



The Making of the  
2010 Keep Columbus Beautiful  
Earth Day Celebration

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## Introduction

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The University of Iowa Department of Urban and Regional Planning partnered with the city of Columbus Junction to promote sustainability within the community as well as provide us, second year graduate students in planning, with hands on training in our final semester. We worked with Mallory Smith and developed a project that not only aligns with the efforts and goals of the Keep Columbus Beautiful project but also works to combat the challenges of rapidly changing demographics, burgeoning immigration and loss of the youth and young adult populations being faced by many small towns across the country. We worked to help Columbus Junction create a sense of place within the community, which is critical to meeting these challenges and creating a sustainable community.

Our project had three components – a communication assessment, community clean-up/beautification events, and youth participation. Seeing as sustainability is our overarching theme, we planned our events to coincide with Earth Day in late April. The pages that follow provide a complete description of Columbus Junction and our work over the past 8 months from proposal development to execution.

## Welcome to Columbus Junction

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The City of Columbus Junction is located in Louisa County at the confluence of the Iowa and Cedar Rivers. The town was established in 1874 and was originally named Sand Bank. The town is known for one of the few remaining swinging bridges in the country; the bridge was built in 1886 to allow residents to easily cross a deep ravine between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. Columbus Junction's history is deeply embedded in its proximity to the railroad – similar to that of many small Iowa towns. The railroad, along with farming, dominated the early history of Columbus Junction as well as its more diverse demographics.

A common misperception is that the Hispanic population is relatively new to Columbus Junction but in reality, the Latino community has been in the area since the early days of the railroad. The first influx of Hispanic immigrants came to Columbus Junction in the early 1900s to work on the railroad. It is undeniable that the Hispanic population has put their roots down in this community as a number of area businesses are owned and/or operated by members of the Hispanic community.

Columbus Junction has experienced a new influx of Latino immigrants recently as a result of the reopening of the local meat packing plant. In 1983, IBP acquired the former Rath packinghouse putting it back into production and hiring upwards of 1,200 employees – many of whom were of Hispanic heritage. Tyson then acquired IBP in September 2001 and has kept the plant operating at full

production. Additionally, Columbus Junction has experienced a small influx of Burmese immigrants who have also come to work at the Tyson plant.

During the floods of 1993, Columbus Junction saw minor flooding; however, the community suffered major flooding in 2008. The community is still recovering from the 2008 flood, having lost a handful of businesses including the one hotel in town and the bowling alley. In response to the flood, Columbus Junction was recently awarded a \$3 million grant from the Department of Commerce to relocate the water treatment plant out of the floodplain, which was inundated by the 2008 floods.

### Local Government Capacity in Columbus Junction

To understand how and why we shaped our project the way we did it is essential to understand the capacity of the local governmental, the local appetite for sustainability, overall community engagement, and our group's unanimous desire to *do* something. We wanted our actions to affect real and actual change in Columbus Junction as opposed to writing a plan that may or may not be implemented.

One of the reasons we chose not to write a plan was due to the limited capacity of the Columbus Junction local government. Any plan we presented to them would likely be difficult to implement given the absence of a city manager or planning and zoning commission.<sup>1</sup>

The City of Columbus Junction has a very small staff. The city staff includes one full-time clerk and one half-time deputy clerk, two full-time utility/public works employees, and four full-time and three volunteer police officers. The community relies on a volunteer fire department and the police force is shared with the surrounding small communities. Our client, Mallory Smith, is employed by the city on a part-time basis, working one to two days a week, as the coordinator of the Community Development Center. Columbus Junction is fortunate to have the ability to employ a part-time community development employee. Taken as a whole, Columbus Junction's staff, time and monetary resources are limited.

Due to the community's limited capacity, any project we employed had to remain grounded in reality and practicality. It is without a doubt that there are numerous sustainability projects and scenarios that could be dreamt up in the idealistic and academic atmosphere that a university provides, but until one immerses themselves in the local culture and accounts for actual, existing governmental

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<sup>1</sup> On an anecdotal level, during a conversation with Columbus Junction's part-time volunteer city attorney, it was revealed that the City lacks the ability and desire to enforce a simple nuisance ordinance.

capacity, an effective sustainability project cannot be realized. Therefore, the direction our group took was to provide outreach and educational opportunities for Columbus Junction residents in an attempt to raise awareness of sustainability.

## Demographics

Columbus Junction has a heterogeneous population, primarily as a result of immigration to the area starting back in the days of the railroad and continuing today as a result of the meat packing plant. Columbus Junction’s demographics can best be understood and analyzed utilizing statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and from Columbus Community School District. Although included below, the figures from the 2000 Decennial Census (Table 1 and 2) are somewhat antiquated, and the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) statistics (Table 3) are not specific to Columbus Junction but paint a good

**Table 1: City of Columbus Junction, Iowa**

Poverty Rate	11.2%
Median Age	34
Median HH Income	\$ 33,167
Per Capita Income	\$ 16,314

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

picture of Louisa County. In light of this, we turned to the Columbus Community School District statistics, which seemed to most accurately represent the Columbus Junction of today. Using schools district statistics paints an excellent race/ethnicity and poverty picture of an area and provides statistics for a political boundary that suits the community we served.

