

The Gathering - Cortellini

On Earth Day 2007, Green Broad Ripple sponsored its first Earth Day event entitled "Glimpse the Future." On Earth Day 2008, Green Broad Ripple sponsored "Envision Broad Ripple" that launched the current ongoing Visioning process. On Earth Day 2009, April 22, Green Broad Ripple will initiate a concreted effort to Build Community in Broad Ripple. What will this entail?

Robert Putnam's best selling book; *Bowling Alone* quantified, with facts and statistics, that fact that Community, in America, has suffered a collapse. As a people, we have become estranged from one another. Our emphasis of individuality and materialism of the past half century has virtually destroyed our Sense of Community We must rebuild this Sense of Community if we are to make any serious progress toward building a Sustainable Community.



Peter Senge, in his book; *The Fifth Discipline* provides a roadmap. He lays out a concept, a way of getting there and a geometry of its structure. The subtitle of his book is "The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization." He, and others, have been inventing a Science of the Organization in an effort to make corporations more effective yet many of their insights are applicable to the organization of a Community as well. Herein, I will take the liberty of substituting "Community" for "Organization" whenever it seems appropriate. The Learning Community then is one in which "... people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together."

A Community is always in the process of changing - it is dynamic. Yet, as many things in nature, this change is not linear but cyclical - like the four seasons. Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter become GATHERING, CHAOS, UNITY, PERFORMANCE.

We, in Indianapolis, are most fortunate to have the services of the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center. With a small staff, they are reaching many community leaders with their free classes on how to build Community. The following is taken directly from coursework compiled and delivered by Mary Durkin as part of the course I am currently taking for a second time because I find it most relevant and valuable to the issues that confronts our communities today.

The PERFORMANCE season of a Learning Community is characterized by the following: work gets done faster with better quality results, people have grown and acquired new skills, and the organization can self-correct mistakes. In this season, the Community may slip back into CHAOS yet bounce back out quickly. Successes can be replicated within and outside the group. This is the season for action and accomplishment.

In the UNITY season, the group can work on goals with energy and make progress. It can work out differences but changes can put group back into CHAOS. If not attended to, camaraderie can be mistaken for progress. The group may develop an attitude of exclusion and begin to settle for "good enough." Growth may stop.

In the CHAOS season work gets done but at a cost. Energy for tasks may be wasted in a perpetual struggle. If not attended to, people drop out, creativity is lost, and talents go unused. Work done in this season produces lower quality results, there is less buy-in and less support for implementing decisions or goals. "Undiscussables" may develop.

The GATHERING season will see minimal accomplishment toward tasks. It is the time to build trust and relationships that will be vital later on. When we first gather, we can expect feelings of fear and apprehension - of caution and confusion. Conversations initially will be polite and reserved. Here, at the Glendale Auditorium on Earth Day 2009, with a gathering of the natural leaders of our community, we will begin the group process where participants experience and practice communication skills that create the possibility for deep human connection.

