



[www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org](http://www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org)

Summer 2012

### A message from Jim Rokakis

This is our second issue of Urban Landline and events continue to occur at a dizzying pace.

The progress in just the past 16 months in setting up land banks, raising money for demolition through the Ohio Attorney General's Office and the "robo-signing" settlement has been gratifying - to say the least.

Just as gratifying for me is to be able to work the multi-county footprint of Western Reserve Land Conservancy and to be able to interact with community leaders in Mahoning, Trumbull, Portage, Summit, Lake, Lorain and Erie counties and those in the cities of Youngstown, Warren, Akron, Canton and others. We have brought a lot of value to these communities through our efforts, but they have been very helpful to us and have made great suggestions that we are sharing with our partners throughout the state.

The tools in the "tool box of conservation" that the Land Conservancy has used so skillfully have applicability in the urban setting as well. We are not yet ready to report on any urban projects yet - but we are close.

I look forward to moving throughout the Land Conservancy's service area and "spreading the gospel" of conservation and how it can work even in urban areas.

### Quicklinks

[Thriving Communities Institute](#)  
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### Nine Ohio counties have established land banks

The list of Ohio counties with fully formed land banks is growing. To date, nine land banks are fully established and eligible to accept properties, according to Robin Thomas, land bank program director for Thriving Communities Institute. Those counties are Lucas, Erie, Lorain, Cuyahoga, Trumbull, Mahoning, Franklin, Montgomery and Hamilton.

Five other counties - Lake, Summit, Portage, Stark and Butler - now have legislation in the works and should be fully formed in the near future. We also believe that at least four other counties (Muskingum, Richland, Ashtabula and Wood) will be taking steps in the fall toward the establishment of a county land bank. Thriving Communities Institute, which was formed one year ago to help counties establish land banks and to revitalize communities hurt by the foreclosure crisis, is continuing to work with officials around Ohio. For more information, contact Thriving Communities at (216) 515-8300 or visit [www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org](http://www.thrivingcommunitiesinstitute.org).



### Strategic planning workshops held in North Canton, Toledo

Counties and communities seeking some of the \$75 million in demolition funding available through Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine's Moving Ohio Forward Grant Program are required to develop a strategic plan. In order to help counties and communities develop such a plan, Thriving Communities Institute recently held workshops at Walsh University in North Canton and at the Toledo Public Library. Speakers included Jim Rokakis, executive director of Thriving Communities, Jennifer Mildren, assistant attorney general in the Mortgage Foreclosure

Unit, and Terry Schwarz, director of Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative. About 80 people attended. The demolition funding is available to local communities to assist in razing residential properties throughout the state. Further assistance in strategic planning is available by contacting Thriving Communities by e-mail or phone; presentations made at the North Canton workshop can be accessed [here](#).

### Back by popular demand: Jim Rokakis on '60 Minutes'

Perhaps no single story on the foreclosure crisis in America garnered as much attention as the December '60 Minutes' segment featuring Jim Rokakis, executive director of Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Thriving Communities Institute. In the piece, titled "There Goes the Neighborhood," Scott Pelley interviews Jim about the problems posed by scores of vacant and abandoned houses -- and Cuyahoga County's efforts to make neighborhoods safer by tearing down homes. You can revisit the segment, which helped prompt a



'There Goes the Neighborhood'



View our profile on 

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## Upcoming Events

### Gaega Harvest Dinner

6 p.m.

Saturday, August 11

International Culinary Arts and  
Sciences Institute

8700 Mayfield Road

Chesterland

*Tickets for this local foods dinner are  
\$95, and part of the proceeds benefit  
the Land Conservancy.*

### Raccoon County Music Festival

Noon-8 p.m.

Saturday, August 18

Century Village Museum  
Burton

*Adult tickets are \$10 for a day of  
music, food and fun for people of all  
ages.*

### Practice on the Preserve

Saturday, August 18

Orchard Hills Park  
Chester Township

national discussion about the revitalization of urban centers that have been devastated by foreclosures, by clicking the photo above.

## We're talking land banks with Cleveland Area Board of REALTORS

What does the existence of a county land bank do for the real estate market in a particular community, and how can a land bank help build stronger neighborhoods? These issues and others were addressed by Thriving Communities Institute Land Bank Program Director Robin Thomas when she spoke to the Cleveland Area Board of REALTORS as part of the group's Continuing Education Program. The one-hour presentation was titled, "County Land Banks and How Land Banks Impact Real Estate."

Joanne Zettl, Chairwoman-Elect of CABOR, said, "The real estate licensees learned how land banks help the real estate market, what the impact of land banks are on vacant and abandoned properties. Students were especially interested in how land banks acquire and dispose of properties. Those in attendance had a better understanding of land banks and were glad they attended."