**Table 2: 2008 ACS (Columbus City, Columbus Junction, Fredonia)**

<b>Total Population</b>	<b>2,487</b>	<b>100%</b>
White Alone	2,050	82%
Black or African American alone	14	1%
Some other race alone	368	15%
Two or more races	42	2%
Hispanic or Latino	973	39%
Not Hispanic or Latino	1,514	61%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

**Table 3: 2008 ACS (Louisa County, Iowa)**

Poverty Rate	11.2%
Median HH Income	\$44,429
Persons of Hispanic/Latino Descent	15.7%
White Persons (not Hispanic)	82.8%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

**Table 4: Columbus Community School District 2009 – 2010 Enrollment Statistics**

Ethnicity		
Native American	1	0%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	0%
African-American	14	1%
Hispanic	620	63%
White	347	35%
Total	985	100%

Free or Reduced Lunch		
Total Free or Reduced	687	70%
Reduced	146	15%
Free	541	55%
Non Free or Reduced	297	30%
Total Students	984	100%

Source: Columbus Community School District

## Our Client

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Our main client was Mallory Smith—the director of the Columbus Junction Community Development Center (CDC). Mallory is bilingual and currently works with multiple organizations in Louisa County and the state of Iowa in addition to her time spent working for the Community Development Center and is a resident of Columbus Junction. Mallory is supported at the Community Development Center by Nitza, a Puerto Rican woman with strong connections to the Hispanic community in Columbus Junction.

The University of Iowa’s Urban and Regional Planning Department approached Mallory in the summer of 2009 to see if Columbus Junction would be interested in participating as a client for the program’s capstone course, Field Problems. Mallory was very interested in working with us and immediately attached us to a newly formed group in the community, Keep Columbus Beautiful.

Our work with Mallory and in Columbus Junction rallied around working with a newly established community group: Keep Columbus Beautiful (KCB). In the summer of 2009, Columbus Junction was awarded a community grant through Keep Iowa Beautiful and the Keep America Beautiful organizations. Keep America Beautiful wanted to assist in the recovery and rebuilding after the flooding in 2008. As a result of their relationship with Keep Iowa Beautiful, Columbus Junction was chosen as a special project community. As part of the grant, RDG Planning & Design, out of Des Moines, were commissioned to carry out a planning process for the community. A three day community input and planning session was held in the Summer of 2009 and the final document provided the community with a framework to move forward focusing on the following key areas:

- Corridor/Entrance/Way Finding Improvements
- Walkway & Trail Development/Enhancement
- Neighborhood Organization & Development
- Family & Youth Center Development
- Downtown/Main Street Architectural Renovation

A day after receiving our Field Problems assignments, we participated in the first Keep Columbus Beautiful meeting, following the printing and release of RDG Planning & Design’s plan for the

community. At the meeting, approximately 15 community members were present. The meeting was a good first step in understanding the recent projects in Columbus Junction and where the KCB organization wanted to go.

## **The Beginning: Proposal Development**

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In drafting our project proposal, we faced three primary challenges: multiple existing planning efforts in the community, public participation struggles, and changing goals from our client.

As mentioned above, Columbus Junction has no dearth of planning efforts in its community. Because it has the luxury of a part-time community development coordinator, the town is currently engaged in poverty alleviation planning through the Horizons project, environmental planning through the Trees Forever program and the Monkey Run Watershed Management Plan, all in addition to the community cleanup efforts of Keep Columbus Beautiful. These planning efforts involved study circles, SWOT analysis and community visioning.

As is the case in many municipal planning processes, Columbus Junction faces its share of public participation struggles. Many of its planning efforts are driven by a “usual crowd” of participators, many of whom are local business owners and nearly all of whom are older white males. Although the Community Development Center has tried to engage the town’s significant Hispanic community, its successes have been limited and sporadic with no long-term, regularly participating representatives from the Hispanic community. A language barrier may be part of the problem, but our client is bilingual and thinks the lack of Hispanic participation stems more from an outreach barrier. Another concern was a lack of participation among the youth and young adult populations in town and a fear that brain drain would be the result of their low participation rates. Finally, community members who regularly participate in the planning process had already gone through extensive input processes, but the input generated from these processes was not thoroughly documented for us to use in our project. Although we initially planned to use public meetings to gather input, we soon realized that any meeting we planned would have the same limitations as the ones that had been previously planned by the CDC. Therefore, we knew that we had to generate our own input, but we needed to do so in an untraditional manner that would engage the Hispanic community, involve youth populations and not generate input fatigue for people who typically participate in community projects.

A final challenge in our proposal development stemmed from the positive fact that our client is very enthusiastic in her community development work and has many ideas for improving Columbus Junction. However, this seemingly positive aspect of our client became a challenge when it came to settling on

one unified project. Originally, our client had envisioned our group members splitting up and working with various subcommittees under the Keep Columbus Beautiful. However, we envisioned putting together a community event that would bring residents together and build informal connections that are valuable in producing meaningful community participation. After agreeing to this idea, our client later came to us with a plan for doing private property cleanups centered around churches in each neighborhood. Because this idea conflicted with our plan to bring people together, we steered the process toward encouraging private property cleanup during the week of Earth Day and holding a community cleanup that would bring people together on Earth Day. Later, our client mentioned that she would like to explore the communication channels within the community so that she could better reach out to various segments of the population. Because this aligned with our community development goals, we decided that we would attempt to incorporate a communications analysis into our project as well.

In the end, we tied together the interests of our client and our group by forming a proposal that incorporates the following goals and strategies:

1. Actively engage Columbus Junction residents in community projects that further multiple aspects of community sustainability while expanding relationships within the community
  - Widely publicize events to ensure that as many segments of the community as possible are aware of the project
    - Research, document, and assess communication channels in the community
    - Identify as many different organizations within the community as possible to assist in event notification
    - Advertise events in multiple media formats
  - Ensure events are accessible to as many people as possible
    - Hold meetings in various locations
    - Hold meetings in various formats
    - Offer dual language services
  - Ensure diverse working groups for break-out or small group sessions
    - A balance between age, gender, ethnicity, and occupation
2. Raise household awareness of resources to help sustain, build and strengthen the Columbus Junction community
  - Understand the needs of the community to help establish a sense of place
    - Collect input
    - Interview community leaders
  - Understand and leverage resources available to the community
    - Identify resources with help from community
    - Facilitate communitywide access to the resources
3. Focus intently on the engagement of the youth and adolescent population of Columbus Junction
  - Hold focus groups with teachers to understand how best to engage students
  - Develop activities that will interest and engage the younger population
    - Schedule projects and events with sensitivity to youth constraints
    - Engage youth at all age levels



## The 2010 Columbus Junction Earth Day Celebration

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To achieve these goals, we included action steps for a communications and input component, a youth component and a community event component. To implement our proposal, we divided our working group into three subcommittees:

1. *Communications Committee*- planed and implemented a survey to reach out to as many broad segments of the population as possible. The committee was also in charge of a communications assessment to determine effective ways for advertising community events. The survey was used to develop content for the culminating Earth Day event and the communications assessment was used to encourage participation in the event.
2. *Youth Committee*- planed and implemented a youth program to engage school-age youth in the planning process. The program was used to help promote our culminating Earth Day event and encourage participation.
3. *Events Committee*- planed and implemented a communitywide, week-long Earth Day celebration that included a community cleanup and Earth Day-themed education.

