



**2005 ICMA Annual Awards Program
Nomination
Program Excellence Awards
Citizen Involvement**



Program: "In Partnership with Businesses"

Jurisdiction: City of Aurora, CO

I. Scope of the problem/background:

Established in August 2003, "*In Partnership With Businesses*" is a program conceived by the City of Aurora to help business owners with establishments located along the city's historic East Colfax Avenue corridor.

Once considered among the Denver metro area's leading retail and commercial hubs, Aurora's East Colfax Avenue corridor has lacked substantial investment since the 1970s, when major retail outlets left the thoroughfare for suburban shopping malls.

The federal decommission of the nearby Lowry Air Force Base *and* the Fitzsimons Army Medical Center, and the resulting exodus of thousands of families and federal employees once stationed at the military bases, also contributed to the area's economic decline.

Businesses have felt the pinch. In a series of meetings held in spring of 2003, business and property owners highlighted for city officials the challenges to successfully managing a business along the blighted and aging commercial strip.

Among the obstacles most often cited by these East Colfax Avenue entrepreneurs: a lack of awareness about public safety initiatives being carried out by the Aurora Police Dept.; a general lack of awareness about activities to improve the physical appearance of the surrounding neighborhoods and the city's efforts to revitalize the East Colfax corridor; and a desire to see the city play a role in attracting new visitors and consumers to the area.

Responding to these concerns, the city of Aurora and business representatives conceived the In Partnership with Businesses program in April 2003 and implemented it four months later.

In Partnership with Businesses assigns representatives from the nonprofit Northern Aurora Business Association (NABA) and several city agencies--Original Aurora Renewal, a neighborhood resource center; the Aurora Business Development Center; and the city's Urban Renewal Division--to personally deliver information to more than 130 East Colfax businesses located in a 16-block area of the corridor.

This specific section of East Colfax Avenue has been designated as an Arts District by city officials and will by the end of 2005 see more than \$54 million in public and private investment.

The program's representatives, known as "block workers," regularly visit store managers on their assigned East Colfax Avenue blocks to share pertinent and timely information.

Delivered materials--which can take the form of letters, flyers, brochures, posters, newsletters and more--can cover a variety of topics from public safety tips to small business resources available within the city. Collaterals that promote business opportunities and city events also are shared with merchants and store managers.

Monthly 'editorial' meetings are held to determine which materials will be distributed to business owners. Special priority is given to items and information that is most likely to help business owners build revenue and increase productivity.

Three bilingual block workers also are assigned to deliver the information to the area's growing number of Spanish-speaking merchants--ensuring that a population with limited English-speaking skills also is included in the corridor's future success.

To introduce the project, the city developed an impressive four-page, legal-sized brochure for business owners, and made it available in both English and Spanish. Program coordinators also purchased and organized three-ring binders for the business owners--where they can insert the information easy referral and safekeeping.

At a glance, the program appears simple in its implementation. In fact, the program's coordination demands a great deal of time, effort and resources.

First, monthly 'editorial' meetings are held to determine which materials will be distributed to business owners. Priority is given to information/items most likely to help business owners build revenue and increase productivity.

Depending on the time of year and the specific issues/initiatives deemed important to convey to local business owners, the material shared can cover a wide-range of topics. Since its inception, information distributed to business owners has included public safety tips, helpful small business resources available within the city, opportunities to participate in city-driven events, information about the city's current and proposed codes related to business operation, and information about beneficial business grant and loan programs. Strategic city initiatives and business opportunities also have been regularly shared with business and property owners.

Because the program is designed as both an informational and business-boosting vehicle, block workers share *only* the information that can assist East Colfax Avenue merchants in the operation, promotion or maintenance of their business. "Block worker" representatives also are mindful to visit during the hours of the day that a business owner finds appealing--generally in the early morning or late-afternoon.

On average, block workers are likely to spend 10 to 20 minutes with each business owner to explain the information in detail, and respond to questions and concerns. As a result of the program, block workers have become important liaisons between the city and the business owners.

II. Measurable Outcomes:

The program's bottom-line focus and friendly delivery has helped the City of Aurora establish an ongoing, meaningful rapport with the corridor's business owners.

The progress can be measured in many ways, but is most notably demonstrated in the sizable number of local merchants who have been enlisted to attend or participate as vendors/sponsors in several local events, including the opening of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library/Municipal Services Center; Original Aurora Renewal's FallFest—an annual community celebration; the annual Gateway to the Rockies Parade and Arts Festival; the city's first Hispanic Heritage Celebration; and the popular Aurora Asian Film Festival.

