

EDITORIAL

Street newspapers are finding their own online turf

Most of the times you see the words “digital” and “newspapers” in the same sentence, it’s in the context of lost opportunities, negative realities and handwringing projections.

But around the globe, street papers are looking at the digital model and seeing a world of possibilities.

For years, Street Roots and our sister papers in cities worldwide have connected through the International Network of Street Papers, or INSP, linking best practices and great journalism, and creating a global movement that gives a hand up — not a hand out — to tens of thousands of men and women experiencing poverty and homelessness every day.

This past week, the International Network of Street Papers conducted its 17th annual conference in Munich, Germany, where 110 delegates discussed not only their vendors and their newspapers, but also where the digital

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world can take both. Street Roots Vendor Coordinator Cole Merkel attended the event, sharing how our small organization has amplified our vendors and our voice with the World Wide Web.

In December, Street Roots merged social media with social justice to create #SR24 — a 24-hour Twitter feed with reporters through the city chronicling the experiences of people who were homeless. In July, we revisited the concept to open a window on the lives and experiences of vendors with #SRWorks. Globally, we participated in the inaugural Vendor Week, which celebrated the work and personalities of vendors just like ours, in cities around the world.

More importantly, we partnered with social-service organizations throughout Portland in a campaign to preserve more than \$2.1 million in city’s safety-net programs — those services that provide shelter for people on the streets during emergency conditions, and keep people from falling into homelessness with short-term assistance.

Street papers are looking at ways to harness new technology for the benefit of vendors, from education and socialization to tapping into resources that help them get back on their feet. They’re looking at open source software options, much like the model Street Roots used last year to build our web site (news.streetroots.org).

We know that technology can help even the playing field for small, grassroots news outlets and other social-justice organizations. The Pacific Northwest is leading the effort through public-private relationships with innovators in technology.

Street Roots is currently working with open source developers to build a news site to share with our entire street newspaper network. Megaphone, our sister paper in Vancouver, B.C. is working on building a smartphone app that would allow customers to identify where a vendor is selling at any give time. The newspaper in Seattle is developing a digital payment method in a manner that will preserve the financial and personal relationship customers have with vendors.

Street newspapers are adapting in the 21st century and will continue to do so. We have to. The world won’t wait.

We need new solutions to old problems

The past few weeks have been chock full of tragic events, bad press and anxiety on the streets, specifically downtown.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

A group of kids, presumably homeless, attacked a 70-year old employee of the Portland Outdoor Store downtown. He was hospitalized after a blow to his head. This comes after months of frustration and advocacy by the business

community to do something about the street kids downtown.

“We need enforcement. We need to be able to send a message that this kind of behavior is not acceptable in our city,” Megan Doern, a spokeswoman for the Portland Business Alliance recently told the Oregonian.

She’s right. It is unacceptable. Violence shouldn’t be tolerated.

Mayor Charlie Hales and the police bureau then moved to sweep campers in front of city hall. The camp has become disorganized in many ways, and it’s unclear to the public what exactly the group is protesting.

A column in The Oregonian two weeks ago by Steve Duin shredded the group’s credibility, if there was any, after claiming that heroin was being used by the campers. Still, that doesn’t change the fact that some of those campers should be connected to services before being scattered throughout the city.

It’s also worth noting that the small sliver of sidewalk in front of city hall has become a symbol of free speech for anti-war protestors, environmentalists, homeless advocates and the Occupy Portland movement over the past decade. I would never wager to guess what the actual long-term outcome might be for the sidewalk in front of city hall.

Also lingering are the next steps on Right 2

Dream Too (R2DToo), the tent city that has been operating for nearly two years in downtown. A judge will soon rule in a case that could decide if the camp owes the city thousands of dollars in fines. The outcome may have an impact on what the next steps are for R2DToo.

Regardless of the outcome of the court case, to ignore R2DToo would be foolish. Scattering 80 individuals and families throughout downtown would be shortsighted.

My guess is the mayor and R2DToo understand this dynamic clearly. They also understand they can’t stay at their current location forever. I’m hopeful something will be worked out.

Having said all of that, there is no perfect time politically for city hall to make a move on issues such as camping, sidewalks and panhandling. With the wave of bad press, a fuming business community and so much uncertainty in the air, it appears now is as good as time as any.

Let’s back up for a minute.

No mayor runs for office with the hopes of having to deal with thousands of people sleeping on the streets, especially in a thriving city like Portland. But the crisis of homelessness, as it relates to public safety, neighborhood livability and the lack of housing, is exactly what a mayor inherits.

The mayor isn’t alone. The same debate about what to do about homelessness and the housing shortage is happening all across America.

Knowing this, you shouldn’t be surprised to know that most urban environments have tent cities, a massive shortage of affordable housing, and a public discourse on a range of issues related to people on the streets, including camping and panhandling.

The message that Portland is too easy on

See SOLUTIONS page 3

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Send letters to the editor to the Street Roots office, 211 NW Davis St., Portland, OR 97209, or e-mail to joanne@streetroots.org.



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting guides, call 503-228-5657. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢
goes directly to the vendor who sold you the paper

25¢
goes toward printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.