



Indianapolis REALTORS® Score Win-Win With Graffiti Abatement Program—August 2015

If an area's crime rate is the biggest factor in most home-buying and business-location decisions, it is also probably the most challenging for real estate professionals and associations to address, in looking to make a positive difference. The Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS® (MIBOR) had struggled for a long time seeking a way to have an impact on crime, and by taking a lead in the city's new Graffiti Abatement Program, it has found its opportunity.

"We know that the mere presence of graffiti contributes to more serious crime," says Chris Pryor, Government Affairs Director of the 6,850-member association. "Fighting graffiti vandalism is a critical component in reducing overall crime and deterring more serious offenses, but it was hard to know how to get at it in an effective way." MIBOR had been involved in developing a municipal graffiti ordinance in Indianapolis, which was a good start, explains Pryor, but it didn't provide for necessary community support. "The Graffiti Abatement Program is helping to eradicate graffiti on a practical level, and our Graffiti Abatement Unit is an exciting part of the solution," he says.

The Graffiti Abatement Program is a partnership between a number of municipal departments, the Indianapolis Public Safety Foundation, and the Keep Indianapolis Beautiful non-profit organization. Using a Game Changer Grant from the National Association of REALTORS®, MIBOR joined forces with a few other local funders to create a mobile Graffiti Abatement Unit that responds to calls from citizens reporting graffiti, and from property owners who are unable to remove graffiti from their own houses and businesses, as required by the ordinance. A truck donated by the Fire Department, and a trailer fully loaded with equipment and supplies, have been painted and branded with a colorful new logo.

Most exciting, says Pryor, is that the Graffiti Abatement Unit is staffed by Recycle Force, a program helping former inmates re-enter the workforce with dignity, viable skills, and a strong work ethic. "We're very glad to be giving these members of our community this opportunity for readjustment," he says.

MIBOR celebrated the launch of the Graffiti Abatement Unit with a volunteer opportunity and press conference on June 24th, which brought out about 20 members who painted several high-profile sites along a major thoroughfare after the mobile unit had done its work; a number of local elected officials and community leaders attended the press conference, which received significant local media coverage. Claire Belby, MIBOR's Communications Director, notes that folks from the surrounding neighborhood came out to say thank-you, appreciative that someone was taking an interest, and taking charge. "That was an unexpected benefit of the actual work that was being done: the sense that the partnership was able to achieve something with strength, visibility, and momentum that was too big for individuals to tackle. Members have been excited to see the truck and trailer around town," she continues, noting that they follow its progress via social media. In its first two weeks on the job, the Graffiti Abatement Unit worked on over twenty-five sites, eradicating 4,340 square-feet of graffiti. One of the jobs, the removal of a graffiti retribution message near the site of a recent homicide, was requested by the



Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department and completed the following day; the police force was impressed and grateful.

"The challenges of graffiti are not unique to Indianapolis; communities across the country are dealing with it to a greater or lesser extent," adds Pryor. "Programs like this are one way that REALTORS® can have a direct impact on the issue of crime," he says. "We believe it's a terrific way for REALTORS® to be a part of the solution in supporting a healthy real estate market and a safer, more vibrant community."

To learn more about how the REALTORS® of Indianapolis are working to discourage criminal activity and improve quality of life and property values in their communities, contact Chris Pryor, Government Affairs Director of the Metropolitan Indianapolis Board of REALTORS® at chrispryor@mibor.com or 317-956-5240, or Claire Belby, its Communications Director, at clairebelby@mibor.com or 317-956-5232.



The association kicks off graffiti abatement campaign in front of one of several targeted buildings, and then gets to work cleaning up.