

On the web at: www.omahaice.org

Streetcars: A tool for revitalizing Omaha's Inner-city Neighborhoods

Jason Smith to speak at ICE Annual Banquet

Thursday, October 2, 2008 5:30pm

Spaghetti Works in the Old Market (11th & Howard)

By Clyde Anderson

Several Omaha neighborhoods like Dundee and Benson owe their early development to streetcar lines that were built west into farmland with the hope of attracting new residents by providing fast, affordable transportation. A few years ago Dundee recognized its streetcar heritage with the erection of a streetcar monument near Happy Hollow Blvd. and Underwood Ave.

After World War II, streetcar service declined in Omaha coming to an end in 1955. New residential development was oriented to the automobile. This shift was not kind to Omaha's older streetcar neighborhoods. Between 1970 and 2000, population declined in many census tracts east of 72nd Street.

Several cities like Portland and New Orleans have revitalized many of their older neighborhoods by reintroducing streetcars. The clean, quiet, electric-powered cars not only provide fast, efficient public transit to local residents, but they give the



The Dundee Neighborhood honored its streetcar heritage by constructing this memorial on the southwest corner of Underwood Drive and Happy Hollow Blvd.

neighborhoods stability, enhance streetscapes, and promote pedestrian access. Experience has shown that streetcars, unlike cars and buses, stimulate neighborhood businesses, especially restaurants and local services.

Jason Smith enthusiastically supports reintroduction of streetcars in Omaha. "Our great city is destined for streetcars and streetcars are destined for one of Omaha's great corridors. The area between Downtown and the Henry Doorly Zoo, known as *(continued on page 2)*

Rain Gardens - for low-impact stormwater management

By Kathleen Cue

If you've been attuned to everything that is "going green" these days, then you are well aware of rain gardens and the important role they play in stormwater management. If, however, you are a novice to the concept of rain gardens, here is a primer about this important ecological tool.

In looking at the history of the landscape, long before the advent of concrete, asphalt and steel, over 95% of water coming down as precipitation percolated into the ground, recharging aquifers. Approximately

5% was runoff, accumulating in creeks, streams and rivers. The quality of the water was high and flooding was a rarity.

What human activity and impervious surfaces have done is reverse these percentages, with 95% of precipitation going towards runoff and 5% allowed to percolate into soils. The quality of this runoff water is low, carrying *(continued on page 4)*

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Streetcars: A tool for revitalizing Omaha's Inner-city Neighborhoods (continued from page 1)

Little Italy, Near South or otherwise the *Gateway to south Omaha*, is prime streetcar territory", says Jason.

Smith, our banquet speaker, is President of the Deer Park Neighborhood Association, V.P. of the South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance, and board member of Omaha Streetcar, a nonprofit organization composed of grassroots citizens, organizations, institutions, businesses, and public agencies with the goal of improving the quality of life in Omaha through the implementation of streetcars. (www.omahastreetcar.com) Jason Smith is also a member of the ICE Board.

Jason is excited about recent Omaha streetcar developments. On June 2nd, the City of Omaha and local residents announced a new effort to preserve and enhance the Near South 10th and 13th Street Corridors with community-driven initiatives. The vision for the area is the result of a resident-driven plan known as **Parkway10**.

The vision for the revitalization began to take shape in 2006 when – with the assistance of Omaha By Design and the blessing of the City Planning Department – local community leaders and neighbors formulated a plan that would breathe new life into the corridor. A key element to the **Parkway10** plan, and the entire corridor's future, is the implementation of streetcars.

Omaha's Mayor Fahey and the Planning Department have worked diligently with community leaders and developers to begin creating a solid framework for this Area of Civic Importance (ACI), as it has been designated. "By embracing, preserving and enhancing the heritage and character of this part of our city, I am confident great things will result," said Fahey. "I am proud of the vision and support of the neighborhoods and businesses, and look forward to creating the necessary framework to turn this impressive vision into a reality."

"With the help of the Mayor and the City Planning Department the vision that is Parkway10 will take us from a proud past to a promising future. Parkway 10 will lead the way to a rebirth of our neighborhood and will be a model for others," said Arnold Breslow, President of the Old Market South

Neighborhood Association.