Robin Thomas

## Thriving Communities Institute offices moving to Ohio City

Thriving Communities Institute is on the move! On July 2, the Thriving Communities offices will be moving to the restored United Bank Building, which is at the corner of Lorain Avenue and West 25th Street in Cleveland's Ohio City neighborhood. The nine-story building opened in 1925 as the tallest and largest commercial building on Cleveland's West Side. It was one of the last of a series of classical bank buildings constructed in Cleveland during the 1910s and 1920s, a golden age for the city's banking industry. The new address is 2012 West 25th Street, Suite 504, Cleveland, Ohio 44113. The phone number remains (216) 515-8300.



## Q and A with Rich Cochran

Rich Cochran, president and CEO of Western Reserve Land Conservancy, was profiled in Plain Dealer reporter Grant Segall's "My Cleveland," a question-and-answer feature. In the piece, Rich discusses the possibilities for natural resource-based economic development in the region: "We have a great ecotourism opportunity. We don't collectively market it. We have world-class hunting and fishing: deer, duck, turkey, steelhead and walleye. People come from all over to hunt and

fish. We're not providing a way for them to do that easily." If you missed the story, you can read it [here](#).

## Rokakis tells our story to national housing panel

Jim Rokakis was one of the national housing experts chosen to speak at a Pew Charitable Trust workshop June 20-21 in Washington, D.C. The panel was convened to discuss how to restore the housing market. Jim spoke about Thriving Communities' efforts in the area of demolition and its Clean and Green Programs. He argued that these programs are a necessary component to restoring health to the housing markets in weak-market cities. An independent nonprofit foundation, Pew is the sole beneficiary of seven individual charitable funds established between 1948 and 1979 by two sons and two daughters of Sun Oil Company founder Joseph N. Pew and his wife, Mary Anderson Pew. The assets of these trusts totaled \$4.797 billion at the end of June 2011.



## Roundtable explores neighborhood restoration

On May 30, Thriving Communities Institute participated in a [Brookings Institution](#) roundtable called "Making Demolition Work: Practices, Revitalization Strategies and Policies." The



Join Cleveland Yoga and the Land Conservancy for a morning of outdoor yoga.

### **EverGreen EverBlue**

6 p.m.-midnight  
Saturday, September 8  
Mountain Glen Farm  
Chardon Township

*The Land Conservancy's annual gala will be hosted by Claire and Sandy McMillan.*

### **Great Lakes Restoration Conference**

September 11-13  
The Renaissance Hotel  
Cleveland

*The Land Conservancy will present a workshop at this conference sponsored by Healing Our Waters coalition.*

For more event details, visit  
[www.wrlandconservancy.org](http://www.wrlandconservancy.org)

Want to help support our efforts?  
Click [here](#).



Rokakis shared his experience and insights with municipal officials and policy experts from across America.

### **Join us Sept. 8 for EverGreen EverBlue**

Claire and Sandy McMillan are hosting this year's EverGreen EverBlue gala at their Cotswold design home, which was built in the 1920s and sits on the 900-plus acres still owned by the descendants of Cleveland's Mather family. We invite you to join us for an evening in which we celebrate the expansion of our efforts to connect people and land. Hear first-hand how our work to preserve northern Ohio's abundant natural resources is now reaching out to the urban cores of our cities -- and making a difference. By preserving and restoring these crucial resources, we make our region a better place to live, work and play. Come join us! For ticket and sponsorship information, contact Kim Bihler at (440) 729-9621 Ext. 112 or [kbihler@wrlandconservancy.org](mailto:kbihler@wrlandconservancy.org) or visit [www.evergreeneverblue.org](http://www.evergreeneverblue.org).



### **A day at the Beachland: Conservation Rocks!**

About 200 people gathered at Cleveland's Beachland Ballroom and Tavern on June 8 for the third annual Conservation Rocks! concert, sponsored by the Land Conservancy. The lineup, which featured musicians who work locally in the field of conservation, included the Land Conservancy's Pete McDonald and The Black Oaks, Steve Madewell (executive director of Metroparks of the Toledo Area), The Swamp Rattlers Band (with Paul Pira of Geauga Park District) and He-Chaw Frunk (with drummer

Mark Slater of the National Park Service). It was a great evening of music, dancing and fellowship. You can see more photos from the event [here](#).



### **How Thriving Communities was formed**

In March 2011, Western Reserve Land Conservancy launched a region-wide effort to help revitalize our urban centers. We named the effort Thriving Communities Institute because of all the connotations the word thriving holds for urban centers: flourishing, prospering, blossoming and successful. Our cities have thrived in the past; and we believe they will thrive again. They will move from vacancy to vitality.

Thriving Communities Institute, led by director Jim Rokakis, is already lending its hand to transform vacant and unproductive properties into new opportunities to attract economic growth, to bring green space to our cities, and to support safe, beautiful neighborhoods. In working with community leaders in our region, we have learned that urban revitalization is a process, one with many steps supported by great partnerships. Thriving Communities is helping secure our cities' vacant, unhealthy properties by establishing and supporting county land banks throughout our region.

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