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**Wal-mart to donate lawn care equipment to neighborhood groups**  
*Lawn mowers, weed eaters will allow volunteers to help maintain vacant lots*

CANTON, Ohio – City Development Director Robert Torres announced Friday that Wal-Mart has agreed to donate twelve (12) lawn mowers and six (6) weed eaters to the Stark Community Foundation’s Neighborhood Partnership Grant Program. Neighborhood association members will use the equipment this summer to help the City maintain vacant homes and empty lots before they become overgrown eyesores.

“We appreciate Wal-Mart and their willingness to support residents who want to help beautify our city streets,” said Torres. “Wal-mart’s dedication to our community is only matched by those volunteers who have offered to donate their time and labor to this worthwhile cause. We are grateful for both of their support during these tough economic times.”

The idea for maintaining empty lots in neighborhoods was suggested by Joyce Sumlin, a leader of the Concerned Citizens of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward Neighborhood Association. She had initially requested that the City allow her group’s members to use city equipment to do the maintenance work, however local labor rules and liability issues prevented her suggestion from being put into practice.

“We knew that we had to get these yards mowed,” said Sumlin. “If the City wasn’t allowed to let us use their equipment, we had to find another way to get the job done.”

It was at this point that Torres, who leads the City’s economic and community development departments, approached Wal-Mart to see if they would be willing to donate lawn care equipment directly to the groups. Canton Wal-mart manager Bill O’Brien said he was “thrilled” to be able to help such a worthwhile program by donating the equipment.

“Wal-mart stores work hard to support their communities through a number of programs, and this seemed like a perfect opportunity to be able to help in a meaningful way,” O’Brien said. “Our small contribution will go a long way toward helping these residents keep their neighborhoods looking beautiful.”

City budget woes paired with the effects of the national foreclosure crisis have resulted in vacant yards and empty lots going unmaintained at much higher rates than in years past. Recently, neighborhood groups have assisted the City by participating in a number of similar beautification projects to fill the void created when government programs have been hit hard by declining revenue.

Wal-mart will donate the equipment to the Stark Community Foundation, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization that operates a number of neighborhood programs in addition to other charitable pursuits. The foundation will manage the distribution of equipment to neighborhood associations interested in keeping their neighborhoods maintained.

“We are happy to be able to assist this effort in any way we can,” said Marilyn Thomas Jones, the neighborhood groups’ advisor at the foundation. “Seeing this kind of dedication gives us great hope for the future of our neighborhoods.”

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