

that there are landowners wishing to sell properly situated land or development rights at a reasonable price.

As Dixon Mayor Don Erickson, who currently serves as VDGA chairman, states, "The benefits of the greenbelt are not obvious to some people at present because the open space already exists. The benefits will be much more obvious in 30 years,

when the greenbelt is the only virgin flat land on the I-80 corridor between Sacramento and San Francisco."

Vacaville Mayor David Fleming agrees, adding: "The greenbelt effort clearly demonstrates that cities can collaborate for the common good. The greenbelt is a winner for the entire region." It would appear that the only thing that could come between the two greenbelt partners is more

open space. If this is the case, both cities believe that further separation will only strengthen the marriage. **DM**

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Little Rock's Alert Center Experiment

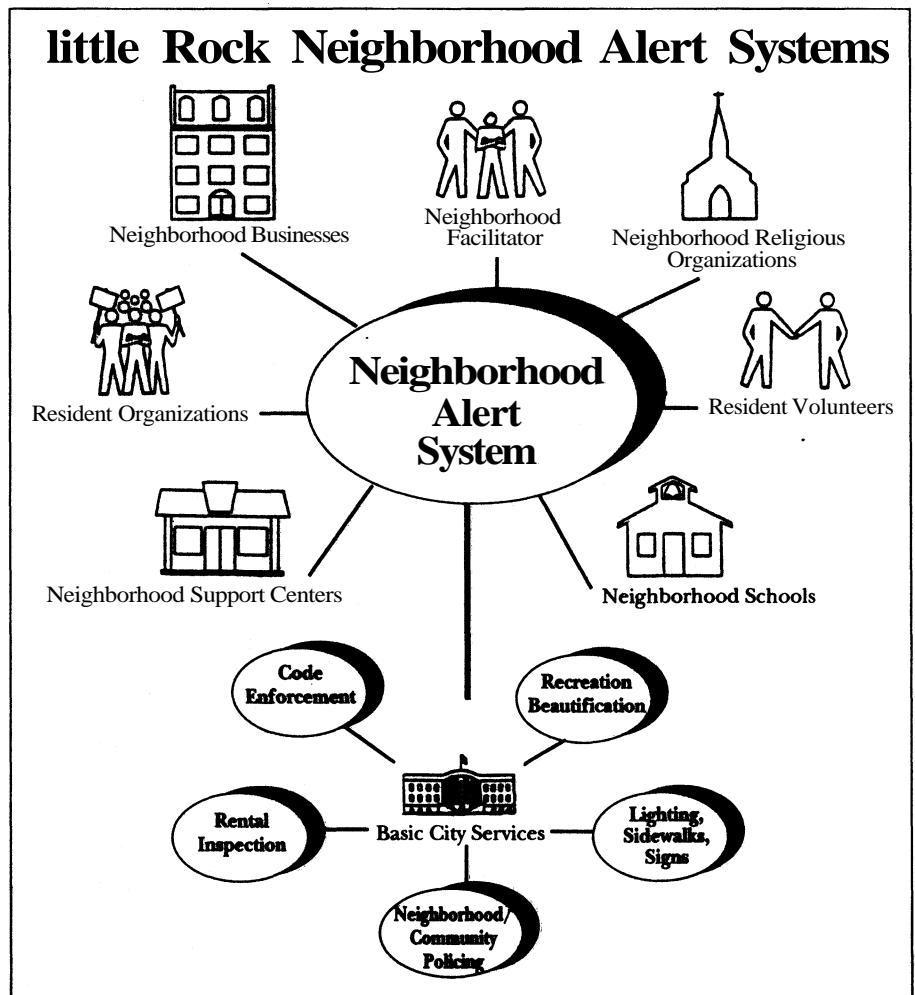
Holly Felix

In the broadest sense, total quality management can be defined as a greater responsiveness to the needs and expectations of an organization's customers. Although the city of Little Rock, Arkansas, might not have called its Neighborhood Alert Centers a total quality management experiment four years ago, the experiment has proven to deliver just that: a rise in responsiveness to the needs and expectations of the city's customers, its residents.

Dealing with the Problems

Before the development of these centers, many Little Rock neighborhoods felt abandoned by traditional public systems. City services, often understaffed and underfunded, were spread too thin, resulting in less intensive and nonsustaining responses in some neighborhoods. That feeling of abandonment coupled with dramatic increases in alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and violence, created an environment of hopelessness, distrust, and inertia in many of the city's older neighborhoods.

Inspired by the chance of a five-



year, \$3 million grant and by a need to address the problems of escalating substance abuse, crime, and gangs, Little Rock developed the **Neighborhood Alert Center** system. A hub of city government was placed in a neighborhood so that various city services and other public resources could be made more accessible to residents and neighborhood groups.

To implement this concept, three city departments have joined forces. Each department provides at least one staff member to create an alert center team. Little Rock **Fighting Back** supplied a neighborhood facilitator to **coordinate** and mobilize residents to fight back against substance abuse and crime. The department of neighborhoods and planning supplied a code enforcement officer to help stabilize the deteriorating fabric of the neighborhood and to promote a healthier and structurally safer at-

mosphere. The police department supplied officers who work out of the alert centers. Police officers have established **community-oriented** policing and now help develop working relationships with neighbors for overall safety and crime reduction.

Popular Places

Although the original plans called for eight alert centers to be developed over a five-year period starting in **mid-1992**, the center's success and popularity have led many residents to request them in their own neighborhoods. Eleven centers are now operational, with four more scheduled to be opened by the end of 1996. Funding for the centers comes from a mix of local revenues, a local dedicated sales tax, federal funding, and other public and private contributions.

Centers are housed in community-based **facilities**, some of which were once deteriorating structures. Several collaborations have resulted in homes for the alert centers: the Little Rock School District partnered with the city to open an alert center within an elementary school, and two churches have provided facilities. The decentralized system of alert centers gives residents greater access to resources and services and provides city **staff** with a way of learning **residents'** needs and expectations.

Annual surveys are conducted in alert center areas to obtain the opinions of residents and business. The city manager and mayor also spend at least one day a month in the community, often in alert centers, where they hold City Hall for a Day. And public forums are held during these events to solicit **residents'** input.

Members of alert center teams are encouraged to employ nontraditional means to solve neighborhood problems. They also are given **ample** authority to make immediate decisions, which reduces the time needed to complete corrective action. All of these measures result in less red tape and in greater service for the **customer**—true elements of total quality management. **DAI**

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