

ESSAYS FROM THE EAST SIDE: Creating community at the end of your driveway

By Corrie Clark

My next-door neighbours are new.

They leave at 6 a.m. in the dark that is winter and come home at 6 or 7 p.m. in the same dark, one 12-hour cycle ahead. I rarely see them on the weekends. When it snows, some kind of miracle happens as their driveway is always clear, but I never hear that familiar sound of the shovel.

I live in an attached townhouse on both sides, so sights and sounds of neighbours is a regular occurrence. Sometimes I see other neighbors out talking to each other while shoveling; some are familiar with each other and some just a casual hello. And it reminds me that so much of whom we are as neighbours happens at the end of our driveways.

How you keep your property is the first thing your neighbours notice.

Sure, some people are master gardeners, and keep immaculate lawns? but are they the best neighbours? What makes someone a good neighbour? It all depends on what your interpretation is.

If a good neighbour coming and going in silence, keeping their place clean, who doesn't bother you is your definition? then that's easy in a commuter belt like Aurora.

And frankly, it's getting much easier with all the new builds, large houses and busy lives needed to pay for them.

But, there's a lot you can do at the end of your driveway to contribute to being a good neighbour, and help create a warmer, more welcoming neighbourhood.

Saying hello is a good start. Picking up wind blown trash around your property or around the multi-unit mailboxes takes little time and adds to the harmony of your street. Keeping the manholes and drains clear of debris in the fall or not piling the snow too high on one side so your neighbour has no visibility are all common courtesies. These are simple things, but it's amazing how many times I have observed those coming and going and not even nodding hello or creating hazards for others.

I give gifts to the recycling guys and garbage guys at Christmas, and sometimes through the year at holidays. It isn't the easiest of jobs and they sure do appreciate it.

It's usually food or beer on a hot day to enjoy after work. Once I brought hot coffee back for them from Tim Horton's and it completely changed their mood.

As a single mother, I've never been the best neighbour. Sometimes my lawn is far too long as I haven't gotten time to mow it yet, my kids are noisy as they come and go? and I have a dog? although I always clean up after my dog? that is just being a good human. But I try to create a sense of community in my neighbourhood the best I can.

One of the better things I do is to offer a coffee stop on Halloween to parents, where you can get a hot cup to go for your stroll around the neighbourhood. I did it faithfully for years outside my house in another province, and it became a reliable stop and brought more kids to my house.

So, a few years ago, I started doing it here. It gives me a chance to meet and say hello to my neighbours and adds to the atmosphere of an already fun night.

The same sort of feeling you get when you have a garage sale, it's a bit of community, right at the end of a driveway, without every leaving home.