Each of these subcommittees' responsibilities and activities are further detailed in the following section.

### Communication Committee

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The communications committee was responsible for two primary activities – putting together a communications assessment and surveying Columbus Junction residents.

The communications assessment was designed to be an overview of all communication channels in and around Columbus Junction. We wanted to document the names of community organizations as well as the primary contact information for each organization so that when the community plans events, they will have a reference guide outlining all possible modes for communication. The assessment was to include a wide variety of organizations so many population demographics could be targeted. The assessment covered the following types of organizations:

- Religious
- Schools
- Youth
- Political & Government
- Athletic
- Social/Recreational
- Fraternal
- Civic/Service
- Business

The communications committee was also in charge of creating and implementing a survey. The primary purpose of the survey was to gauge residents' interest in potential workshop topics. The Event and Workshop Committee would then base the Earth Week event workshops on the most popular survey responses. In addition, the communications committee crafted a 'How did you hear about Earth Week' questionnaire that was distributed at the Earth Day Community Cleanup. The purpose of the brief

questionnaire was to determine how the people who showed up at our event heard about it so that we could determine what communications channel(s) were most effective at reaching community members.

### Communications Assessment

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The communications assessment was originally seen as a document that would outline communication channels within the Columbus Junction community. To determine these channels, we wanted to collect information about community organizations, traffic count numbers at major highway intersections, newspaper readership, etc. The traffic count data was going to be used by the city to determine the highest visibility point for an electronic message board that could be used to advertise community events. We also wanted to collect information from community organizations that would tell us who is a part of the organization and how we can contact them. Thus, we were looking for demographic data about membership and communication channels within the organization such as bulletins, newsletters, etc.

Soon after starting the assessment, however, we realized that the document would be too complex to be a mere component of our field problems project and could be a field problems project in itself. For example, when looking at social/recreational organizations in the community we realized that there were a surprising number of small groups such as the embroidery club, the Etude club, and many other small, fairly informal organizations. When we discovered the vast array of small community groups and when winter weather put a hold on our traffic counts, we knew that our document was not going to be as comprehensive as we had envisioned.

After discovering that our client already had an Excel spreadsheet containing contact information for a variety of community groups, we decided that our efforts would be more useful if directed toward organizing and filling holes in the existing document. Thus, we focused our attention on organizing the spreadsheet into the organization categories mentioned above, adding smaller, less visible groups to the list and adding more information about each organization where we could find it. This information includes:

- Primary contact name
- Address
- Phone number
- Communication channels

We put this information in a spreadsheet so that we could provide the Community Development Center (CDC) with a document that could continually evolve. This will allow the CDC to update the spreadsheet as more community organizations are formed and as contact information changes. Our

communications assessment will be an accessible and easy-to-use reference should the CDC want to reach out to local organizations.

## **Community Survey**

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### **Electronic Survey**

The Communications Committee decided to implement an electronic, web-based survey to seek community input. Our client, Mallory, first mentioned alternative surveying and information sharing methods and encouraged us to pursue unconventional ways of seeking public input. We created our survey through Survey Monkey, which is a web-based surveying tool. The survey contained 12 questions: three questions about our Earth Day event and workshop ideas, seven basic demographic questions, one question about communication channels, and one question about community involvement. The entire survey was available in both English and Spanish. (See attached CD for a complete version of the survey).

As a way to encourage people to take the online survey, we set up an interactive laptop kiosk in public locations. We located the kiosk in the Columbus Junction Library for about two weeks and then for another week and a half in the senior center. The laptop's homepage was set to our survey so that whenever someone walked up to the kiosk, the survey was ready to take. We also displayed a prominent poster that read "Help Plan Earth Day in Columbus Junction! \*\*in five minutes or less\*\*" next to the laptop.

We advertised our electronic survey in a number of ways. A link to the survey was provided on the City of Columbus Junction webpage. Anyone who went to the city website saw the survey link front and center on the website's home page. We left business cards at local businesses that provided the direct URL to our survey as well as the URL of the City of Columbus Junction website. We encouraged residents to follow our survey link through the Columbus Junction website and informed them of our laptop kiosk locations via an article in the newspaper. We also provided a link to our survey on our Facebook page, and we sent all members of our Columbus Junction Earth Day 2010 Facebook page a message that contained a link to our survey.

### **Paper Survey**

We implemented a paper version of our survey at Tyson Foods in Columbus Junction. Tyson allowed our group to set up a table in the lunchroom to distribute our survey. We targeted Tyson as a way to reach out to the Latino population, a demographic that we might not have otherwise reached. Tyson was very cooperative and even allowed a bilingual employee, Francis, to sit with us for the day. Francis proved pivotal in our efforts at Tyson as she was able to encourage many employees to take our survey,

employees that we may not have been able to draw in due to the language barrier. Tyson also gave us a stack of \$5 coupons that we could give to all those who participated in the survey; the coupons were good for any frozen Tyson product.

The Lions Club was given the paper version of our survey as well. Our client, Mallory, was attending a Lions Club meeting the same night as our Tyson event, so she took surveys with her and had club members fill them out.

