

Daily News
October 20, 2003
Letter to the Editor

Just get involved -- it does a community good

For all the talk in Los Angeles about neighborhood councils, many might ask: What's in it for us?

The Northridge West Neighborhood Council is holding public meetings the first Tuesday of every month. Its members are talking about writing a letter of intent to the city of Los Angeles about forming a bylaws committee. The Granada Hills and Porter Ranch neighborhood councils completed the process some time ago and hold consistent public meetings as well.

Sure, we hear things like "neighborhood empowerment" and such, but how does that actually benefit the people of Los Angeles?

Too often, community members choose not to get involved in the community. Not until an issue that directly affects us arises do we bother, assuming that someone else will fix it. It becomes easy to get wrapped up in our lives and hardly notice what happens around us until it's too late -- until that someone else doesn't fix it.

Some time ago, a group of 57 people who didn't much appreciate the way they were being treated by government officials decided to form a council of sorts. Political beliefs were put aside for the betterment of their community. There was no left or a right, they were joined in one cause: The success of their council.

This group of individuals crafted a letter of intent for themselves, the public and all the world to see. It took them 11 years to form their bylaws -- the rules which generations to come would follow.

How could they know that 227 years later, their social experiment called democracy would grow to what it is today?

The council I speak of was the Continental Congress; the document they wrote was the Declaration of Independence and the bylaws became known as the Constitution of the United States of America.

That is what Los Angeles' neighborhood councils are all about: Taking part in the community and making a difference.

The difference could be made on issues as serious as school safety, or as benign as tree-trimming, traffic flow or emergency-response time. Neighborhood councils are designed to take the community's concerns directly to the city and hold the departments and personnel accountable.

Our country's Founding Fathers decided to get involved, and look at the result. May we follow in their example and be a force for change, progress and prosperity.

So, again, what's in it for us?

Everything. The decisions are made by those who show up to the meetings.

By those who stand and speak, regardless of their opinion, who stand in the face of adversity, stare it down and conquer it by their mere willingness to be heard.

Jim Alger is an interim board member of the Northridge West Neighborhood Council.