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10 Questions with Kurt Metzger

Kurt R. Metzger recently joined City Connect **Detroit** as the Director of the new **Detroit Area** Community Information System center, also known as **D-ACIS**. Kurt has previously held posts with the United States Census Bureau where he served as Director, covering Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia; and a Senior Research Analyst and Director for Wayne State University's Michigan Metropolitan Information Center. Most recently he was the Research Director for the United Way for Southeast Michigan. Having spent the last 30+ years in metropolitan **Detroit**, Kurt is a well known and prominent figure on the data scene.

Q. Can you explain the purpose of the new D-ACIS Center?

A. **D-ACIS** is a comprehensive regional data collection, analysis and delivery system that will address a broad variety of issues and conditions facing **Detroit** and the region. By having more comprehensive, neighborhood focused data and information, we in the region are in a better position to receive more federal, state and other funding to address vital issues and conditions and improve the quality of life for people in the entire metropolitan **Detroit** area.

Q. How will D-ACIS be funded?

A. The Skillman Foundation and Kresge Foundation awarded a three-year, \$1.85 million grant to City Connect **Detroit** who is serving as an incubator and fiduciary to **D-ACIS**. The new data Center is temporarily housed at City Connect **Detroit's** downtown office. After the 3 years, we expect to have some foundation funding; but the idea is for **D-ACIS** to become its own 501(c)3. We want to develop the capacity to do analysis and research projects to actually start to bring money in and become self sustaining.

Q. How and why did City Connect Detroit become involved in the creation of D-ACIS?

A. Several years ago, City Connect **Detroit** created a project called the **Detroit Data Partnership** (DDP) that maintains data-sharing agreements with numerous organizations. DDP was funded by the Skillman and Kresge Foundations. Based on the success of DDP, City Connect **Detroit** wrote and was awarded a grant by the Skillman and Kresge Foundations for the creation of **D-ACIS**. Because of City Connect Detroit's track record and expertise, the foundation community believed the organization would be the perfect place to incubate **D-ACIS**.

Q. What neighborhood focused issues will D-ACIS address?

A. The neighborhood focused issues will be detailed down to the parcel level, and will include, parks, recreation and green space; abandoned buildings, vacant land, blight and dumping; retail and services attractions; job availability; poverty; educational opportunities; crime and safety; and health and medical issues. We're looking at components and sustainability in healthy neighborhoods and ways to make sure those components are in every neighborhood in **Detroit** and the region.

Q. What excites you about D-ACIS?

A. I have always believed in the power of collecting, sharing and presenting accurate and timely data and information to stakeholders who serve as catalysts to facilitate successful outcomes. So, I'm excited to see the creation of **D-ACIS** because it will address a broad variety of issues facing **Detroit** and the region and perhaps break down a few of our geographic and racial barriers.

Q. What are some of the benefits of such a center?

A. In addition to having a region that shares vital information that will benefit all, **D-ACIS** will seek membership in the Urban Institute's National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP), which is comprised of 31 urban information and data centers throughout the nation. Once we become a member, the center will be in line to compete for national foundation designated funding opportunities available to members only. This will really put **Detroit** and the region on the map, so to speak, as far as developing a culture of data sharing for positive change.

Q. If there are 31 urban information and data centers across the United States, are there models that are more attune to what's going on in Detroit and the region?

A. We have looked at several centers, but feel that Metro Chicago Information Center and Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland are great examples. Case Western's New Cando is really

an excellent model for us.

*Q. What is the biggest challenge that the **D-ACIS** center faces?*

A. The biggest challenge is just getting people and organizations to share information. People and organizations have the tendency to keep information close to the vest because they often worry that information shared will be used in negative ways. So we have to convince people that there are no agendas but to improve the quality of life for residents of **Detroit**. And as I said earlier, it's important that we break down a few of our geographic and racial barriers. We, as a region, must figure out how to work together – city and suburbs – because this region can't succeed unless the city of **Detroit** succeeds.

Q. When will the center be fully operational?

A. I'm projecting that the center will be fully operational in the Spring, 2009.

*Q. What is your ultimate goal for **D-ACIS**?*

A. My ultimate goal is for **D-ACIS** to be a one-stop center, a central clearinghouse, where accurate and complete data and information can be accessed that ultimately moves this region forward. This is an outstanding opportunity for **Detroit** and the region. It's an opportunity to show that the **Detroit** region can develop a culture of data sharing, which will allow us to tackle the "data silos" in which we tend to operate.

This interview was conducted by Donald James of Master Media.