**Interactive Survey**

In addition to the electronic and paper versions of our surveys, we also hung interactive posters in area businesses. The posters allowed people to vote on their two favorite workshop topics. We adhered stickers to the bottom of the poster so that people could peel off and place the stickers in the boxes of their two chosen areas. We thought these posters would be a more visible and more appealing way to get input from people who might ignore a traditional survey. Although the posters were displayed in English, we used graphics to try to bridge the language gap. We chose a variety of locations in an attempt to get input from as many segments of the population as possible. Specific locations are shown in the next section.

**Survey Response**

In the end, we received 139 responses to our electronic and paper surveys. The response breakdown is as follows:

**Table 5: Survey Results**

Survey Collector	Response Count
Laptop Kiosk	12
Columbus Junction Webpage	38
Paper Survey:	89
Tyson	75
Lions Club	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>

We received 215 votes through our interactive surveys. The locations we used to display our posters and the total number of votes received at each location is as follows:

**Table 6: Interactive Survey Results**

Poster Location	Response Count
Community Bank	12
Columbus Junction State Bank	8
Economart Grocery Store	19
Hy-Vee Drugstore	27
Louisa County Health Services	51
Alley Café Restaurant	28
La Hacienda Restaurant	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>

## Lessons Learned

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### *Communications Assessment*

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In our initial planning stages, we saw the communications assessment being something much larger than it actually turned out to be. We learned that, for such a small community, there were an indiscernible number of community organizations. While creating a database of all the active community organizations seemed like a relatively easy task, we discovered quite the opposite. Because a thorough assessment proved beyond the scope of our project, we intend our assessment to be a working document upon which the CDC can build in the future.

### *Survey Methods*

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The interactive laptop kiosk was not a success. In the end, only 12 people took the survey using the kiosk. One reason for the low response rate is likely that the kiosk locations were in areas with low visibility – the library and the senior center. Another reason could be that people were intimidated by the set up because they were unfamiliar with technology or were too shy to approach it. Perhaps people did not want to be bothered by it. Neither location is an area where people would generally be walking by in a hurry, so it is hard to say exactly what caused the low turnout rate. Regardless of why the response rate was low, it is not a method we would recommend using again anytime soon.

The interactive posters that were displayed at the two area banks had the lowest participation rates out of all the posters. Due to the low response rate, we might conclude that the banks are not the best locations to display interactive content; however, both banks have bulletin boards in their entrance breezeways which are typically used to publicize upcoming events. The posters we displayed on the bank bulletin boards did have some votes. Therefore, if time and resources are available to conduct an interactive survey at the banks, we would recommend utilizing the free space banks have to offer; however, if time and display choices are limited, the banks are not the most desirable location and should not top the list of places to display interactive content.

We regret not having our interactive posters bilingual. At the time we created the posters, we felt the pictures we used to represent the topic choices would be sufficient and we were spatially constrained on the poster itself. As it turned out, the locations with the highest participation rates were those that were likely more frequented by the Latino population. While only being in English certainly did not seem to hamper our efforts at these locations, the group consensus was that we would have felt better had we provided the material in both English and Spanish.

### *Successes*

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The day spent at Tyson was a huge success. We received more response surveys there (75 in total) than we did anywhere else. Having the assistance and cooperation of a large organization was key to the success of our time there. Tyson welcomed us and provided us with additional resources that we did not even request; in addition, they gave us an upfront and interactive tour of the plant.<sup>2</sup>

We found that the locations where people might have to wait for a service, such as in a medical clinic waiting room or at a cash register waiting to be rung up, lead to very high participation rates for our interactive posters. The poster displayed at La Hacienda Restaurant had by far the most votes, 70 in all. The location of the poster could not have been better there – it was displayed on the wall directly opposite the cash register and at eye level. The restaurant is also a bar at night, so we think the location had very high visibility. The Louisa County Health Services had the second most votes at 51. Our consensus is that medical clinic waiting rooms are a great place to display interactive material as it gives people something to do while they wait. Restaurants and pharmacies also seem like beneficial places to display this type of material.

The Facebook page also proved successful as a means of reaching out to our Columbus Junction Earth Day 2010 group members and encouraging them to take our survey. Survey responses nearly doubled within a day of the message.

## Event and Workshop Committee

The main responsibility of the event committee was to organize Earth Week 2010, a weeklong celebration surrounding Earth Day, April 22, in Columbus Junction. Our committee's work consisted of four stages: planning, promoting, fundraising and execution. All stages required coordination among group members and collaboration with a wide range of local and non-local organizations.

### Planning

#### *Brainstorming*

The planning process of the weeklong Earth Day program went through several iterations from the beginning of the year until Earth Week in April. Planning for this week was a lesson in understanding the relationship dynamics with our client and the Keep Columbus Beautiful committee as well as patience. Initially our client had an interest in more of a private property cleanup but our group wanted to focus on fostering community development through the cleanup of public spaces. We originally planned a series of events throughout the week, beginning on Saturday, April 17 and running through to the

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<sup>2</sup> The plant in Columbus Junction processes approximately 9000 hogs a day. They gave us a tour of the entire plant with the exception of the kill floor.

following Saturday, April 24. The first day would have focused on a public space cleanup event in Columbus Junction and would then transition to private property cleanups from Sunday to Wednesday. On Thursday, April 22 we planned to host an Earth Day event with three educational workshops, the themes of which would be determined by our survey. The weeklong event would conclude with a beautification effort on Saturday, April 24. We also hoped to conclude the week's activities with a community potluck.

### Community Buy-in

We proposed our initial agenda to the KCB committee in early March. The committee responded enthusiastically to our proposed concepts but encouraged us to concentrate on a single day of events to capture the most community participation and interest. They felt that sustaining public interest over the course of a week and achieving attendance at multiple events was too much to ask in the first year of a large-scale Earth Day event. As a result of that meeting, we decided to condense all of the events into a single communitywide event on Earth Day, April 22, and to promote activities throughout the rest of the week that focus on private property cleanup.

