

Wrenn Drive Block Party

Four years ago, Greenwood Forest Baptist Church in Cary, North Carolina, had a party. The Geneva Park apartment complex near the church could not have known at the time that the party in their parking lot would soon morph into the huge event it is today. Now called the Wrenn Drive Block Party, the event involves five local churches; the Town of Cary's Phoenix Project; Dorcas Ministries, a local prominent nonprofit that helps care for those in the community; the Town of Cary Parks and Recreation Department; and countless other community groups. They all join forces to provide a day full of food, games, information, and most importantly an opportunity for community members to meet, learn about each other, and share resources.

Members of Greenwood Forest Baptist Church originally developed the idea as a way to meet more of their neighbors. As Cary has grown and become another example of suburban sprawl, Greenwood Forest realized that they were ideally located at the corner of a busy intersection near the original heart of downtown Cary and within walking distance of Geneva Park and its other neighboring apartment complexes. Their desire to become more than just another church with members who drive in from other parts of Cary compelled them to seek ways to become more engaged with the people who live around them.

From the beginning, the Cary Police's Phoenix Project has been a driving force and a natural partner. This division of the local police department partners with apartment complexes to maintain safer neighborhoods through improvements such as better lighting, landscaping, building maintenance and one-on-one relationships with residents to help cut down on crime in the communities. The officers are excellent partners who prayerfully and willingly join the effort to provide the community with resources and to open up channels of communication between the local congregations and residents.

After its first year of hosting the Block Party, GFBC decided to reach out to churches in the neighborhood as well so that everyone could begin to be better acquainted, cooperate, and share resources for the benefit of everyone in the community. The second Block Party included GFBC and the Sondei Vineyard Congregation along with the Phoenix Project and Cary PD and included four more apartment complexes in the Wrenn Drive area. In the last two years, the event has become ecumenical as the congregations of the Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian Church, Iglesia Christiana of Cary, Christ Church, and the Summit Church have joined in. Over eighteen different vendors come out to give information, share resources, or entertain. Habitat for Humanity offers information on how to volunteer or apply for a home, the Cary YMCA provides after school and summer scholarships and accept applications, and the Safe Child agency makes sure each child has a current ID. Along with the inflatables, snow cones, popcorn, crafts and games offered by the churches and the Parks and Recreation Department, local groups such as the Carolina Railhawks, a professional soccer team, offer demonstrations throughout the day. Each year has included entertainment from the different churches and their various ministries, highlighting the diversity in the groups present.

Officer Josh Fulbright, who has been a driving force from the Phoenix Project, says the cups that are given out each year at the event with all the church and sponsors names on them are a connection that can be made in the unfortunate event that the police are called. "If we have to go into a home and we see the cup, which we often do, we can say, Hey where you at the block party? Did you enjoy it? What was your favorite part? It gives us a starting point and a way to build a more positive relationship."

That is exactly how GFBC sees the block party as well. It is not enough to go into the surrounding neighborhood one time a year and hand out hot dogs and snow cones and cups with cool logos—but it is a starting point. It also seems like the right way to do ministry—by joining with fellow churches and community leaders to make friends with our neighbors so that through those relationships, the needs in our community can be met.