

**Presentation
by**

**Albion,
Michigan**

**for the 1973
All-America City Award**

Good afternoon, my name is Charles Jones, mayor protem of Albion
my name is Neal Godby, city manager of Albion

Maps will tell you the City of Albion is located in Southern Michigan, midway between Detroit and Benton Harbor. A census report will tell you we have a population of 12,000. Our local chamber of commerce will say Albion has an excellent industrial base, including Corning Glass, Hayes-Albion, Union Steel, McGraw-Edison and Marchand Toys. Educators will tell you Albion is the home of two fine institutions, Starr Commonwealth for Boys and Albion College. On the other hand, Albion is often described by its detractors as simply a small town with big city problems.

Twenty-five percent of Albion's population is black and chicano. The median family income in 1970 was \$9,600. Unemployment was then seven percent. There was and is a lack of new residential construction, and more than two-thirds of all housing was built prior to 1940. Our population declined by 600 in the past decade.

Albion was tense during the late 1960's. The racial riots which spread across the country in 1967 affected Albion, too. Many felt the city was unable to improve the conditions responsible for the racial problems, and for other problems facing Albion.

A lack of faith in Albion's future was further compounded by the local government's inability to finance problem-solving programs. There was no tax money forthcoming for human relations programs or environmental improvements.

A Solution Begins To Take Shape.

A significant change took place in Albion during the late 1960's, a change that continues today through Albion's greatest asset -- its people. Although there was constructive citizen action before this time, truly massive human involvement has become a reality in only the past few years.

Albion's application for the All-America City Award outlines only three of more than a dozen programs which have been instrumental in solving community problems, as well as restoring faith and pride in our city. These are but a few of the innovations which have led to a new Albion -- not only a better looking place, but a better living place as well. Crime rates have dropped, school tensions have eased, race relations have improved, and employment has climbed. Best of all, a new positiveness prevails.

The Melting Pot: An Experiment That Worked.

With us is Mrs. Barbara Gladney, wife of an Albion police sergeant. Only five years ago, she and her husband met with Sandy and Paul Pimentel and discussed the absence of social interaction among Albion's ethnic groups. Racial tension still permeated much of the city and they decided such tensions required social, not political, interaction. They organized a

series of social events inviting black, white and chicano couples. With each event additional couples came along. Soon the catalyst existed for a community-wide effort to foster racial interaction on a large scale. Coffee parties were organized to explain the concept. By October 1970, forty couples were members of a fledgling social organization called the Melting Pot. Directors were selected and by-laws written which included a ban on any political activity by the group. A year later ninety-five couples were members and attendance at social events, dances, dinners and picnics was over three hundred persons, as shown in these slides from one 1971 event.

Before and after each Melting Pot event over ten couples sponsored "get-togethers" attended by up to twenty guests who represent a good mix of ethnic and social backgrounds, as shown in these slides from the 1973 Halloween costume dinner party.

The Melting Pot also was helpful in easing tensions in the city schools. Members established student "rap" sessions relating to ethnic and social problems.

The Melting Pot continues to have great support, as indicated by the large attendance at all 1973 social events. At least 1,500 persons have attended Melting Pot events and racial tension no longer exists as a major problem in Albion.

Improving Albion's Environment: A Citizen Project.

The Kalamazoo River flowing through Albion was dammed in 1856 to provide power for local mills. The resulting mill ponds, which were once

considered community assets, had become eyesores. The original depth of the 48-acre mill pond had decreased from an average of eight feet to less than twelve inches. Also, litter had accumulated along the bank and in the river itself. Truman Barnes, a school bus driver, seated here, was one of the organizers in 1965 of the Albion Beautification Committee. Today he is a dominant force in such projects. Assisted by 20 boy scouts, he and two other adults cleared several acres along the river banks. A year later more citizens began a concerted river clean up project. One hundred persons assisted in removing water weeds from ten acres of the mill pond. In 1968, the State of Michigan awarded this group their prestigious "Keep Michigan Beautiful" award.

In 1970 efforts were expanded to all river banks around the city. On Earth Day in 1970, five-hundred persons cleared brush and removed tons of refuse from the water. C.B.S. newsmen Hughes Rudd and Walter Cronkite covered this citizen-motivated activity on nationwide television. On successive weekends, trees were planted along the river and clean up efforts continued under the guidance of Don Hull, clean up president and chamber of commerce president. In 1972 the program received the Walter E. Reuther Environmental Award.

Albion College research on the mill ponds has resulted in tentative approval for dredging over 300,000 cubic yards of silt from the ponds. Albion is now negotiating for adjacent land to be first used as a silt deposit site, and later as a recreation area.

Last year Mr. Barnes headed the creation of a new group - Youth For Ecology. Thirty youngsters discussed means of collecting and recycling refuse, a project begun earlier by Albion College students. They established a Recycle Center which has now blossomed into a community-wide function. The Recycle Center has been so successful that over three-hundred tons of paper and glass have been recycled since mid-1972. \$3,000 in profits have been donated to a special city fund for mill pond dredging.

Earn, Learn & Play: Responsible Youth Through Involvement.

Earn, Learn & Play annually involves three hundred fifty local youngsters between ages ten and fifteen in six weeks of summer activities which combine the work ethic, education and recreation. Elkin "Ike" Isaac, seated here with our delegation, was originator of the program. He founded Earn, Learn & Play in summer 1968 with an enrollment of one hundred children. That year the program came to the attention of Richard M. Nixon who congratulated him in person.

Mr. Isaac enlisted other supporters for the project, including local clubs and interested citizens who helped supervise. He also obtained a grant from the Mott Foundation and later gifts from local service organizations.

The successful program still lives up to its name. Each day youngsters are assigned one hour of work, usually involving painting and clean up activities. For this they earn an hourly wage. During the rest of the morning they engage in learning and playing activities. Choices

available during the past summer included remedial reading and mathematics, science, art, swimming, archery, ceramics, camping and trips.

During 1969's Michigan Week, "Earn, Learn and Play" received a Michigan Community Pride Award. Until 1973 the program was entirely citizen-run, and was financed almost totally through donations from local organizations.

This year Earn, Learn & Play was incorporated into the public schools summer program. From its beginning, Earn, Learn & Play has covered the scope and breadth of society in Albion. Low income youth often have their first exposure to cultural activities. Others experience their first organized work activities. And under-achievers have an opportunity to "catch up" on school work.

The Tip Of The Iceberg: Albion's Other Citizen Action Programs.

We could go on to mention numerous other examples of Albion's rebirth as a viable community of concerned citizens: for example, the \$100,000 Johnson Day Care Center, built by local donations — not by tax dollars; or the 100-unit, fully integrated housing sub-division sponsored by several local churches; or the entirely volunteer ambulance service which not only serves Albion but surrounding areas as well; or the citizen-operated historical museum; or our recently formed community celebration, the Festival of the River Forks.

Through the three programs outlined here today Albion faces the future with a new innovative awareness of our fellow man through social interaction, and a hard-hitting practical approach to seemingly insurmountable problems of ecology, and a plan for the future as we teach

our children to Earn, Learn and Play.

We still need middle income housing, more diversified industry and additional recreational facilities for our youth and senior citizens. But the community has fought and defeated the strongest opposition of all - - apathy. We are organizing today to meet our problems of the future.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Speakers - - - - - Charles Jones, mayor protem
Neal Godby, city manager

Delegation - - - - - Melting Pot, Mrs. Barbara Gladney, founder
Albion Beautification, Truman Barnes, director
Earn, Learn & Play, Elkin Isaac, founder
Chamber of Commerce, Don Hull, president
City of Albion, Victor Burstein, mayor