"I'm thrilled with the vision we all have put together for our future. It has been years of dedicated community planning for the Parkway10 project," said Smith. "We are proud to join with Omahans who are intimately familiar with Downtown's enormous strides and Midtown's increasing vitality want to answer the call for streetcar transit in these areas. They also understand the exciting potential when this kind of transit system can connect billions of dollars of Omaha's top entertainment & tourist attractions, and offer valuable transportation to millions of annual visitors

as well as a rapidly increasing number of residents. A recent online public poll by the Omaha World Herald showed nearly three quarters of respondents actually favoring a streetcar connection between Downtown and the Zoo by opening day of Omaha's future Downtown ballpark."

People are very happy that this 10th/13th Street Corridor is intended to be part of Omaha's future streetcar system. "We are supportive of any effort that builds a stronger connection between two of Nebraska's most significant attractions – the Old Market and Henry Doorly Zoo," said Spencer Crews, Executive Director of Lauritzen Gardens, which is just east of 10th & Bancroft. Nancy Calinger, an area resident and ardent streetcar supporter is definitely one of those supportive people. She cheerfully declared, "I have been waiting a lifetime to see 10th Street realize its full potential!"

The general public is always welcome at ICE meetings and events. Please join ICE members and Jason Smith on October 2 and learn how streetcars can revitalize Omaha. In addition to the streetcar presentation, ICE will announce its Bob Light Community Service Award. Event registration fee is \$20.00, which includes meal and presentation.

A registration form can be found on the back page of this newsletter, and individuals can go to the ICE website at www.omahaice.org or call 402-932-7225 for more information.

"We are proud to join with Omahans who are intimately familiar with Downtown's enormous strides and Midtown's increasing vitality want to answer the call for streetcar transit in these areas. " Arnold Breslow, President, Old Market South Neighborhood Assn.



Example of a modern streetcar in Portland, OR
(Photo by Cacophony @ wikipedia)

Rain Barrels—A cost-effective method of conserving storm water

By Trenton Erickson

Inexpensive rain barrels can be made from food grade plastic barrels or heavy-duty trash cans, often for as little as 25 dollars.

Rain barrels are containers which collect and store rain water from rooftops for later use, providing valuable and useful opportunities for water conservation while also preventing the loss of "stormwater" as runoff, which is frequently channeled into nearby streams and rivers, carrying pollutants and other contaminants into neighboring ecosystems and on to the Missouri River.

Inexpensive rain barrels can be made from food grade plastic barrels or heavy-duty trash cans, often for as little as 25 dollars, or they can be purchased pre-made from numerous nonprofit agencies, commercial manufacturers and retailers, in prices ranging from 50 to 200 dollars.

Rain barrels can be used individually or linked in tandem to capture a greater volume of water. They can be tapped to fill a watering can for watering hanging baskets and other plants, or used as the central water source for water-saving drip irrigation systems.

Some additional considerations:

Rain water harvested from rain barrels should not be

used for human consumption. Rain that is harvested off of a roof may have contaminants from the roof itself or fecal material present on the roof deposited there by birds or squirrels. This rain is perfectly safe for ornamental plants around the house but is potentially unsafe for drinking and should be treated as such.

Care should be taken to make sure that rain barrels do not become breeding grounds for mosquitoes. This is easily accomplished by covering the top of a rain barrel with mesh screening or through the use of mosquito "dunks". As an additional precaution it is recommended that the rain water in rain barrels be harvested and used within 10 days of a rainstorm event.

Rain barrels also need to be put into storage over winter to prevent water from freezing inside the barrel and damaging it.

More information, as well as, instructions for how you can build your own rain barrel can be obtained from the Douglas/Sarpy County Extension office at 8015 W. Center Rd., (402) 444-7804.



Typical rain barrel installation under downspout
Photo: www.composters.com

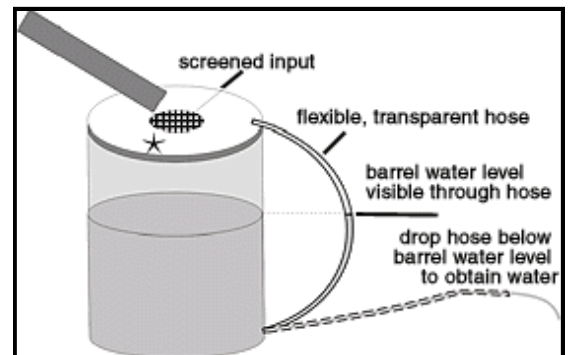


Diagram of a simple rain barrel. Note the screen where the downspout empties into the barrel to catch leaves and other debris.