From this meeting, "*Clean Your Home, Clean Your Community*" emerged as the main theme of Earth Week 2010, which consisted of the following themed cleanup days:

*Sunday, April 18:* Cleanup your Garages and Yards, promoting the City's yard waste collection process and our Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off

*Monday, April 19:* Cleanup your Closets, promoting a local church thrift store for donating unwanted clothes

*Tuesday, April 20:* Cleanup your Kitchen and Bathroom, promoting the local food pantry for donating unwanted toiletries and food as well as our Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off

*Wednesday, April 21:* Bring your Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) to our drop-off location, promoting hazardous waste awareness

*Thursday, April 22:* Cleanup your Community with the first annual Keep Columbus Beautiful Cleanup of the downtown area

*Friday, April 23:* Columbus Junction Citywide Clean Up Day, promoting the existing annual waste pickup day for the disposal of large trash items

Rather than simply asking residents to cleanup, we took a proactive approach by providing residents with information on where they could sustainably dispose of items locally as opposed to throwing 'recyclables' out in the garbage to be collected as part of the citywide cleanup on Friday. In doing so, we hoped to promote an attitude of waste reduction and recycling and to notify residents of local resources.

### Promoting

Realizing that no single outlet would adequately promote our events, our group pursued a variety of avenues to spread the word. Press releases in the Columbus Gazette, the creation of a Facebook page, fliers and posters around town, and postings on the Columbus Junction city website were the principal

means of communication employed. Additionally, work done by the Youth Committee ensured that local students were aware of our efforts. The survey conducted by the Communications Committee also served as a way to raise awareness for the events. In order to ensure maximum exposure, these efforts were cross-referenced as often as possible.

### **Press Releases**

The Columbus Gazette worked closely with the group throughout the organizing process and was a willing partner in our promotional efforts. This relationship was aided by the presence of the editor, John Carpenter, on the Keep Columbus Beautiful committee. He embraced our vision of a cleaner, more sustainable Columbus Junction. Early in the process the paper published an article introducing the students to the community and describing our project. When the group needed to raise awareness of upcoming events like the survey or the school poster and essay contests, statements were drafted and released in the Gazette. Initially the releases were conveyed through Mallory's office in the Community Development Center, but eventually the group formed a close enough relationship with the Gazette to send material directly.

In addition to specific news releases related to the planning of the Earth Day events, the group developed a promotional strategy aimed at keeping the project in the public eye even when direct public involvement was not necessary. The strategy called for the group to write brief articles that could run in the paper each week from February through April. The articles were to focus on themes related to sustainability, preferably addressing one of the themes chosen for the week (e.g. kitchen cleanup, yard cleanup, etc.) or one of the possible workshop topics. Some, but not all, of these articles were published by the Gazette; no explanation was given for the discrepancy. Nonetheless, the group enjoyed a fruitful working relationship with the paper over the course of the project.

### **Facebook**

After much contemplation, the group decided to launch a Facebook page for the Earth Day event. Uncertainty about the level of interest in using Facebook delayed its creation, but the February Keep Columbus Beautiful meeting made it apparent that interest was high. Therefore, we created a Facebook group titled Earth Day Columbus Junction 2010 as a repository for information related to the planning effort and the event itself. The Keep Columbus Beautiful logo serves as the logo for the site, which contains a group portrait, pictures of group members placing interactive posters around town and collecting surveys, photos of the winning entries from the elementary school poster contest as well as photos from our event. The page also includes links to all our articles that appeared in the Gazette and additional information about sustainability.



The real strength of the Facebook page is its ability to interact with people more directly than any of the other approaches. During the time we were collecting public input, a link to the online version of the survey was posted directly on the Facebook page. Shortly before closing the survey we sent a reminder message to all members of the Facebook group seeking their input and they responded; we had a substantial increase in survey replies within the day. In the week leading up to the Earth Day events, further promotions went via the Facebook page. We sent an invitation to our cleanup event directly to every member of the group. Reminders of individual events and cleanup initiatives were also posted directly to the page.

The primary barrier to success with the Facebook group was how to spread it throughout the community. Aside from Mallory, the group had no obvious point of entry. Fortunately, the owner of the 92 Roadhouse had taken an interest in the Keep Columbus Beautiful initiative. He attended the meeting at which the group unveiled the Facebook page and immediately offered to spread it through his wide network of local contacts. This was invaluable to the success of the Facebook group because at its inception membership was less than 10 and consisted solely of UI students and faculty advisors. After receiving help from the 92 Roadhouse, group membership soared to 141. Because the group was dispersed by locals rather than by the students, the majority of the members are people with ties to Columbus Junction rather than friends or acquaintances of the students. We have passed along ownership of the Facebook page to Mallory for continued use.

### *Fliers and Posters*

A combination of promotional posters and fliers were used throughout the planning process. During the planning phase, interactive survey posters were created to gather input on the potential workshop topics. As Earth Day approached, the group produced fliers to promote the week's cleanup themes and events. The fliers featured a chronological listing of the week's events including times, locations and contact information and several of the winning entries from the elementary school poster contest were used in the marketing materials as well. The fliers were distributed and displayed in businesses throughout the community approximately two weeks prior to the events. The flier was also posted on the Facebook page and printed in the Gazette on April 14 in time to precede the week of Earth Day. We also designed smaller scale fliers that only displayed information about the household hazardous waste collection and downtown cleanup. These smaller fliers were placed in the Tyson lunchroom and were distributed by middle school students during their neighborhood cleanup on Wednesday April 21.

### *CJ website*

The City of Columbus Junction website was an accessible and easy way for us to promote our events. The content on the website is the responsibility of the Community Development Center so working closely with the CDC allowed us to have information posted on the city website. We provided a link to our online survey on the city website for the survey's entire duration. Information summarizing the hazardous waste collection and cleanup events were also posted to the website.

