumption of alcohol, public urination and other disorderly nuisances. Many people in the community have expressed that they are much happier now that the street is both cleaner and safer. As they await redevelopment of the store space into a more positive use, examples abound around them of problem properties transformed by 3CDC and the other OTR partners. One such property is now used as a sales center for condominiums in the OTR area. Another has been converted into commercial office space.

PARTNERSHIP INFORMATION

WINNING PROGRAM

Revitalizing Over-the-Rhine

APPLICANTS

Over-the-Rhine Revitalization Corporation
Keep Cincinnati Beautiful
Cincinnati Police Department

INCEPTION DATE

2004

KEY PARTNERS

Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC)
Cincinnati Department of Community Development & Planning
Cincinnati Department of Buildings & Inspections
Cincinnati Health Department
Cincinnati Recreation Department
Cincinnati Department of Traffic Engineering
Hamilton County Commissioners
Hamilton County Probation Department
Hamilton County Prosecutor's Office

Ohio State Liquor Board
OTR Citizens on Patrol
OTR Community Council
OTR Safety Sectors
The Art Academy of Cincinnati
Peaslee Neighborhood Center
IMPACT OTR
Cincinnati Parks
Cincinnati Recreation Commission
Miami University
Hamilton County Sheriff Department
General Electric
Over-the-Rhine Chamber of Commerce
Findlay Market Corporation
Give Back Cincinnati

FUNDERS

City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County
City of Cincinnati Community Development Block Grant
City of Cincinnati Safe & Clean Neighborhood Fund
Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC)

The Fifth Third Foundation
Duke Energy
General Electric Foundation
The Kroger Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts

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PRIMARY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CONTACT

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OTR Revitalization Corporation/
OTR Chamber of Commerce

Photos courtesy of Keep Cincinnati Beautiful

Blight has also decreased significantly throughout OTR. Buildings and Inspections agents from the City wrote over 820 code violations of which almost half were resolved within 18 months time. Recent assessment of the areas along Vine Street revealed a full 30% decline in blight as measured by Keep Cincinnati Beautiful's Blight Index. The Art Academy continues to contribute to the beautification of the Imagination Alley park with new community art projects, and the Cincinnati Recreation Commission has plans to install playground equipment for local youth. The improved landscape has inspired further development and housing rehabilitation around the Alley and other areas like Mulberry Street (see *The Green Revolution*).

Other new investments in Over-the-Rhine are further bolstering the area's quality of life and economic vitality. These

include the creation of 100 new condominiums and the establishment of a non-profit pizza parlor run by Catholic nuns, an upscale restaurant, an urban living furniture store, an eco-friendly "green" general store, a bank and a coffee shop. It would have been hard to imagine such commercial investments in OTR several years ago, when crime and negative perceptions deterred most business investors from even considering the neighborhood. Now as residents reap the benefits of the increased variety of products and services available locally—as well as the jobs that the new stores bring—each new opening breeds more hope for a better OTR future.



MetLife Foundation

LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT CORPORATION – COMMUNITY SAFETY INITIATIVE

LISC is the nation's leading community development support organization. Since 1980, LISC has helped resident-led, community-based development organizations transform distressed communities and neighborhoods into healthy ones – good places to live, do business, work and raise families. By providing capital, technical expertise, training and information, LISC supports the development of local leadership and the creation of affordable housing, commercial, industrial and community facilities, businesses and jobs. LISC established the Community Safety Initiative in 1994 to support strategic alliances between community developers, law enforcement and other key stakeholders in troubled neighborhoods. The partners' work creates strong, stable and healthy communities by reducing persistent crime and disorder and spurring economic investment.

METLIFE FOUNDATION

MetLife Foundation, established by MetLife in 1976, is a long-time supporter of LISC's community revitalization programs. In 1994, the Foundation made a \$1 million leadership grant to pilot the Community Safety Initiative. MetLife and the Foundation have also made below-market rate loans and grants of almost \$77 million to the organization. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PAPER SERIES

This publication is part of a series published by LISC's Community Safety Initiative as part of the MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Awards program. Sponsored by MetLife Foundation since 2002, the Awards celebrate and promote exemplary community safety strategies bolstered by collaboration between police and neighborhood leaders. For other case studies and papers in this series, please visit www.lisc.org/resources.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge MetLife Foundation for continued support of the Community Safety Initiative and strong dedication to public safety partnerships around the country. Under their leadership, we have been able to expand this unique awards program this year, as well as produce a variety of papers highlighting themes that cut across many of our past award winners' work.

We would like to also thank the police and community development leaders who participated in the awards process as application readers: Lisa Belsky, Jim Bueermann, Bill Geller, Charles Gruber, Mossik Hacobian, Bill Jones, James Jordan, Tom Lattimore, Ken Miller, Lisa Mueller-Levy, Gregory Saville and Jerry Williams.

The authors and publishers are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained herein. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of MetLife Foundation.

Writing: Karin Anderson

Design: B. Boyle Design

Cover photos: (Left) Volunteers in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood paint murals to change perceptions and increase community pride (courtesy Keep Cincinnati Beautiful); (Right) Lieutenant Bob Lepre celebrates the Olneyville MetLife Foundation Award with fellow leaders in the Providence Police Department.