A rain barrel must have a cover to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in the water.

Inner-city Coalition on the Environment

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Rain Gardens *(continued from page 1)*

(Continued from page 1)

Rain gardens aren't ponds. They are shallow (8 inches deep, at most) areas where water from roofs and driveways is allowed to collect for short periods of time.

with it oils from leaky cars, rubber from tires, pesticide residues, grass clippings, and sediments.

Equally important, the re-charge of aquifers is slowing down. Locally, combined sewer systems are overwhelmed during periods of intense rainfall.

Rain gardens are a simple way to reverse this trend. Rain gardens aren't ponds. They are shallow (8 inches deep, at most) areas where water from roofs and driveways is allowed to collect for short periods of time (all water percolates into the soil in 24 hours or less). The rain garden itself is planted with native flowers and grasses. Besides lending their beauty to the area, these natives have a phenomenally deep root system that helps to direct the rainwater downward. Native plants are tough too. They can withstand periods of wet and the corresponding periods of dry, attributes needed for a rain garden. Native plants are capable of filtering pollutants carried in rainwater, to the extent that

the quality of water percolated through a rain garden is very high.

A new series of NebGuides by the University of Nebraska makes it simple to understand the fundamentals of rain garden installation:

- G1758, Stormwater Management: Rain Garden Design for Homeowners
- G1759, Stormwater Management: Installing Rain Gardens in Your Yard
- G1760, Stormwater Management: Plant Selection for Rain Gardens in Nebraska.

You can contact UNL Extension in Douglas/Sarpy County for a free copy of these publications, or you can go to the University's website at: <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/index.jsp>.

To improve the quality of our lakes, streams and aquifers, rain gardens are a simple, beautiful and effective way to deal with stormwater. Consider planting a rain garden today!



Example of a residential rain garden by the street. Note the cutout in the curb to allow water flow to and from the garden.

Photo: Boston Metropolitan Planning Council



Downspout leading to a rain garden

Photo: Albemarle County (VA) Community Dev.

Apply now for I.C.E. Master Gardener Scholarship

By Kathleen Cue

Omaha's Inner-city Coalition on the Environment understands the importance of gardening efforts within our urban neighborhoods. Gardens can foster a sense of community pride, provide nutritious food, and add beauty to outdoor spaces. Planning and maintaining a garden is a labor-intensive effort, requiring a great deal of commitment and knowledge. ICE recognizes that gardening efforts are most successful when the expertise resides within the neighborhood.

For this reason, ICE is encouraging neighborhood associations to select an individual to complete Master Gardener education. This person must attend 50 hours of education and commit to volunteering a minimum of 40 hours at the community garden. Activities could include youth gardening, vegetable gardening, flower gardening or other gardening activity approved by the neighborhood association.

In memory of founding board member Rudy Novacek, ICE

awards a \$195 scholarship for a neighborhood member to attend Master Gardener education. Selection criteria is based on the intent of the recipient to develop a community garden or expand an existing one in their neighborhood. To apply, please fill out the form which can be found on the ICE web site at <http://www.omahaice.org> and click on the "Forms" button on the left. Just follow the directions on the form.

If accepted, the recipient is required to volunteer their time at an inner-city neighborhood garden. 40 hours of volunteer time must be completed by September 30, 2009. Questions? Feel free to call Kathleen Cue at 444-7804. Applications are due December 1, 2008 These can be mailed or dropped off at the Extension Office, 8015 West Center Road, Omaha NE 68124, Attention: Kathleen Cue.

For additional information call Kathleen Cue at (402) 444-7804 or email kcue@unlnotes.unl.edu.

Lake Cunningham Restoration Nearing Completion

By Clyde Anderson

The restoration project features sediment removal, construction of two islands, rock riprap structures for shoreline protection, rock fishing jetties and rock off-shore breakwater structures.

Beginning in Spring 2006 Lake Cunningham has been undergoing an aquatic habitat and lake restoration project. A complete drawdown of the 390-acre lake was necessary, and most of the recreation facilities surrounding Cunningham have been closed during construction. The restoration project features sediment removal, construction of two islands, rock riprap structures for shoreline protection, rock fishing jetties and rock off-shore breakwater structures.

