

## Welcoming New Residents: A Small-City Approach *Windcrest, Texas*

By Mayor Jack Leonhardt  
City of Windcrest

Every small city boasts the advantage of offering a homey, close-knit, family-oriented environment. However, with our ever-changing and mobile populations, it is a challenge to welcome new residents into our communities and to inform them quickly about the wonderful quality of life available. In answer to this challenge, Windcrest, Texas, created a unique organization known as Windcrest Proud that identified the needs of new residents and provided a one-stop shop for answers.

To understand the challenges that Windcrest Proud faced, one must first understand the current state of our city, which is situated on the northeast side of San Antonio at the juncture of IH-35 and Loop 410. Windcrest, which was incorporated in 1959, is a city of about 5,300 residents living

in approximately 2,300 homes with 150 commercial/ professional businesses. Landlocked by San Antonio, Windcrest began as a military bedroom community (halfway between Fort Sam Houston and Randolph Air Force Base). At present, approximately 53 percent of the homes are occupied by persons more than 65 years of age; however, that is quickly changing. Over the last few years, many new residents have arrived bringing wider diversity and younger ages. And the future is bright for even more new residents to arrive as technology provider Rackspace prepares to relocate its headquarters (expected to house 5,000 employees by 2012) into the business district of our city. In addition, 11,000 new personnel will be arriving at nearby Fort Sam Houston.

Given the expected growth within the area, in the summer of 2006 the Windcrest City Council decided an expanded effort was needed to welcome and orient new residents into the community. Thus, the Windcrest Proud Committee was created by Ordinance No. 270, adopted on August 26, 2006. The Committee's mission is to enhance the City of Windcrest as an excellent place to live and to work. The Committee's goals, objectives, and actions to be undertaken pertain to the following areas: (a) focusing on welcoming new residents; (2) revitalizing the small town spirit; (3) communicating/encouraging the city's beauty and quality of services; and (4) highlighting participation in city events, civic organizations, and city government.

With a quarterly event budget of \$250 and a clearly outlined mission, the Committee was formed and asked to develop strategies for accomplishing its objectives. First on the Committee's list was determining the most effective means of communicating with new residents. Understanding that face-to-face communication was the best way of integrating new neighbors into the city, the Committee established a quarterly meet-and-greet event, known as a New Resident Reception. The reception is always at the city's civic center on the fourth Friday of the first month of each quarter from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. The entire community is welcome, but new residents are personally invited to attend. The receptions are family-friendly events held in the early evening so that everyone has an opportunity to attend and enjoy the refreshments and festivities. With themed décor at each



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event, representatives from the city government, many civic organizations, churches, and recreation clubs all come out to answer questions for residents—both new and seasoned. All groups have information about their entities available and provide promotional items to hand out.

With the overall vision in place, the Committee determined logistical details to ensure a successful event for all. First, new residents are identified through their sign-up at City Hall for water and garbage service. Within the first month of arrival, new residents receive a welcome packet, followed by a personal contact, to inform them about the next New Resident Reception. Current residents are also encouraged to bring neighbors who are new residents to the reception. A post card reminder (also used as a prize entry card) is sent, and a phone call is made as the next quarterly reception approaches. Additionally, small yard signs announcing the upcoming event are placed at key locations throughout the city. Finally, just to cover all the bases, an announcement is included in the city newsletter and on the Web site at [www.ci.windcrest.tx.us](http://www.ci.windcrest.tx.us) (click on the “Living in Windcrest” tab, then the “Windcrest Proud Committee” link on the left). Through these marketing techniques and good old-fashioned word-of-mouth, the turnout has been impressive.

Once attendees arrive, nametags clearly identify new residents (and street names), current residents, and representatives. Organizations’ tables with appropriate signage surround the perimeter of one side of the room, with refreshment tables on the other side and a small circle of chairs in the middle. Refreshments are roped off until the initial meet-and-greet time is complete. Generally a “fill-in-the-square” trivia card serves as a great ice-breaker, with the winner receiving a prize, of course. After the food and drink buffet opens, attendees can continue to make the rounds at the booths, or they can opt to fill the center chairs while they enjoy food and conversation with fellow residents. To conclude the reception, prize drawings are held to help encourage attendance. Prizes include items purchased at or donated by local businesses, and businesses also donate many of the refreshments.

All combined, the reception plan has created a recipe for success. Since the first reception in January 2007, the event has grown in size—both from new residents attending and from current residents and organizations represented. At the January 2008 reception, there were 14 new resident families present (28 percent of the invitees, which has grown from an original 10 percent turnout), 77 guests, and 53 exhibitors. Each reception seems better, with everyone wondering, “What will the next theme be!?” and “How can the decorations get any better!?”

*For more information on Windcrest Proud or related New Resident Receptions, contact Committee Chair Diane Woods at 210-650-5336 or Mayor Jack Leonhardt at 210-599-2599 or [mayor@ci.windcrest.tx.us](mailto:mayor@ci.windcrest.tx.us). ★*

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