

Street papers lay foundation for stronger movement

BY ISRAEL BAYER
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The North American Street Newspaper Association conference in Denver, Colo., last week brought together 20 street newspapers from across Canada and the U.S.

While many newspaper gatherings today can feel more like a wake than a celebration, the mood at the NASNA conference was one of cautious optimism.

Representatives of street newspapers, including Street Roots, recognize the obstacles before us. Those obstacles include a nasty recession/depression that is dumping thousands of new faces on the streets, along with the challenges of running growing vendor programs and producing a newspaper that appeals to our communities.

Knowing that foundations have more or less devalued the idea of media playing a part in reporting on issues of poverty, immigration, race, etc. (minus a small number of foundations nationally, including the McKenzie River Gathering locally), street newspapers know that we can't rely on foundations to facilitate our future and educate the masses.

NASNA also knows that local or federal government programs are not lining up to help street newspapers, like we see in Europe and in Africa, where the European Union and the United Nations are helping street newspaper grow capacity and build a larger movement.

What we do know is that collectively we have a readership nearing a half million people in 22 cities, including Portland. We know that we are

challenging stereotypes that have existed for decades around homelessness and poverty. We know that in many cities, street papers are producing every the same quality journalism as their local counterparts – and sometimes better. We know that by publishing the voices of the streets and creating economic opportunities for people on the streets that we are changing people lives – both those who are experiencing homelessness and readers who have developed relationships with our vendors.

So where do we go from here?
 A little more than a year ago Bryan



PHOTO BY STEFF SANCHEZ

Pollard, Street Roots' founder Bryan Pollard and a NASNA board member, and I traveled to Oklahoma City to meet with the Ethics and Excellence Foundation. NASNA laid out to the foundation a humble, yet aggressive strategy to help build capacity for newspapers around North America.

The foundation responded. Street Roots hosted a face-to-face meeting in Portland to create a three-year strategic plan led by Street Roots' Board President Bruce Anderson. The plan create entailed hiring an executive director and building capacity that would support both start-up and established street newspapers and create partnerships with the International Network of Street Papers, representing 100 papers around the globe.

Shortly after the face-to-face meeting, NASNA board of directors began the process of finding an executive director for a new office in Washington D.C., where SR's sister paper Street Sense resides. Six-months ago NASNA hired Andy Freeze from StreetVibes in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was the first executive director the organization has had in its 12-year history.

The first year of the strategic plan has already been accomplished – hiring a director, creating an office, connecting and beginning to work on projects with the International Network, and broadening the NASNA board of directors to better represent our papers in Canada and to add a fundraising element.

This year, NASNA will be building the capacity needed access developing technology that will offer support for the wide array of papers that belong to the network, developing regional editorial partnerships, and financially building the organization in a way that it will be sustainable in the years to come.

Currently, NASNA is gathering best

practices for vendor programs, newspapers, volunteering and fundraising that will be shared one-on-one and through modern technology. We are working on building better technology for the Street News Service, a global news wire representing papers in 36 counties in 17 different languages, and creating a tier system that will let us better help papers at different levels. They include start-up papers, small and struggling organizations, mid-level and established organizations.

All of this came together this past weekend in Denver, home of the Denver Voice, a young monthly newspaper in the Mile High City that has been having major success.

Workshops included indepth looks at vendor and editorial programs, fundraising, technology, volunteer programs, organizing and much more. Speakers included Denver's Mayor John Hickenlooper, Patty Calhoun, founder and editor with the Westword (Denver's weekly) and Cheri Honkala with the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Commission. In short, the conference was a success.

While the mood of street papers around North America remains cautiously optimistic, there's also a hunger, both on the ground with people experiencing homelessness and editorial departments that recognize that with the collapsing of corporate media, street newspaper have a responsibility to the community and a niche to fill.

Whether you have been a long-time supporter and reader, or you just picked up the paper for the first time, you can be proud that Street Roots is helping lead the way, not only in our own community but around the globe. You are a part of a growing movement.

Delegates to the North American Street Newspaper Association 2009 Conference gather in Denver. They include vendors from the Denver Voice, Street Roots' sister paper.



PHOTO BY PETER FREEZE

Street Roots Executive Director Israel Bayer collects his NASNA award for best interview for his conversation with Serbian rebel Srdja Popovic. (Street Roots, Sept. 19, 2008)

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Friday, Oct. 23

Portland Art Museum's Kridel Grand Ballroom



Hoedown is our biggest fundraiser of the year, and this year it's going to be an extra special affair honoring all the great work Sisters has done in 2009 and celebrating our 30th birthday!

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 Tickets are \$85; tables of ten \$850 or limited patron tables available for \$1,300.



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