## Fundraising

To attract people to the events and reward those who attended, the group secured supplies for the event, door prizes and food for volunteers. Because the group went into the project with a minimal budget, we relied on donations to meet this need. The American Legion allowed us to use its meeting hall to serve as headquarters during the cleanup and to receive people afterwards for food and prizes. The group sent letters to local businesses asking for food and beverage donations and contacted Tyson for prizes. Donations included the following:

*Restaurants* – Approximately two weeks prior to the event, several group members traveled to Columbus Junction to follow up on our donation letters in person. At that point, the group secured donations of ham and cheese sandwiches from Lee's Alley Café and chips and guacamole from Rey de Reyes. After a follow up visit the following week accompanied by Mallory, who helped break the ice with some of the Spanish-speaking proprietors, further donations were secured. The Santa Ana bakery donated sweets and baked goods; La Hacienda donated pico de gallo and fresh-made flautas; Take 2 Scene 2 donated soft drinks; the 92 Roadhouse donated meats, cheeses and fruit; and Economart donated drinks, paper products, and several reusable bags for our raffle prizes.

*Keep Iowa Beautiful* – KIB, the parent organization of Keep Columbus Beautiful, provided several important contributions. They donated mesh bags and two boxes of heavy-duty leather gloves for volunteers to use during the cleanup. They also allowed us to use two large banners to promote the event. Additionally, the organization donated small items including stickers and pencils to give away to event attendees.

*Tyson* – Tyson was very helpful throughout the process, making several donations to the group. When the group was invited to conduct surveys with Tyson employees, the company donated \$ 5 coupons to all survey participants. The group sought further donations from Tyson for prizes to award during the Earth Day celebration and the company responded by donating six pork tenderloins.

*Columbus Junction State Bank* – Tom Houston, President of the Columbus Junction State Bank made a cash donation of \$100. The donation was used to help cover a portion of the expenses associated with the poster contest prizes.

## Execution

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### *Household hazardous waste collection event*

Although we originally envisioned the Wednesday household hazardous waste cleanup to be informational only, we were actually able to host a household hazardous waste collection event downtown. When we pitched our ideas to the KCB committee, Columbus Junction city councilmember Phil Kaalberg jumped on the opportunity to organize an event in which residents could drop off their hazardous waste for proper disposal. He recruited the help of Laura Liegois from the Muscatine Recycling Center and Transfer Station, who helped staff the event and prepared a survey including questions about demographics, household hazardous waste type, storage period, etc. Our field problems group and community members volunteered at the event by conducting the survey, collecting waste and sorting it. We accepted all household hazardous waste deliveries except motor oil, antifreeze and car batteries.

In the end, we received 30 deliveries of household hazardous waste from 33 households. Waste included latex- and oil-based paints, pesticides, herbicides, cleaners, varnishes, photo chemicals and paint thinner. The average storage period of these household hazardous wastes was more than 9 years according to the survey results.

### *Earth Day Event*

The Earth Day event consisted of a downtown cleanup from 4:00-6:00 pm followed by an Earth Day celebration at the American Legion. Upon arrival, attendees were asked to fill out a brief survey gauging the success of our outreach efforts. If they filled out the survey, they were allowed to enter their name in a raffle for prizes. After filling out the surveys, we gave volunteers mesh bags and gloves and sent them on their way throughout the downtown area to cleanup. After their hard work, volunteers were asked to attend our Earth Day celebration, which included an awards ceremony for poster contest winners, raffle prizes for attendees and of course, free food and drink. We also had information tables set up in the American Legion with materials about various sustainability topics including bike safety and home energy efficiency, the winning topics of interest from our survey. All poster contest entries were on display at the event as well.

About 20 people participated in the cleanup portion of our event. Participants included Columbus Junction residents, the executive director of Keep Iowa Beautiful, and the mayor. Although we were prepared with maps to direct volunteers to specific areas to clean, we allowed people to fan out and clean the area of their choice because of relatively low turnout. Volunteers gathered approximately 40 bags of trash at the event.

At the celebration following the cleanup, a significantly higher number of people joined us. Attendees included cleanup volunteers, all poster contest winners and their families, key players in the KCB program and city staff members. According to the results from our entry survey, over 40% participants were Hispanic and the majority of attendees were children and seniors.

### Lessons Learned

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In our initial planning process, we did not realize that having a series of events and three education-oriented workshops within one week might strain people's time and lead to very low participation. By concentrating our efforts on a single event and providing information tables instead of workshops, we think we improved our overall participation. However, getting the participation meant cutting informational workshops that could have benefited the community. As these Earth Day events become more established in the community, we hope more information sessions can be incorporated.

The turnout imbalance on Earth Day between those who came and participated in the cleanup and those who came just for the celebration makes us think that restructuring the event may prove beneficial. For one, we would likely reduce the cleanup portion of the event from two hours to one hour. We also considered restructuring the event so the celebration comes before the cleanup; however, we are not sure that would be the most effective tactic either.

Finally, we cannot overstate the understanding we gained for the importance of personal interactions in a small community. The more times we visited Columbus Junction, the more comfortable and recognizable we became in the community. Hanging survey posters, soliciting donations and simply being customers at restaurants provided an unmatched kind of public outreach that contributed to the success of our events.

### Successes

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We think our events were overall a success in that we brought the community together for an Earth Day event. We successfully recruited both Hispanic and non-Hispanic participation, which is significant because the two parts of the community generally operate separately. Involving youth in our project significantly aided us in our pursuit of having a diverse turnout. The children brought with them their parents and grandparents which resulted in not only an ethnically diverse turnout but also a wide-range in age groups.

Other success include the fact that our weeklong Earth Day program was largely driven by public input that we gathered from our survey and KCB meetings we attended. We were also able to participate in relationship building with local organizations and businesses. This type of community outreach was one of the biggest contributing factors to our success. Many of the activities we did

leading up to our event were done with the support of community members and our sponsors/business partnerships.

