

# Neighborhood Block Party Guide

A series of how-to-guide for residents working to improve their neighborhoods.

## Why Have a Block Party?

Dear Lompoc Valley Residents,

For many generations block parties have served as a way for neighbors to meet each other. Some block parties are organized around holidays such as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July or Labor Day. Others may start because of an issue affecting the neighborhood. Whatever the motive, block parties often lead to further gatherings of neighbors, and may lead to neighborhood improvements or a neighborhood cleanup campaign.

You don't have to live in an area of single-family homes to be involved in a block party. Block parties can happen in townhouse complexes, in apartment buildings or even in a park near a condominium. A block party is simply a group of neighbors who work together to organize an event for their neighborhood.

This kit is organized so that all necessary information forms and "do's and don'ts" are included. In addition, your neighborhood community center or police may be able to direct you to others who organized block parties in your area if you want to organize a big event!

So don't hesitate! Gather a couple of neighbors, pick a date, follow the instructions in the guide and invite everyone to join in!

Sincerely,

Mario Guerrero, Jr.  
Recreation Manager



# 10 Reasons To Have a Block Party:

1. To have fun - no excuse or reason to celebrate!
2. To meet your neighbors. The more you know who belongs to the neighborhood, the more likely you are to identify strangers or suspicious people.
3. To increase the sense of belonging in your neighborhood.
4. To organize a city-sponsored group such as Neighborhood Watch.
5. To make connections within the community. When you know people, you can exchange skills or resources and perhaps organize a book club, baby-sitting co-op, share walking to school duties, or find new friends for your children.
6. To plan a campaign for traffic slowdown, get better lighting, or address other interests.
7. To "use" the street for one day, for example to roller blade, set up a kids jump house or to practice bike safety skills.
8. To meet some of the old-time residents in the neighborhood and learn about its history.
9. To have a neighborhood clean-up day, play some good music and barbecue once all the work is done.
10. To start a tradition of getting together at least once a year.

# Suggestions on How to Start Organizing

1. Gather a few neighbors and divide up the tasks. Ask for contributions towards the permit fees. Decide on a possible theme, activities, etc. Decide what to do about food.
2. Start knocking on doors to find out if there is enough interest and, if so, which day would be the best for the most people.
3. Pick a date and time (mid-afternoon to evening works best). Respect neighborhood quietness after 9:00 pm. Think of an alternate plan in case of poor weather.
4. Go door to door:
  - Hand out invitations (use the one included in the guide or create your own).
  - If you plan to close off the street, you will need to complete a Block Party application form with a signature and deliver it to the Anderson Recreation Center at 125 West Walnut Avenue or fax it to (805) 736-5195.
  - Recruit volunteers to help with the planning.
5. Decide if this will be a block party restricted to those on the street/block or will people be able to invite friends/relatives (if yes, how many). Make this clear in your flyer/invitation.



## Good Ideas



- Invite a city council member, school principal, or city staff member.
- Make sure you have a record of everyone who attends and everyone you contacted; after all, the idea of a block party is to connect with your neighbors.
- Identify special talents your neighbors might have - you may be living next to a magician, singer, dancer, artist, radio host or prize winning cook.
- Plan lots of activities for children.
- Have an environmentally friendly party. Ask everyone to bring their own reusable plates, cups and cutlery to limit paper garbage and litter.
- Include activities that encourage people to meet each other. Use nametags and include children by asking them to create the tags.
- Make sure that people with disabilities can participate in the activities and include their attendants (those with Seeing Eye dogs or in wheelchairs).
- Institute a bathroom policy "Everyone to use their own" so that home security is maintained.
- Inspire clean up after every party by rewarding children with a prize for picking up garbage.
- Have a block/street clean up as part of the party. Also, neighbors may want to contribute towards the cost of a truckload to the dump and use this to clean out gardens, garbage or alleys.
- Distribute an evaluation form to participants (to get a good response, number the forms and have door prizes for returned entries).

# Suggested Activities for Getting to Know Your Neighbors



## 4<sup>th</sup> of July

- Who can trace their family origins back the farthest?
- Who is the newest "American"?
- Play charades using American heroes.
- Include a cake decorated with the American Flag.
- Play patriotic music.

## Neighborhood History

- Research through the library, and the museum of local history of your neighborhood.
- Identify any special people that lived in your area such as the longest resident, politician, artist, eccentric, hero, etc. Have partygoers guess who, what, where through charades and other games.

## Cultural Connections

- Have everyone bring his or her favorite family dish.
- Teach everyone how to say three things in another language.
- Use a map to indicate where everyone originally came from.
- Record the story of how everyone came to live in the neighborhood and what he or she likes best about it.

## Neighborhood Action

- Discuss what issues/concerns people may have (keep this to a predetermined time: remember, a block party should be fun).
- Establish teams to explore how to resolve the concerns.
- Have a cleanUp time.
- Build a bench, plant a garden, and paint street numbers, etc. as part of the block party activities.