

» OHIO ENTREPRENEUR

On the PROWL

By Lyndsey Walker

CITYPROWL FOUNDER JENNIFER COLEMAN IS TAKING STEPS TO SPIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE ON CLEVELAND'S DOWNTOWN.

Jennifer Coleman wanted to find a way to get people excited about her native Cleveland.

"If I could get people to understand the history, they'd be more apt to support it," she explains.

So Coleman, an architect for more than 20 years, combined her experiences and knowledge to launch CityProwl Cleveland in July 2005. She thought what better than self-guided walking tours downtown to rally Clevelanders and visitors alike.

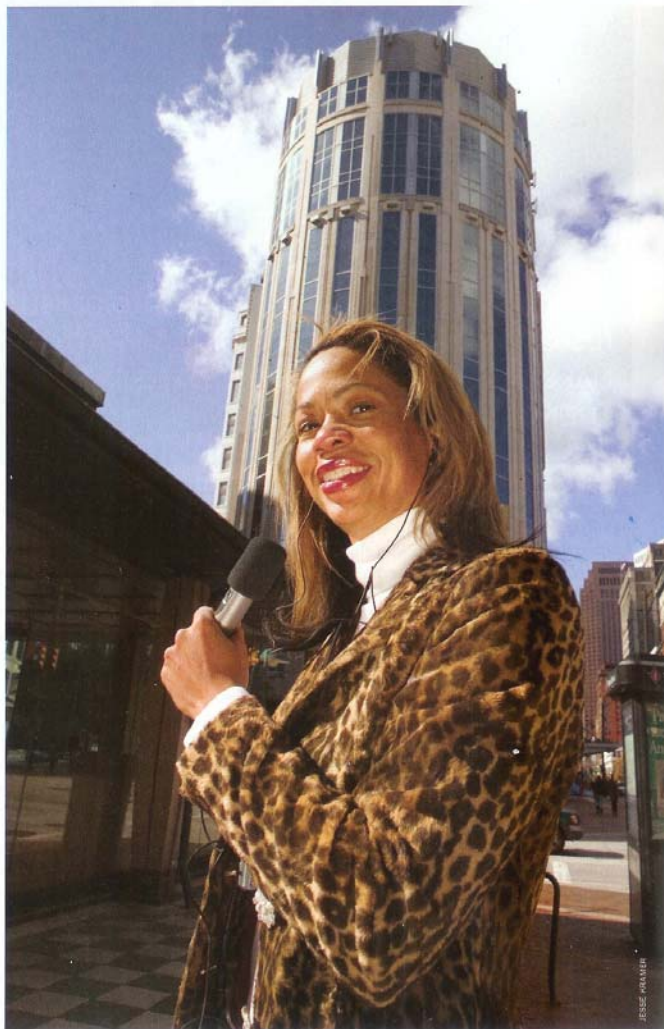
"If it's something that can get people to know about the city, then I've done my job," says Coleman, who worked for Westlake Reed Leskosky for more than 10 years before founding architecture firm Jennifer Coleman Creative LLC in 2005. "People don't realize how special Cleveland is ... and the rich history it has."

CityProwl Cleveland offers a series of urban walking tours that can be downloaded to digital media players for self-guided, 30-minute tours. Currently, two are available: The Arcade and the Lower Prospect Avenue district, which includes East Fourth Street. The free tours give commentary on the history of downtown buildings, along with directions to follow the route.

"Being an architect, I love the architectural details, but it's not just about that, the downtown tours should be interesting to a variety of people," she says.

In the summer of 2005, with an idea in mind, Coleman turned to Cleveland Next, a program of Corporate College that offers forums to help entrepreneurs looking to make a difference in Northeast Ohio bring their ideas forward. Cleveland Next connected Coleman with like-minded leaders to make her vision a reality.

"We helped her hone her skills in entrepreneurship to leverage the other two — her skills and her passion for civic engagement," says Anne Hach, director of



Ohio Entrepreneur



the Key Entrepreneur Development Center at Corporate College.

Coleman received a \$30,000 grant in February 2006 to jumpstart CityProwl from The Civic Innovation Lab, a project funded by The Cleveland Foundation to mentor and train ideas that have a measurable economic impact on the region.

"Cleveland has been a great place to start CityProwl," says Coleman, who works out of her home in Cleveland, much to her husband's chagrin, but to the delight of her four-year-old son. "I've gotten tremendous feedback from the community."

Since the launch of CityProwl, the Web site has received 3,500 hits and more than 500 downloads for the Prospect Avenue tour. Though investors had concerns about attracting visitors to the site, Coleman says she hasn't had much of a problem with it. "I just keep the monster fed," she says. "I keep talking about it and promoting it."

In August, Coleman started a bi-monthly e-newsletter to help drive visitors to the site, as well as give CityProwlers additional information about the businesses that work in these historic buildings. She plans to attract advertisers to the Web site and the e-newsletters, as well as gain sponsorships for the buildings and tours to provide a solid revenue stream.

In the meantime, the future of CityProwl looks bright. By next spring, Coleman hopes to have five or six downtown tours available for downloading, including the Warehouse District and an inside tour, which will cover bank lobbies in the downtown area, such as National City, Huntington National Bank and KeyBank. Also, she began discussions with Chagrin Falls-based Findaway World LLC, the inventors of Playaway, the first-ever, self-playing audio digital book, to provide these digital units preloaded with four to six tours. The CityProwl Playaways will be available at the Cleveland Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"It's definitely been a great start," says Coleman, who plans to add Ohio City and University Circle next summer and has hopes to expand to other cities such as Pittsburgh and Detroit in the next few years. "I thought I would initially have a gradual startup with 500 downloads by the end of the year and, [instead], I got them in 10 weeks." ❧