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The Chicago Community Trust Announces Community News Matters Award Recipients

Innovative program to spur the growth of new sources of high quality local news and information about the Chicago region selects 12 award winners

November 5, 2009, Chicago – The Chicago Community Trust, our region’s community foundation, today announced \$500,000 in awards to 12 recipients under an innovative new program, Community News Matters, to spur the growth of new sources of quality local news and information about the Chicago region.

The award winners were selected from among 86 requests, totaling \$5.7 million.

“The response to this program demonstrates without a doubt that the Chicago region is loaded with talented people and smart organizations determined to find new ways to serve the public’s information needs in these times of enormous change in the media landscape,” said Terry Mazany, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Trust. “The Chicago area has become a real laboratory for development of the future for community news and information.”

Mazany noted that given changes in traditional media, there is a growing need for the philanthropic sector to help develop new and different ways to provide communities the information they need. As a result, the Trust has begun expanding its support of news and information projects.

“These award recipients are outstanding examples of the rich mix of imaginative solutions and different types of innovators at work in our region,” he said.

The Community News Matters program was spurred by a lead grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation’s Knight Community Information Challenge and is jointly funded by The Chicago Community Trust, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. It seeks to increase the flow of truthful, accurate and

insightful news and information in the region and spur development of new business models for news.

The Knight Community Information Challenge is a five-year, \$24 million effort to help community and place-based foundations find creative ways to use new media and technology to keep residents informed and engaged. The Trust received one of the Challenge's first matching grants.

"Projects like these have the power to engage communities around pressing issues and spark the conversations and actions that move communities forward," said Trabian Shorters, Knight Foundation's vice president for communities.

The following are the 2009 Community News Matters award recipients:

Projects designed to improve the flow of information in high-need communities

Columbia College Chicago

Nonprofit/For Profit

\$45,000

For a Columbia College/Chicago Tribune collaboration using student and professional journalists to cover government meetings, businesses, churches and other institutions in **Austin**, with content distributed via a new Web site (www.austintalks.com), Tribune's ChicagoNow blog site (www.chicagonow.com), a mobile edition, a newsletter and text messaging

Gapers Block Media, LLC

For Profit Business

\$35,000

To increase the amount of neighborhood-based, original local coverage on Gapers Block (<http://gapersblock.com>), with priority given to stories about underserved communities and issues that affect them

Loyola University Chicago (School of Communication)

Nonprofit

\$45,000

For a partnership between Loyola and Benito Juarez Community Academy to train high school and college journalists to cover **Pilsen**, with content distributed via a new Web site, "Adentro de Pilsen" (Inside Pilsen), a Spanish language news magazine and (potentially) hand-held mobile devices

South Suburban Publishing LLC

For Profit Business

\$30,000

To train and equip citizen journalists to cover news in **Markham** for a new Web site (www.southsnews.com), using smartphone video reporting and traditional online newsgathering techniques

Projects designed to strengthen information sharing, learning and unique perspectives by and for specific groups

Chicago Association of Hispanic Journalists

Nonprofit

\$30,000

For a new Web site to promote the work of Chicago-area Latino journalists, to assign freelance reporters to fill gaps in coverage about issues of interest to the area's Latino community and to train and mentor student and citizen journalists

Chicago Youth Voices Network

Nonprofit

\$60,000

To engage several hundred youth journalists in twelve local youth media programs to explore and report on how Chicago teens are faring in the economic recovery, using online polls and social media reporting

Community Media Workshop

Nonprofit

\$45,000 total

1. \$15,000 to help build and develop a strong, healthy online news ecosystem in the Chicago area through continued tracking, convening, reporting, collaboration with and education of the sector
2. \$30,000 to launch (in collaboration with Northwestern University Medill School professor Jack Doppelt) a reporting, story sharing and translation service for ethnic media and their audiences, building on CMW's ethnic media work and Medill's "Immigrant Connect Chicago" program

Projects designed to create and build new business models

Chicago News Cooperative

Nonprofit (to become L3C)

\$50,000

To support development of a new L3C cooperative business model providing enterprising journalistic coverage of the Chicago area using various Web, print and broadcast platforms, including a new Web site called "The Chicago Scoop"

Northwestern University (Medill School)

Nonprofit

\$30,000

For graduate students to help two local community news ventures develop sustainable business models, with in-depth analysis, prototype development and recommendations for business strategy, audience, content design, delivery, marketing and revenue

Project designed to support investigative journalism and civic engagement

Better Government Association

Nonprofit

\$60,000

To train volunteer "reporter monitors" to report on government meetings downtown and in Chicago's neighborhoods for a new "Good Government Virtual Town Hall" Web site

Projects designed to improve technology platforms and aggregation of news and information

Beachwood Media Company

For Profit Business

\$35,000

To help the Beachwood Reporter (www.beachwoodreporter.com) create a sustainable business model through strategic enhancements in technology and content

Brad Flora

Individual

\$35,000

To upgrade software used by The Windy Citizen (www.windycitizen.com) to enable the site to expand and better integrate with other social media platforms

The proposals were screened by a diverse group of Trust program staff and consultants with extensive community and media experience. Then an expert advisory board reviewed the proposals and made recommendations to the Trust's Executive Committee, which made the final selection. Advisory board members from institutions seeking funding were not allowed to vote on their organization's proposal.

The Trust received requests for more than ten times the funds available from a broad group of applicants – from community organizations and individual

entrepreneurs to traditional, ethnic, nonprofit and new media ventures; youth programs; universities and colleges; and public broadcasting outlets.

“This shows just how much need and opportunity there is to support all the very promising innovation going on in Chicago right now,” said Ngoan Le, vice president of programs, who commissioned [The New News: Journalism We Want and Need](#), a study assessing the state of Internet-based news in Chicago.

To support this growing community of innovators, the Trust will offer educational, information-sharing and networking sessions throughout the coming year for all interested Chicago-area media innovators, including all Community News Matters applicants.

The New News report found that while the Chicago area is full of media experiments, the many online news sites, blogs or e-newsletters serving the Chicago area have not yet filled the gap created by a decrease in the amount of local news coverage by traditional media. It found that nonprofit leaders are concerned about the lack of quality news coverage on local issues. Not only have the leaders interviewed seen a decrease in reporting on issues they care about, they worry that less of the information they see is vetted, edited and fact checked; that it’s getting harder to get a balanced diet of news and a sense of shared community; and that it has gotten harder to determine what’s important amidst a deluge of information.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the vitality of the U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects with the potential to create transformational change. For more information, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

About The Chicago Community Trust

For 94 years, The Chicago Community Trust, the region’s community foundation, has connected the generosity of donors with community needs by making grants to organizations working to improve metropolitan Chicago. In 2008, the Trust, together with its donors, granted more than \$100 million to nonprofit organizations. From strengthening schools to assisting local art programs, from building health centers to helping lives affected by violence, the Trust continues to enhance our region. To learn more, please visit the Trust online at www.cct.org.

The Trust has a longstanding commitment to community information with its support, for 19 years, of *Chicago Matters*, a multimedia public affairs series featuring the work of WTTW 11, Chicago Public Radio, the Chicago Public Library and *The Chicago Reporter*, a publication of the Community Renewal Society.

About the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology is affecting children and society. More information is at www.macfound.org.

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