Most importantly, our events have leveraged the planning of future community events. For the household hazardous waste collection, we empowered community members to take ownership of the event and they have pledged to continue the event in the future. The Keep Columbus Beautiful committee is currently using the weeklong template we created to host a follow-up beautification week in May. The Community Development Center intends to host Earth Week 2011 including a cleanup day and a household hazardous waste drive.

## Youth Committee

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The youth portion of our project was comprised of three components – a poster contest, an essay contest, and a service-learning neighborhood cleanup with middle school students. The poster contest was open to all elementary school students whereas the essay contest was directed toward junior high and high school students. Both contests focused on what the students would do to keep Columbus Junction beautiful. The other component of our project involved organizing and directing junior high students to help with a neighborhood cleanup and an address visibility assessment of all housing in Columbus Junction.

As described in our project proposal, our motivations for having a youth component stemmed from our desire to foster community sustainability by reaching out to the entire community. Many small communities in Iowa and the Midwest see their college bound high school students leave upon graduation never to return to the community in which they were raised. We hoped by initiating a pattern of community engagement, it might help foster an interest in community involvement – an interest that could carry through to the community in which they one day reside.

We also felt that youth play an important, yet often overlooked, role in communities. For example, young people are rarely at the table for community meetings and discussions. In addition, we believed introducing the concepts of sustainability to the younger population was important enough that we devoted an entire subcommittee to engaging the youth of Columbus Junction

## Contest Planning

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Planning the youth part of the project was an exercise in finding a balance between desire and reality. In the early brainstorming stages, we came up with a plethora of ideas for ways we could reach out to the youth of Columbus Junction and involve them in our project. Without a clear sense of what shape our overall project was going to end up taking, it was difficult to narrow down our list of possible

ideas that ranged from having the students create their own sustainability plan for Columbus Junction to using students for a communitywide cleanup.

The planning and execution process for the contests can be summarized in the following steps: brainstorming, buy-in, go-ahead, execution, outreach, and leveraging.

### ***Brainstorming***

The brainstorming phase of our project was possibly the most fun and most challenging part of the project. The predomination of the brainstorming was done at the group level prior to splitting up into subcommittees to ensure everyone felt comfortable with the direction the project was heading. Group brainstorming presented some challenges as there were more good ideas than we could feasibly do in the time we had. Additionally, with so many good ideas, it was difficult to narrow down the field of possibilities and begin actually working on the desired project. Eventually, the group decided to allow the subcommittee to finalize what it was we were actually going to do to engage the youth of Columbus Junction.

### ***Buy-in***

After coming to a consensus within the subcommittee that our project would consist of the elements described above, we needed to get buy-in from the rest of the group as well as our client before proceeding. When bringing our final project plan to the whole group, however, we needed to make sure that we did not inadvertently open the subject up for more brainstorming as it was time to begin implementing our projects. The same was true when we sought buy-in from Mallory. In both cases, we were able to get buy-in with relative ease.

Upon receipt of the go-ahead from Mallory, we drafted a letter to the Columbus Junction School District Superintendent, Rich Bridenstine, describing our overall project and detailing our proposal for involving the schools in the project (See attached CD). Mr. Bridenstine was responsive to our proposal and invited us to a meeting with him and the schools' principals. The meeting with the principals was successful and, to our surprise, they volunteered to copy, distribute and collect the entry forms for their respective schools.

### ***Outreach***

The support of Columbus Community School administrators was vital in our ability to run a poster and essay contest in the community. In addition, we ran stories and ads in the Columbus Gazette promoting the contests.

### ***Execution***

Once the poster and essay entry forms were completed, they were presented to school administrators for distribution to students. Students were given two weeks to complete their posters and essays. A large ad ran in the Columbus Gazette encouraging participation in the contests two days prior to the deadline. The entries were collected at the schools and judged by our committee. In the end, we only received poster contest entries; no middle or high school students participated in the essay contest. We drafted award letters for each of the winning artists which were distributed by the school principals. We selected two winners for each grade in which we received entries – 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. Eight total winners were selected and student winners were given sustainable prizes including reusable water bottles, donated by Jennifer Jordan at ECO Iowa City, and reusable tote bags. The prizes were awarded at the Earth Day Celebration as a way to encourage attendance. The idea worked as all eight contest winners came to the Earth Day event to claim their prize and brought with them many proud parents and grandparents.

As an additional measure to encourage participation in our contest, we awarded the class with the most contest entries a pizza party. We had a tie for the most number of entries with two classes so we decided to give two pizza parties. The two winning teachers collaborated and found a time on Earth Day in which we could bring pizza for the students.

### **Leveraging**

Our poster and essay contest allowed us to introduce the school administrators to the Keep Columbus Beautiful committee and the work they were trying to accomplish in Columbus Junction. As a direct result of our interaction with the schools, the middle school principal was interested in further engaging his students in service learning and the goals of the Keep Columbus Beautiful committee. In doing so, he volunteered 120 of his students for 90 minutes of the school day on the day before our big Earth Day celebration to pick up litter throughout the community and survey the visibility of addresses on homes for the County's emergency first responder team. Additionally, the students helped distribute reminders about the downtown cleanup on Earth Day.

The principal asked our group and our client to come speak to the students about the service learning and cleanup event. He called an assembly for all middle school students a week before their volunteer service learning project which gave us the opportunity to speak directly to the students about our entire week of cleanup efforts. It also allowed us to personally encourage them to join us again on Earth Day for the communitywide cleanup.

### **Lessons Learned**

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Our project was relatively successful; however, there are a few things we would likely do differently in the future. We went to the schools with a plan for what we wanted to do and anticipated the students would take the initiative to do it on their own. We did not meet with teachers to collaborate with them on a project they were excited about nor did we even meet with them to pitch our project, which might have helped garner support. For example, at the junior high and high school levels, we did not receive any essay contest entries. Perhaps had we contacted the teachers and worked to make it part of a particular lesson, we would have seen the students participate. Also, the lack of response makes it unclear as to whether or not we have helped tie the youth of Columbus Junction to their community.

