Time Exchange Launches in the Riverwest

by Debbie Davis, *Riverwest Currents, March 2010*

Start with any three-block area in the Riverwest. Take an inventory of all the human resources. You will most likely find carpenters, chefs, childcare providers, website designers, artists, medics, gardeners, teachers, community organizers, writers, people who sew, who drive, who will pick up the phone, who will shelter your cat, who will play basketball with your kids, who will visit your grandparents.

The book that started a movement, *No MoreThrow Away People* by Edgar Cahn, encourages us to recognize our social value outside the limits of the market economy. Encourages us to form cooperative, reciprocal, equitable relationships with neighbors. And promises this: “We have all that we need when we use all that we have.”

His recommendation: a complementary currency that shifts the exchange unit from the dollar to time. Time, we all have it. If we recognize that all people have social value, we value everyone’s time equally and encourage reciprocity, then non-traditional volunteers step forward, social service recipients become empowered contributors to their communities, people make more environmentally sound choices and the social/ecological fabric is slowly rewoven.

The mechanism for facilitating these exchanges? A community bank registering resources and brokering time. This bank has just come to the Milwaukee and is launching (of course) in Riverwest: Milwaukee (Area) Time Exchange (mketimeexchange.org). The Milwaukee (Area) Time Exchange quietly “opened doors” in the late summer.

The process is simple: individuals or organizations register their interest on-line, by phone or buy attending an orientation. A time bank “volunteer” then meets with the new member for a brief orientation and interview, offerings and needs are entered on-line, background check is completed and the new member has access to the directory.

Members can register with neighborhoods and organizational affiliations. This provides the opportunity to exchange locally and build social/economic relations within your religious, educational, social or civic organization, as well as sharing specialized skills across the county. Currently members from seven neighborhoods and seven organizations have registered.

After completing exchanges, the receiver enters hours on-line and the appropriate accounts are credited and debited. Members are invited to attend group work projects, potlucks, meetings and fund raisers to build familiarity. Attendance At events and organizing/volunteering for the time bank also earns the member credit (“time dollars”). There are currently 30 individual and two organizational members of the Mke TE.

Neighborhood Visions for Mke TE: Father Jerry Hessel wants visitors for elderly home-bound neighbors. Anita Reed would like to see a Riverwest Childcare Coop. Small business people Marc Rassbach (IT support) and Spike Bandy(painter) want to spread awareness of quality local services. “Transitions” organizer Gretchen Mead would like to see DIY urban homesteading skills shared across the neighborhood. Kenli Harmon and Debbie Davis would like to extend learning opportunities and reward parent involvement for MPS students and home schoolers. Sally Kuzma would like social/economic integration opportunities for refugees and immigrants. We all want to see a safer, more vibrant neighborhood.

County-wide, Mke TE founders would like to see time banking integrated into neighborhood associations, religious and educational institutions and social service agencies. Dane County Time Bank, a national leader in the timebanking movement, currently serves 1,300 individual members and 93 organizational members.

The Mke TE board members will seek funding for professional staff and office space to match the impact of their Madison mentors. Volunteers are available to present to any organization in Milwaukee County. Bring your vision, resources and time to the Milwaukee (Area) Time Exchange.