

Code 700004  
Subject Curtis Banks  
Date 4/12/2010  
Interviewer Brandon Croucher

Abstract Mr. Curtis Banks discusses his past and future for Kosciuszko Avenue in Cleveland Ohio. He explains what his plans are for his site and how he came to Cleveland. Cleveland Ohio, Kosciuszko Avenue, Curtis Banks, Hough riots, farming, neighborhood change

Tags  
Special  
Notes  
minutes:

Introduction of: Brandon Croucher (interviewer), Curtis Banks (interviewee), Michelle  
0 Epps (observer), Matt Seaman (recorder)  
Born in Alabama, mother moved to Cleveland when he was 6 months old, grew up in  
1 the Hough area, lived in the area for about 40 years  
2 Neighborhood was close, spent a lot of time at neighbors' homes and park  
Father planted to provide food for the family, surplus was given to others in the  
3 neighborhood  
4 Wants to carry on the family tradition of gardening with his four kids  
Grew variety of vegetables (collared greens, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots,  
5 beets, onions), Lived on 84th Street prior to living on Kosciuszko  
Came back to neighborhood after returning from military duty, Has lived on Kosciuszko  
for 5 years now, Feels that keeping families close will prevent kids from turning to the  
6 streets  
Plans on using the community garden as a means to teach kids responsibility and give  
7 them something to do  
Wrote the grant as a means of expediting the process of taking care of the lot and  
8 building the garden  
Grant inspired him to show people what could be done with the land, Short term goal  
9 is to build a fence to protect the area  
Long term goal is to work with the local school to have young children partake in the  
10 care of the area, Would also like to erect a wind turbine  
11 Also plans on cleaning the tree line  
Desires to fix the sidewalk because it is uneven and a tripping hazard, Hopes that  
improving the area immediately surrounding the school will cause it to spread to other  
12 areas of the neighborhood  
Wife was hesitant about caring for the lot at first, but has become more involved, Has  
13 picked out a variety of plants to create an 'oasis' feeling  
Was a boy scout when he was younger, Wishes he could run a similar program there  
14 as well  
Years ago instead of demolishing houses, they would bury them, putting lead in the  
15 soil, Area had to be tested because of this  
16 Test results should come back within about two weeks  
If the soil has too much lead in it the plan is to plant in boxes above the ground,  
Phytoremediation is another method by which lead is absorbed into plant and plant is  
17 destroyed  
Going to try to put a yard expansion in the area, Storm water run off has caused slight  
18 damage to his driveway  
19 Heard about the grant at the library about a week before the deadline

Where the school is now located there used to be homes, When they were torn down it was like a vacant football field, trees created a hideout for people trying to escape  
20 from the police

21 Started trimming up the area to reduce police activity, Today it is a very livable area  
22 Would love for people to move back into the neighborhood and see how great of an area it is

Neighborhood is still growing, an attitude transformation needs to take place for this to work, Currently there are a lot of renters in the area who tend not to care as much  
23 because it is not their property

24 Has been looking forward to planting in the lot all winter long

Biggest needs are community support, Possible solution is to have community service  
25 members help out

26 Thinks that once people see the benefits of the land they will start asking questions

27 Neighbors have already come to ask questions, One man brought over some dirt

28 Interested in knowing if donations of time or labor are tax deductible for volunteers

29 Believes that the site used to be a dump site because of giant concrete slabs present

Most people involved have been cooperative, The size of the project itself will involve  
30 stumbling blocks

The city has a 50/50 sidewalk program where they will pay for half of the cost of repairing a sidewalk, Grant money can be budgeted for this, but estimate is needed,

31 Also needs to convince neighbor that the fence coming down would be beneficial

This neighbor has dumped stuff over the other side of the fence when cleaning the yard, Talked to this neighbor about the fence but may need to do so one more time,

32 Fence spans about 150 feet

33 Council person's support may be necessary to convince neighbor to remove fence

Surveyor needs to come out to determine property lines in relation to the fence, Fence  
34 appears to be well within the 110 feet of the lot

