

CTA works to bring community and Loyola art to local el stations

Maria Randazzo - 2/21/07

They call themselves the CTA. No, it's not the Chicago Transit Authority's train conductors or drivers of the 147 bus. This CTA is a group of Loyola students seeking to create a strong visual connection between the university and Rogers Park.

The acronym is no coincidence. Community Transforming Art (CTA) hopes to establish a bond by mounting artwork from the Loyola and Rogers Park communities onto the Loyola el stop.

CTA was formed during the Fall Semester when sophomores Anna Springer, Kelsey McManus, Emily Wilk, Cindy Cook, Lauren De Veau and Erin Stanley decided to spark a movement to personalize the el in order to foster an open relationship between Loyola and Rogers Park.

After a semester of brainstorming, McManus enrolled in a class called Artist as an Activist. New to the Loyola curriculum, it focuses on honing an artist's leadership skills to aid social problems and work within a community. Students received an assignment to collaborate with an activist group on a civic project. McManus saw the opportunity for CTA's vision to become a reality.

"It felt like the class was made for us," Springer, chair of CTA, said.

Five student teams chose which activist groups to collaborate with based on presentations from each organization. Before pitching their idea to the class, the girls ventured into Rogers Park to diffuse their ideas and receive feedback from community leaders, city officials and citizens. They attended Rogers Park art exhibits and aldermanic forums and are currently networking with local artists through the Rogers Park Web site.

For the presentation, they created a slideshow to the song "Art in Me" by Jars of Clay. It featured pictures of the barren Loyola station and images of what they hope it will look like.

The girls handed out puzzle pieces to their audience that read, "Forming Community Piece by Peace, Part by Part." On the back of each piece was the CTA's mission statement: "Increasing pride within Rogers Park and Loyola University by actively involving those within the community and the students of Loyola toward a goal of beautifying our neighborhood which we consider home."

"They put a great deal of effort into their presentation such as talking to LUC [students and officials] and the Chicago Transit Authority," senior Sarah Newsham, who is a member of the student team paired with CTA. "Community beautification is a project I will enjoy working toward."

Professor Tom Tresser, who teaches Artist as an Activist, believes CTA's project is entirely consistent with the goal of the Loyola mission statement: "dedicated to knowledge in the service of humanity."

"The el stop is a meeting place, a destination, a hub and a place of journey," Tresser said. "Thousands use it every day, and it could serve as a wonderful canvas for student and community art."

Although they are still in a developmental phase, CTA's project will reach its final stage when a proposal is approved by Adopt-A-Station, a program of the Chicago Transit Authority. Since October of 2005, 20 el stations have been "adopted" and aesthetically renovated, including the Sheridan, Morse and Davis stops.

"Our goal is to bring people together and integrate Loyola with the Rogers Park community," McManus said. "We have a lot of Loyola pride and many artistic students."

CTA plans to allot space on the train station to different organizations from Rogers Park and from Loyola. These

groups would be asked to design their area as a reflection of themselves. Ideally, CTA would coordinate one day in the spring where residents and students could create their pieces together.

"Having the el stop as a testament to the diversity of Loyola and the diversity of the neighborhood would be amazing," McManus said.

CTA hopes this endeavor will spark dialogue between students and Rogers Park citizens, to share thoughts and eliminate polarization that may exist on campus.

"I think people will start to realize that we have similar ideas," Springer said. "By working together, we can accomplish more, learn more and be spiritually challenged."

Many students believe in the "Loyola bubble," the theory that the university is ignorant of the Rogers Park community and that it does not branch outside of campus life. CTA begs to differ.

"There is a small link that exists, but we can hopefully expand that," McManus said. "A lot of people are unaware of the theater, the art and the restaurants in Rogers Park - these things are not tapped into by students. There are tons of businesses that want Loyola patrons, it is not impossible to merge the two."

According to the 2000 census, Rogers Park is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the United States. CTA wishes to help Loyolans take advantage of such rich cultural surroundings.

McManus also emphasized the possibilities of college students acquiring mentors or serving as role models to residents of Rogers Park. She explained how students can learn from the experiences of older people as well as develop relationships with children in the community.

CTA recognizes an additional problem: The majority of Loyola's programs are facilitated by the same small population of "involved" students. To carry out their project, CTA needs students to advertise, fundraise, extend outreach, perform manual labor and create art. By incorporating a wide spectrum of talents, CTA hopes to increase student engagement and improve the Loyola community.

Tresser, the instructor of the course, described the role of the artist as an activist: "Imagination precedes implementation. The idea is that you can't get a community to move with purpose to some common goal unless they have a shared vision of what that better community looks like."

CTA asks students to share in their vision, volunteer their talents and contribute to the movement.

If interested, contact Anna Springer at asprin1@luc.edu.

<http://media.www.loyolaphoenix.com/media/storage/paper673/news/2007/02/21/News/Cta-Works.To.Bring.Community.And.Loyola.Art.To.Local.El.Stations-2731882.shtml>

Tom Tresser is a consultant, producer, educator and trainer who can help individuals, companies and communities leverage and amplify their creative assets in order to solve problems, create economic value and trigger civic engagement. Tom has been a long-time advocate for an increased appreciation for the role of creativity in the life of the community. In 1991 he started an organization that organized artists and cultural workers for political activism and taught "Arts and Public Policy" at Roosevelt University, where he organized a center for the study of cultural policy. Tom was Director Cultural Development at Peoples Housing, a nonprofit community development corporation operating in northeast Chicago, where he organized a community arts program that combined culture and economic development. Tom served as lead organizer for the Chicago Park District for two years in a pilot project that transformed a major regional park into a community cultural center. In April 2004, Tom was elected to a two-year term for the Local School Council for the Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. He lectures on "The Politics of Creativity" and conducts leadership training sessions for artists and creative professionals. He teaches classes on arts and civic engagement at DePaul University and Loyola University.



www.tresser.com tom@tresser.com