

Miss Mary's Walkers

Miss Mary died April 2, 2006 at the age of 98. For thirty-three years, since her retirement, she got up every morning at 5:30 AM and started walking at 6:00 AM. She walked around the Baldwin Park neighborhood for about an hour with four women and one man.



What do you think they were doing while they were walking for that hour? They were talking. They talked about everybody and everything. They also picked up paper. (But Miss Ann, one of the walkers, said, "I pick up paper but I don't do napkins or Kleenex!") Sigmund picked up aluminum cans and put them in a plastic bag and gave them to a guy who supplemented his income selling recycled cans. The walkers also picked up people's newspapers off the sidewalk or the lawn and threw them onto their porches. For this hour everyday that it didn't rain, they studied the neighborhood in every way you can imagine.

Frequently, they'd solve a community problem. For example, when they discovered that some children had knocked out the streetlights in Baldwin Circle. Mary nagged until some of the walkers talked to the children's parents and got restitution.

The walkers tried to figure out what they could do about problems they observed on their daily walks. If they couldn't solve a problem themselves, they identified which local authority they could call to resolve the issue.

What kind of community development group is this? They have no registered name, no tax-exemption, no bank account, no officers or board of directors, no annual general meeting, no membership dues or cards. They are anonymous, but they create benefits: the walkers take steps that help the community stay healthy. They keep the news moving around the neighborhood. They clean-up and recycle as they walk. They identify problems, take action and urge others to take action on neighborhood problems.

As we think about community-building, it seems important that we remember these invisible groups. We should figure out how to lift up their everyday community work, and give them a meaningful role in making the community a better place to live.

– Henry Moore