Additionally, we had hoped to involve high school students in our cleanup day, but due to a delay in determining exactly what our cleanup day would look like, we chose not to contact the two student clubs we had been directed to. If we were to do it over again, reaching out to the clubs to see what they would like to contribute to the day rather than waiting to assign them a role in our day may have been a better approach.

### Successes

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The youth portion of the project had its share of successes. The elementary school poster contest yielded a good response from multiple classes. In the end, we received 53 poster entries. Additionally, all eight of our poster contest winners came with their families to receive their prizes at our Earth Day Celebration.

Unexpectedly, our essay contest, though unsuccessful, spurred further involvement of the junior high school students who, as mentioned, sought us out as a partner for their Earth Day service-learning cleanup. These students were actively engaged in cleaning up the neighborhoods, which was one of our goals when we began this project. In addition, the middle school has expressed interest in continuing the annual Earth Day cleanup we helped coordinate next year.



## Conclusion

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Overall, our project was a success because we met all three goals we set in our proposal. By hosting the Earth Day cleanup and celebration, we were able to meet our first goal of actively engaging the Columbus Junction community in sustainable projects. Because the event was well publicized and coordinated with our youth events, we were able to bring a good mix of ethnicities and ages together for a common purpose. By encouraging private cleanups during the week, hosting a household hazardous waste collection and providing educational materials at the Earth Day celebration, we met our second goal of raising household awareness of local sustainability resources. Finally, we met our third goal of engaging the youth population by creating the poster and essay contests and partnering with the middle school to clean up neighborhoods. Because the community is pleased with our efforts and plans to replicate them in future years, we think the project itself will be sustainable and reach more people in years to come.

Although we were happy with the outcome of our project, if we were to do it again we would take the following steps to improve our success in meeting each of our goals:

- Goal 1: Actively engage residents in sustainable community projects
  - To bring more people together, we would use more outreach in both surveying and inviting community groups to our events. We thought our visit to Tyson was a great way to reach people, and we would like to have attended more community group meetings to get input and buy-in for our project.
  - We would have restructured our Earth Day event to encourage people to participate in both the cleanup and the celebration. Possibilities to do so include having the contest awards before the cleanup or requiring a bag of litter as a “ticket” to the celebration.
- Goal 2: Raise household awareness of sustainable community resources
  - We would like to have incorporated more interactive educational resources at the Earth Day event. Having booths at the event about sustainability concepts such as energy efficiency may have been a better way to communicate the information than our handouts, which could easily have been ignored by attendees.
  - Recruiting community groups to “adopt” a day of the week would have generated more buy-in for all events. For example, if a community group decided to do a clothing drive for the Monday “Cleanup your closets day,” that group could recruit participation in both the clothes drive and the Earth Day celebration.
- Goal 3: Intently focus on engaging the youth population

- Collaborate with teachers to create youth projects that fit within their curriculums. If teachers were involved in the planning, we think we could have generated more student participation in all age levels.
- Invite high school student groups to participate in our project and define their own role to play. If we had contacted student clubs early in the planning process, they could have come up with their own Earth Day programs that coordinate with our efforts. This could have generated more participation and buy-in from the high school students.

## Appendix: List of Documents

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The following is a list of all the documents that have been included on the flash drive and given to the department.

### Columbus Junction Field Problems Earth Week 2010

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**List of Documents** – Contains a comprehensive list of the documents and files included on the CD

**Columbus Gazette Press Releases** – Contains all the items that were forwarded to John Carpenter, editor, for inclusion in the Columbus Gazette, organized by date

**Sponsors & Donors** – Comprehensive list of all donors/supporters of this project in Columbus Junction including the organization/business, contact person, address and items donated

**Columbus Junction Presentation** – PowerPoint file presentation of our project that was presented to the Urban and Regional Planning Department faculty and students and interested community members on April 27, 2010

**Presentation Photos** – JPEGs of the images used in the slideshow presentation

### Communications Committee

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**CJ Survey Results** – Results of the 12 question survey targeted to gain information on communication habits and interests in Earth Day activities

**Business Card Proof** – Copy of the business cards that were created to advertise the survey

**Survey Questions** – A list of questions from the survey, includes English and Spanish translation

**Earth Day Survey Results** – Results of the Earth Day survey that was distributed to participants at the Earth Day event, survey sought demographic information and event advertising success

**Communications Assessment** - A list of community organizations and businesses in Columbus Junction, highlighted groups include those who participated in Earth Week 2010 events, a tool for the Community Development Center in outreach and event planning

**Photos** – Documentation of communication committee activities

### Events Committee

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**Earth Day Sponsorship Request Letters** – Template for requesting donations from local businesses for the Earth Day cleanup

**Earth Week 2010 Flier** – Template for Earth Week 2010 flier, includes Spanish translations

**Household Hazardous Waste & Earth Day Flier** – Template for flier that was printed in the Columbus Gazette and also distributed at Tyson for display in the lunch room

**Photos** – Documentation of event committee activities

### Youth Committee

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## Poster & Essay Contest

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**Essay Contest Entry Form** - Template

**Poster Contest Entry Form** - Template

**Youth Press Releases** – Articles and announcements that ran in the Columbus Gazette specific to youth committee events

**Letter to Columbus School Administration** – Copy of letter sent to Rich Bridenstine requesting approval of the poster and essay contest to be distributed within the Columbus Community School District

**Poster Contest Winner Certificates** – Template of the certificates that were awarded to students with winning poster entries

**Poster Contest Winners Letter** – Template of the letter teachers and students to announce and congratulate winning poster entries

**Photos of Poster Contest** - Documentation of poster/essay contest

## Middle School Cleanup

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**Address Visibility Form** – Final template of flier students completed regarding address visibility and includes event advertisement for Earth Day cleanup

**Photos of Middle School Cleanup** – Documentation of middle school cleanup day

Underlined titles represent folders.