

Sue West: Feelings about Portland.....

I'm missing some centralized communication about Portland, Oregon.....

Communication in all its forms, though I confess I really miss a newspaper or two that would report well on our city and community. While I was growing up, there were the Oregonian and the Journal, then the Reporter, and they were full of articles about "the civic life of Portland," as David phrases it. You could read about the City Club and its reports, about future development plans, transportation issues, City Hall's resolutions and its agendas, racial issues and plans to mediate them, public and private school issues, neighborhood investment in the community, etc. There was a lot published in our papers. And yes, we are still informed about these topics.....sort of.....but you have to google this or that to find out more. You have to go to the City Club web site for info, for instance, to see what's happening. The Oregonian really covers nothing about it. When I even wanted a centralized place to find out about what bridges were open or closed, which streets were being torn up downtown, it took a while to locate information.....the Multnomah County bridge site, for instance, and PDoT. You have to search for the information yourself.....if you're interested at all.....rather than being informed about events by an outside source that could possibly and perhaps even profitably present it in some sort of unified and cohesive form, a form that could have broad appeal and that would make readers feel a part of something whole.

Everyone says, "Ahhh....you just go to Oregonlive." But well.....there's not a lot there. Like TV and radio news (PBS aside and this is not PDX news)), by and large there are very few details to be found, much less anything complex, and very little depth. Also, not very much positive. (I do compliment the Trib for some better, more detailed articles though). But one thing that struck me reading the Abbot book, was that when he cited headlines from the past, they were often positive. They dealt with Portland's attributes, its attractions, its growth, and, yes, the city was growing and trying to attract populace, but the attitude was different than now, I believe. Mind you, "Sin City" also made headlines, but generally there was pride in the city and hope for the future, and even a little vision about what that should be. Now I see criticism, frustration, limitation, and quandries. Which way to go.....who knows??

What we're getting are bits and pieces here and there, snatches of events, sound bites, if even that. It reminds me a bit of the Lilla book and his comments on academe. We see and hear bits and pieces here and there about this group and that one, or maybe this legislator and that councilperson, this tiff and that disagreement, but there is no overall cohesion to the reporting of our current events or much concern about a unified path toward that or a sense of any kind of unified history built TOGETHER. I know David is trying to rectify this a bit with his seminar(s) next fall at PSU where he is attempting to present past history and vision to current and younger members of the Portland community. This would present some sort of continuum to the group and make them feel a part of something bigger than themselves.....hopefully.

Those of us who have had past links to Portland's history have had a feeling of pride and cohesion at times, and I very much miss that. But I think the media, our reliance on and love of technology have, as in other areas besides our Portland community, separated us from our history as well as from each other. And I'm not sure any news source knows how to access and appeal to individuals en masse these days. We have "target" audiences, splinter groups, left, right, tweets and twitters, and.....no real sense of belonging to a larger Portland community much anymore, at least as presented by the media. And if there is in existence some source that does present this, stop reading this now and just tell me. I am uninformed.....obviously.

I'm not saying we necessarily have to teach Portland history to everyone as they do lightly in third grade, but it would be lovely to feel encouraged by something somewhere that would give us a sense of connection, of something larger than ourselves that we can be proud of about Portland.....again. I am missing that. Perhaps using technology, the city and county could set up a website where detailed information is posted about what is going on in the city on all sorts of levels. The information may become totally overwhelming, but at least it would be accessible in one place, a source that anyone could go to for information about the city and the plans that it and other organizations have for it.....because I know there are various visions of different futures out there, but I find them very inaccessible. What I learn from the local papers and from the news is pretty much who shot who where and when, what sports and other prominent figures have cheated at whatever, what the weather might be like, and that many things about our city are "bad." There are lots of "feature" stories.....It might be more useful to have some detailed knowledge about Trimet expansion, say, eg even about a small tidbit like the proposal to run light rail down the middle of Barbur Blvd instead of down Naito, so that we can see there is some eentsy bit of vision from Trimet of what it sees as the future. But how this connects with a broader vision of Portland's future is certainly not being communicated to me, nor is this little Trimet piece broadcast generally either.

So I'll stop rambling.....my point being that I would like more detailed information about our city: good, bad, or otherwise. To be civic-minded means to be an informed citizen. This is difficult to pull off and as you can tell from the above, I have no real ideas about how to accomplish this.....maybe the New York Times would like to come here and give us lessons??