



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Community Leader Spotlight: Art Robinson, Seneca-Babcock Block Club President

TIMOTHY M. KENNEDY July 25, 2011

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“Don’t ever give up on your neighborhood.”

The word community is defined as a group of people who live in the same area.

Art Robinson believes a community is much more than just an area where you live. For Art, a community is a sense of belonging, a place to be proud of.

Art is the president of the Seneca-Babcock Block Club. He has demonstrated great leadership within the Seneca-Babcock community.

Taking the reins

Stepping up as the president of the block club 11 years ago, Art believes, "To make a better community, people need to get involved." Although he felt "drafted" as the block club president, Art said, "I'm glad I did this."

Art said he feels his job is "extremely important." He gets the information that the community needs and keeps the neighborhood looking nice. People come to Art with issues they may be having, and he does everything he can in order to help.

"I feel it's an avenue people need," Art said.

He hosts neighborhood meetings and brings in members of the State Assembly, Senate and Congress, as well as the Mayor.

One of the main issues he deals with is abandoned homes. People living next to abandoned homes want to know if the home is dangerous and when, or if, the home will be torn down. Art said during the last 15 to 20 years, the Seneca-Babcock neighborhood has lost about 70 homes. In the 1960's, Seneca-Babcock had about 7,000 people. Today, Art said the community has a population of about 2,000. While that presents a challenge, Art said the community is very stabilized now.

Making an impact

As president, Art has done many things for the Seneca-Babcock community.

One of his biggest projects each year is the neighborhood clean-up. Art said the turnout was great this year with about 100 people in attendance. The volunteers filled up two dump trucks with debris and cleaned 20 blocks.

Art calls this steady increase in volunteer participation the “trickling effect.”

“People see people care,” Art said. “It goes from neighbor to neighbor.”

The clean up event has become quicker and easier over the years for two reasons: a decrease in the amount of garbage and an increase in volunteers. When they first began the clean-up, there was about 400 bags of garbage. In recent years, volunteers have only filled about 100 to 150 bags of garbage.

“This is a lot of progress,” Art said. “The community is willing to help. It’s *their* neighborhood.”

He also set up two flower gardens in the neighborhood. One located on Seneca Street and Babcock Street and the other located on Babcock and Quinn Street. In addition to the flowers, the gardens include a community sign and a fiberglass buffalo. Art said his proudest moment as block club president was getting the fiberglass buffalo.

Art said the gardens distinguish the neighborhood from other neighborhoods.

“This gives people in the community more pride and that to me is key – to have pride in your neighborhood,” Art said. “People can say, ‘I am from *here*.’”

Art has also planted over 100 trees around the neighborhood in previous years.

Setting goals

In the future Art would love to see the community develop more. “We could use new streets, sidewalks, lights and new homes,” Art said.

He is reminded of all the empty lots when he and the vice president of the block club cut the grass on 53 vacant lots every seven to 10 days.

“I would love for a new community center and more businesses to come in,” Art said. “That would add so much to this community.”

His message: get involved

Art said there was one piece of advice he wished to share with others: “Don’t ever give up on your neighborhood.”

It can take as little as an hour a week to volunteer in your neighborhood to make it a better place, he said.

“You can change your neighborhood for the better, but you have to be willing,” Art said. “No one person can do it by themselves, it takes a whole community.”

In addition to being the president of the Seneca Babcock Block Club, Art helps out with the Citizens Participation Capital Budget for the City of Buffalo and the Environmental Management Commission for the City of Buffalo. He is on the board of the Board of Block Clubs, and he is a chairman for the Neighborhood Connectors.