Here is a project status report from Pat Slaven, Park Planner for the City of Omaha:

- The Nebraska Game & Parks Commission Aquatic Habitat Restoration project south of Hwy 36 has been completed. Improvements include targeted dredging, breakwaters, jetties and other shoreline protection and two accessible fishing piers.
- Phase II of the project includes targeted dredging and construction of a weir on the north side of Hwy 36. This is being called the Pawnee Wetland and will help protect the

lake's water quality south of the highway.

- The City Marina project is in the design stages. Construction is planned for next spring. Anticipated date for opening the marina is June 1, 2009. The marina will be located just east of the existing boat launch. There will be two docks with 30 slips each, as well as up to 25 moorings, a bathhouse and parking. Boaters can lease the slips and moorings on a seasonal basis. For more marina information, contact John Niksick at 444-5916.
- Other park improvements which should be underway this fall include renovation of all picnic facilities, replacement of old toilet structures with portable toilets enclosed in metal shelters and new entrance improvements.

If construction continues on schedule, most of the facilities, including the campground, should be open to the public next Spring. There was not enough money in this project to rebuild Lake Cunningham trails.

Construction to Start Soon on Two Trails

By Clyde Anderson

As soon as the Nebraska Department of Roads (DOR) gives its approval, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) will contract for construction of the missing link in the Missouri River Trail from Ponca Road north to the Washington County Line. Construction has been delayed for several years while a right-of-way ownership issue was resolved. Once this segment is completed by early Summer 2009, the Missouri River Trail will extend north from its connection with Omaha's Riverfront Trail at N.P. Dodge Park to Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge near Ft. Calhoun.

Another trail segment awaiting DOR approval to begin construction is the missing 3-mile link of the MoPac Trail between Highway 50 north of Louisville and the Lied Platte River Bridge. According to NRD's Gerry Bowen, approval is expected soon, and construction could start late this Fall or next Spring. The MoPac Trail will eventually connect Lincoln with the Chalco Hills Recreation Area near Millard. Portions of the route utilize abandoned Missouri Pacific (MoPac) branch line roadbeds. However, the segment to be constructed north of Louisville will utilize an old Rock Island right-of-way. The trail already utilizes the old Rock Island bridge across the Platte River.

For more information on Omaha trails, go to <http://www.omahatrails.com/>.

The MoPac Trail will eventually connect Lincoln with the Chalco Hills Recreation Area near Millard.



Omaha's Metro Area Transit reports that the installation of the bike racks on its buses has begun. However, at this time, the bike racks are not operational. Please do not try to use them. Soon Bike Rack operating procedures will be issued. When use of the racks begins, it will be bikers' responsibility to load and unload their bikes on the racks. Each rack, which is located on the front of the bus, holds two bikes. The bike racks should be in service in time for the Missouri River Pedestrian Bridge dedication this Fall. Please check the MAT web site for more info. at <http://www.metroareatransit.com/>.



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Environment**

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ICE Annual Banquet Reservation Form

Thursday, October 2, 2007 – 5:30 PM – 7:30 PM
Spaghetti Works, 502 S. 11th Street

Banquet costs are: \$20.00 (Includes meal, tax , gratuity & lecture)

\$15.00 for Neighborhood Assn. Officers

\$10.00 for children 12 and under

Meal includes: All you can eat pasta, Choice of sauces,
Salad bar, Bread, and Choice of coffee, tea, or soda

Number of meals at \$20..... x \$20.00 = \$ _____

Neighborhood Assn. Officers at \$15..... x \$15.00 = \$ _____

Children 12 and under at \$10.00..... x \$10.00 = \$ _____

Total Payment = \$ _____

Name _____

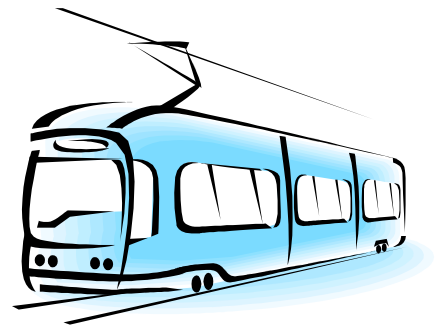
Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Mail this form with your check made out to **I.C.E.** to:

Clyde Anderson, Treasurer, 7020 Burt Street, Omaha, 68132-2600

Or call Clyde to make reservations, 932-7225



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ing Omaha's Inner-city
Neighborhoods**

Banquet presentation by
Jason Smith, President
Deer Park Neighborhood Assn.

**Reservations must be received
by Monday, September 29th.**