

## How to Create Bumping Spots

*Based on a conversation and walk with Julie Chasen, Growing a Village/Cultivando un Pueblo*

Bumping spots, created through the process of placemaking, are spaces where people can come together and create relationships. They can be public places such as parks and street corners or private property like a person's front yard. Julie Chasen from the Junior College Neighborhood learned about them after seeing a slide show put on by City Repair from Portland, OR. She was so inspired by the concept that she decided to organize a neighborhood meeting to brainstorm places they could turn into bumping spots. With help from The Leadership Institute for Ecology and the Economy, a meeting was held in a local church and twenty-eight neighbors participated and came up with one hundred ideas just for the JC neighborhood. Ideas included places for food exchanges, artwork, benches, gardens, bulletin boards, traffic calming, planting trees, and meditation.



*Julie stops to relax on a covered bench made by a neighbor for anyone to use.*

The first event for the neighborhood took place in 2006 at the intersection of Silva and Orchard St. They used chalk to draw a large picture in the roadway for temporary art and built a community bench on wheels that was able to be moved around the neighborhood. The full day included live music and food sharing. One year later, volunteers got eighteen straw bales and placed them throughout the neighborhood as resting places that would signal to neighbors that this was a welcome place to sit and chat. Some of them were replaced with permanent benches after people experienced what it was like to allow others onto their private property. As Julie describes it, bumping spots are a "space where people feel welcome to hang out." Ideally, people also feel comfortable to contribute to the space, express themselves, and feel connected. This can be an ongoing process letting people know that even if a resting place is on someone else's property, everyone is welcome to use it to relax.

Julie started a bumping space in her front yard by creating a children's fort among the trees in her front yard. She added a bench so parents could sit nearby and talk while the children play. Young people from the neighborhood were invited to bring toys, artwork, and whatever else they wanted to add to the



*Julie created this bumping spot in her front yard. Neighbors and local children have contributed to it ever since.*

space to leave their mark and personalize it. What has grown is a nook in the neighborhood with little remnants contributed over time from various neighbors. The key to keeping these places used on an ongoing basis is that the property owner and nearby residents must be passionate about it and willing to maintain it. Julie marveled at how much safer she feels having a bumping spot in front of her

home. It has added a connection with her neighbors and they look out for negative influences on her property.

The neighborhood's new project, spearheaded by Julie and Growing a Village/Cultivando un Pueblo and with help from a Community Advisory Board Grant she received, is to transform the Poppy Creek Green Space into a kid-friendlier place. Already neighbors have done weed whacking, cleaned up dog waste, removed trash, done crafts projects, and cleaned along the sidewalks to keep debris from going into the creek with help from City Creek Steward, Alistair Bleifuss. When they got together to generate ideas for how the space could be used, they came up with adding a post with biodegradable bags for people to remove dog waste, a bulletin board, a garbage bin, art, and planting poppies. A neighborhood youth has offered to keep the bags stocked which is in keeping with Julie's philosophy of supporting young people as they take on leadership roles in the community.

As we walked around the neighborhood, I was struck with how everyone seemed to know Julie. She had time to say hello to each person and seemed to feel that the neighborhood was truly hers. She has contributed to so many of the benches, straw bales, artwork, gardens, and events that she walks with a confidence that she belongs in the neighborhood and can count on her community. Bumping spots have made more private space public to her and she feels comfortable sitting down and enjoying it.



*Poppy Creek Green Space*

### **Tips for Creating Bumping Spots:**

- Work with neighbors to identify places in your community where people gather or could gather (parks, corner lots, open spaces, alleyways, intersections, etc).
- Brainstorm what you would like to have in those spaces (community garden, vegetable swap, mural, flowers, bench, etc).
- Decide who is willing to initiate contact with the property owner or contact the City department that maintains the space.
- Find a way to let people know the space is intended for everyone's use (signs, bulletin boards, e-mail, word of mouth, etc). This could be as simple as moving chairs from your backyard onto your front yard with a sign that reads, "Feel free to relax here."
- Encourage people to contribute to the space's character (help with maintenance, add artwork, etc).
- Children are great sources of energy so contact local daycares, schools, and young leaders in the neighborhood to involve them in the process
- Have fun! Use the bumping spots as a chance to meet new people, introduce yourself, and create an atmosphere of belonging

With little to no money, neighbors can transform their streets and sidewalks into a true neighborhood.



*A neighbor added this bench to his front yard and, with Julie's support, created a bulletin board for community members to post on.*

“City Repair is an organized group action that educates and inspires communities and individuals to creatively transform the places where they live. City Repair facilitates artistic and ecologically-oriented placemaking through projects that honor the interconnection of human communities and the natural world. The many projects of City Repair have been accomplished by a mostly volunteer staff and thousands of volunteer citizen activists.”

From <http://cityrepair.org/>