

Ridgewood Wins NACo Award

The Ridgewood Summer Beautification Program completed its second summer with a 2009 National Association of Counties (NACo) Award. NACo is the only organization that represents county government in the United States. Each year NACo gives recognition to counties that offer unique and innovative programs.

The Summer Beautification Program, implemented in 2008, was recognized by NACo for addressing an urgent need in the community. As a result of the revitalization project, beautification projects were completed at 7 intersections. Once the gardens were established, it became immediately apparent that the Ridgewood neighborhood association did not have the capacity or resources to maintain the gardens. During the first two years, from season to season, plants were lost, weeds grew out of control, mulching and pruning was overdue, perennials didn't reappear, and overall maintenance was minimal. The neighborhood association's beautification committee comprised of a few volunteers did not have the capacity to maintain the gardens.

In 2009, the Summer Beautification Program engaged 13 teenagers ranging from ages 13-18. The program was held from May 29, 2009 through August 27, 2009. The teenagers selected for the program, either lived in the neighborhood or had family members who reside there. Richland County granted \$25,000 CDBG to operate the program.

This year the teenagers received 50 hours of training from a certified brick mason and were able to apply their skills to the construction of a brick wall that serves as a backdrop for one of the gardens. The Ridgewood Neighborhood Association partnered with Keep America Beautiful who provided supplies to get the program started. Participants attended two, 2- hour workshops at the State Farmers Market. Anne Phillips, owner of the Gardner's Market provided an opportunity for hands on instruction on proper planting and transplanting techniques. Rebekah's Garden opened their doors after-hours for a "Plant Shopping Spree" and the staff came in on their day off and assisted with plant selection for the specific gardens.