Will give rationale to neighbor for taking down fence in hopes of creating a positive  
35 relationship

The police seemed to have stepped up a little bit, Drugs are a problem in the community, but those caught within 1000 feet of a school the consequences are

36 mandatory jail time, There is not as much of this in the neighborhood any more

At one point someone tried to enter his house when he was not home, but his wife was able to close and lock the door before this could happen, Hopes that a new fence

37 would prevent this from ever happening again

Assumes that people are going to take stuff from the garden, just hopes that they don't  
38 take everything

Another concern is the drunk drivers that have driven up onto the sidewalk, Plans to  
39 use boulders or other natural barriers to protect the sidewalk area

Violence is everywhere in America, but when people see families they tend to show  
40 more respect

41 Feels that once he leads by example the kids will want to follow

42 Knows of some wind turbines that have been put up by Cleveland State

Research is being done with these to see if one big turbine is better than a couple of  
43 small ones, It only takes one person to spread these ideas within a community  
Cleveland is windy and those living in the inner city would benefit from the wind  
44 turbines reducing their electricity bills  
45 Youngest two children are more involved with the garden than older two are  
Was tradition for him to spend entire summer in Alabama on a farm, also grew up  
46 planting flowers  
Father taught him to start plants indoors halfway through April and move outside after  
47 Memorial Day  
Grant money will be used on the lot, but not toward his house although improving his  
48 house is part of this dream project  
May have a small celebration to open up the garden with neighbors who are interested  
in participating, One neighbor had a garden on the site of his home before it was built  
49 there, Thinks she will be interested in helping  
Expectations for next year include overall improvement on the project and making it  
better than it was this year, Show people how to live off of the land and reduce their  
50 bills by doing so  
One potential issue to be worked out is the location of water. There is a fire hydrant  
51 across the street, Collecting rainwater is a possibility  
Gives a water allowance to the people he rents a house to, beyond this it comes out of  
52 his pocket, This is not a concern unless drought conditions occur  
Electricity needs increase when you have children, wind turbines would be beneficial  
53 to lowering these costs, Five year plan includes solar and wind panels  
Plans on living in the neighborhood as long as financial situation stays the same, As  
someone who grew up with summers in the country likes the idea of not having  
54 someone living right next to him  
55 Tries to live peacefully with current neighbors  
Most nervous about living up to self-expectations, Trying to balance work with the  
56 project  
57 Great satisfaction will be found in growing own food  
Father once grew a cabbage so big it was twice the size of a basketball, May try to do  
58 the same just for fun  
There are currently a handful of homes in the Hough area that are really well cared for,  
Sees that these bright spots are multiplying and hopes that it continues, Living spaces  
59 need to be recycled  
The Kosciuszko Community Project is the name of this endeavor, Hopes to open in  
60 June  
61 Excited about people taking part  
Used to be a Polish neighborhood that people took pride in, Would like to see that  
pride back in the community, Along with being a war hero, Kosciuszko was a very  
62 wealthy man

In his will, Kosciuszko asked that his money be used to buy slaves in order educate  
63 and empower them, Many streets are named after famous Polish people  
Historical statues fill the parks in the area, Local churches in the area have closed  
64 down, One was previously used as his gym in elementary school  
65 Churches are currently filled with Polish artwork  
Hopes the city will work with the neighborhood to make it safe for kids to walk to  
66 school

There is a larger lot in the area that could possibly be made into a community center  
67 one day  
Father's original move from Alabama to Cleveland was to find work to support his  
68 family

Summer visits to the south as a kid were like an escape from all of the violence in the  
city, Came up around the time of the Hough Riots, remembers lots of violence from the  
69 age he was in kindergarten on up, Never let this affect him negatively

Experience in the air force taught discipline, self-sufficiency, survival skills,  
70 independence

Prior to the air force unsure of life's purpose, Going into the air force was a good  
decision, Taught him skills that he still uses for his career as a pharmacy technician

71 today, With no further questions interview concludes

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