Another major manifestation of the program's value to area merchants is the bridge it has built between East Colfax Avenue business owners and the Aurora Police Department.

When acid-etched graffiti incidents in the East Colfax corridor increased sharply in the spring of 2003, hitting more than 40 local businesses and causing an estimated \$100,000 in damage, block workers tapped into the goodwill that had been built through the program to help police crack the case.

The block workers developed and delivered fliers that encouraged merchants to report the incidents to police—rather than simply masking the vandalism and writing it off as the cost of doing business.

As a result, graffiti reporting increased dramatically and helped officers identify patterns in the spree, and chronicle its scope and impact on local business owners. It also provided an overwhelming case for prosecutors, who were able to secure a conviction.

At that time, the block workers also educated vendors on the city's Graffiti off Neighborhoods program—a free service coordinated by the Aurora Police Department and primarily paid for with federal U.S. Dept. of Justice Weed and Seed funds. The initiative is primarily earmarked for the corridor and removes graffiti within 48 hours of being reported. Block workers also highlighted products and methods to minimize the visible impact of acid-etched graffiti on windows—thereby reducing/eliminating the high costs associated with their replacement.

Businesses are appreciative. A recent survey compiled to gauge the program's value to corridor merchants showed that 77 percent of businesses said they were satisfied with the information presented via the program. Sixty-five percent of the respondents called the program 'valuable' in the operation of their business.

More than half of the businesses surveyed, or 61 percent, said the program made them aware of local activities and special events. Sixty-eight percent of the business owners said the program had improved their relationship with the Aurora Police Department, and 70 percent cited the program for boosting its relationship with the City of Aurora as a whole.

III. Lessons Learned through the program:

For City of Aurora officials, the “In Partnership with Businesses” program is providing a comprehensive picture of retail in the city’s historic East Colfax commercial corridor. As a direct result of block worker visits, city officials have developed a database that includes the name and type of each business in the target area, as well as key contact information.

The database also includes useful information about site ownership and occupancy status—all of which enable officials to quickly assess retail trends and turnover, and to better-market the area to potential investors and developers.

By increasing the stature of East Colfax business owners through the program, and by delivering information that helps them succeed, the program is boosting their stake in the area’s future.



In Partnership with Businesses

*Working Together to Attract Customers to Your
Downtown Aurora Business*



- *Partners in Public Safety*
- *Partners for an Improvement in Appearance*
- *Partners in Promotion*

Partners in Success

We all want businesses located on and along East Colfax Avenue to succeed.

That's why a partnership comprised of businesses and property owners, the Northern Aurora Business Association (NABA) and the city of Aurora has been established to create a safe and vibrant downtown that will help your business retain and attract customers.

It's an effort that can only work when we're all working together.

Partners in Public Safety

The Aurora Police Department (APD) is playing an important role in this effort. As your partner in public safety, APD has:

- ◆ Designated four, full-time Foot Patrol Officers to work within the Colfax business district.
- ◆ Appointed a Business Officer to work exclusively with businesses.
- ◆ Deployed additional police resources (PAR, DART, Traffic, Narcotics) to work on specific problems in the business district.
- ◆ Convened regular meetings with East Colfax business owners and northwest Aurora residents to identify common concerns and strategize solutions.
- ◆ Implemented regular sweeps with a detoxification van.
- ◆ Adopted a 'zero tolerance' approach for public disorder crimes, including open container, disorderly conduct and littering.
- ◆ Educated business owners on how to issue trespassing notices to curb loitering and aggressive panhandling.
- ◆ Conducted regular prostitution and "john" stings.
- ◆ Partnered with social service agencies to implement a diversion program called PROUD that allows homeless individuals who are alcohol and/or drug-addicted to opt for treatment over jail.



The Police Department encourages business to immediately report any crime or suspicious activity.

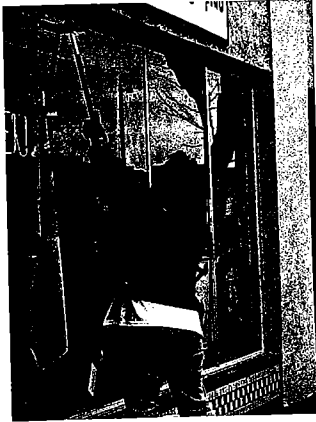
Emergency Dispatch: 911

Non-Emergency Dispatch: 303-365-2844

You're also welcome to call the Police Department with questions, concerns or suggestions:

Captain Roger Cloyd, District 1 Commander: 303-739-6950

Partners for an Improvement in Appearance



For customers, cleanliness counts. We all play a role in the appearance of East Colfax Avenue and downtown Aurora.

