

Saint John Telegraph-Journal

Community newspaper places emphasis on positive

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Enterprise City's priority neighbourhoods combine on new publication

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SAINT JOHN - Residents of the five priority neighbourhoods want to ensure the rest of the city knows about the good times they have and the sense of community they enjoy.

[ENLARGE PHOTO](#)



Katé LeBlanc/Telegraph-Journal

Juanita Black, left, and Elaine Orser proudly display the first edition of their community newspaper.

So, to spread the word, they have started a community newspaper.

The first eight-page edition will be delivered door-to-door in each of the communities today.

The plan is to publish a paper, which is free, every two months.

Articles range from a feature on Crescent Valley's community garden to one on the west side's Carleton Community Centre and St. Joseph's Computer Access Centre in the village,

Unlike standard publications, the news in the yet-to-be-named paper must all be good, says Wendy MacDermott, Vibrant Communities co-ordinator, who was instrumental in bringing it all together.

The newspaper is written and illustrated by and for residents and delivered by residents in the city's poorest communities.

Each of the priority neighbourhoods - Crescent Valley, lower west side, old north end, Waterloo Village and the deep south end - has its own page, along with a couple of generic pages. Residents and others involved in the neighbourhoods determine content, write the stories and take the photos.

The newspaper is an example of how residents in priority neighbourhoods are becoming increasingly self-confident, are proud of their communities and are taking risks and initiative more than ever before.

Some, however, may continue to need a little help, especially at Christmas.

Many of these enterprising people depend on the Empty Stocking Fund to help them put gifts under the Christmas tree; gifts they might not normally be able to afford for their family.

In Crescent Valley, for example, the poverty rate is 68 per cent and many of the families are led by a single parent, some of whom have been involved in this first publication.

For those who didn't get to participate, there will be ample opportunity to write, photograph, even sell advertising.

Already, people have been asking about buying a "spot".

"We'll have to balance it. We won't take out residents' material to put in advertising," MacDermott said.

"I would be surprised if our next issue stays at eight pages.

"We could have produced three papers on the submissions."

The first edition was put together entirely by volunteers but, since then, the city has provided some cash to pay a co-ordinator.

"We don't want an editor to take over the paper - we want somebody who's a good community organizer who can set up training for residents," MacDermott said.

Mentors are also being sought to teach residents how to write a story and take better photographs.

The idea came from a similar exercise in Newfoundland, where priority neighbourhoods came together to hire a journalist who covers events and does layout and design.

Saint John has taken a different tack.

"We saw it as an opportunity to do some skills training," MacDermott said.

"One of the real tangibles is skills in terms of writing and reading information that's relevant and pertinent."

It will also help bond the five neighbourhoods. "It's a real community enterprise," she said.

"People are saying, 'I choose to live here, I love my neighbourhood. How do I make people see that?'"

Juanita Black and Elaine Orser of Crescent Valley are some of the first residents to catch the newspaper-publishing bug.

It was Black's job to get her neighbours fired up and co-ordinate the publication in her community. Her eyes welled with tears when she got her first glimpse of the paper.

"I was so proud of it.

"As exciting as it is, it's kind of scary to take the lead role," Black said. "There are so many things you don't take into consideration."

The paper represents Orser's first stab at writing for a newspaper; she wrote about Crescent Valley's community garden, which is close to her heart.

She and her sister, Karen, decided to start growing their own vegetables because they're inexpensive, healthy and gardening offers some exercise.

She's hoping her article will get others interested in gardening.

MacDermott hopes the next issue, which will be published before Christmas, will be more attractive, with more white space and photographs.

"We also hope to spend a bit more time editing for reading levels. We want to have it very accessible to everyone. That's one of the things we didn't have the time to do the first go-round."

Anyone interested in submitting a name for the newspaper should contact MacDermott at 693-0904 or sjcommunitynewspaper@gmail.com