Business owners can help keep the corridor clean and attract customers by:

- ◆ Sweeping entryways and sidewalks to keep them free of trash and debris.
- ◆ Ensuring that parking areas are tidy and well lit.
- ◆ Keeping windows clean and free of signage and storage that block the view of the activities within the business.

To supplement these efforts, the Northern Aurora Business Association (NABA) and the city of Aurora are working together to address specific issues that detract from the corridor's appeal by:

- ◆ Coordinating the regular emptying of trash receptacles at RTD bus stops.
- ◆ Customizing clean-up strategies for each block.
- ◆ Identifying Block Captains to spearhead business improvement efforts.
- ◆ Improving the streetscapes and signage along East Colfax Avenue by establishing new design standards for a more appealing downtown appearance.
- ◆ Helping businesses refurbish their properties via exterior and interior grant and loan programs.

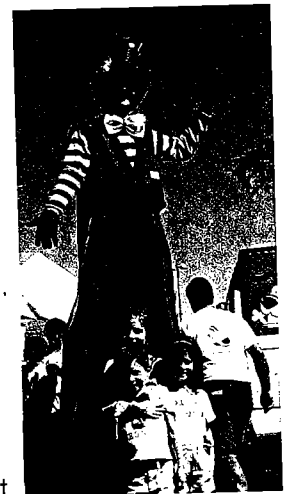
The following resources are available to local businesses to improve the area's overall appearance:

Northern Aurora Business Association (NABA) 303-361-6169
City of Aurora Code Enforcement 303-739-7280
Community Development 303-739-7900
Original Aurora Renewal (OAR) 303-739-7929

Partners in Promotion

NABA and the city of Aurora are your partners in the promotion of downtown Original Aurora. To bring new visitors and customers to the area, these partners will:

- ◆ Market the area as a safe, inviting and diverse community with many attributes.
- ◆ Work with property owners to identify potential tenants and fill commercial vacancies.
- ◆ Assist local groups to sponsor family-oriented events, such as the Aurora Asian Film Fest (May/June); NABA's FarmArt Mart (July-September); and NABA's Annual Gateway to the Rockies Parade and Jazz Festival (September).



For more information on special events, call:

Northern Aurora Business Association (NABA) 303-361-6169
Original Aurora Renewal (OAR) 303-739-7929
Small Business Development Center 303-361-0847
City of Aurora Urban Renewal Division 303-739-7130

Keys to Success

- Report any suspicious activity or crime immediately.
- Introduce yourself to the Foot Patrol Officers.
- Have Police conduct a crime prevention and safety assessment of your business.
- Get to know your neighbors on your block and their employees.
- Sweep your entryway and sidewalk.
- Keep your windows clean and free of clutter.
- Retain customers with a clean shop, well-stocked shelves and up-to-date inventory.
- Get involved: Attend or organize meetings that address East Colfax improvements.
- Volunteer to serve as a "Business Block Captain."
- Report all graffiti to the Graffiti Off Neighborhoods (GON) hotline at 303-739-6063.
- Ask customers who take your shopping carts off the premise to bring them back.
- Help strategize and implement solutions to issues on your block.
- Stay informed about upcoming activities along the East Colfax corridor.
- Promote East Colfax Avenue improvements to your family, friends and customers.
- Refer customers—whose needs you can't meet—to other neighborhood retailers.
- Your participation will improve the partnership's chances for success.
- **Join NABA—Your downtown business association.**



Partners

Original Aurora Businesses

Northern Aurora Business Association

City of Aurora

Aurora Small Business Development Center—9915 East Colfax Avenue—Phone: (303) 361-0847—www.aurorasbdc.com
Free one-on-one business counseling by appointment. Low cost seminars and workshops to help you build the business skills needed in growing your business.

Northern Aurora Business Association—9726 East Colfax Avenue—Phone: (303) 361-6169—www.aurorabusiness.org
Northern Aurora Business Association (NABA), is the collective voice of a thriving, diverse community dedicated to addressing business and area needs. Membership is open to anyone interested in supporting the civic and economic development of Northern Aurora and its surrounding community.

City of Aurora, Community Development Office—9801 East Colfax Avenue—Phone: (303) 739-7900
Grants for Original Aurora businesses who want to renovate the exterior of their buildings. Assistance is also available for interior improvements.

City of Aurora, Urban Renewal Division—15151 E. Alameda Pkwy—Phone: (303) 739-7130
The Urban Renewal Division works to contribute to the revitalization of targeted geographic areas in the City of Aurora by securing investment in high-quality development and redevelopment projects supported by the community.