

BUSINESS

Markets were closed
Tuesday for
Independence Day.

THE PLAIN DEALER

BRIGHT IDEAS Northeast Ohio is full of entrepreneurs hatching creative business ideas or developing innovative products. In this monthly feature, *The Plain Dealer* spotlights those pushing the brightest ones.



C.H. PETE COPELAND | THE PLAIN DEALER

Jennifer Coleman launched CityProwl Cleveland to get people walking and talking about Cleveland. She creates 30-minute audio walking tours, like this one through the Colonial Marketplace on Euclid Avenue, that detail an area's architecture, culture and history. Listeners download the tour from her Web site — www.cityprowl.com — to their iPod or other MP3 player and wander the route on their own time.

Walk through city's history

Architect creates free audio downloads for tours

EMILY HAMLIN
Plain Dealer Reporter

Jennifer Coleman loves a good story. Especially if it's about architecture. She knows hundreds of tales about the history of Cleveland's buildings — interesting tidbits that only a few people are aware of.

"There are stories all around us, really great things that usually get lost in the sauce," she said.

So Coleman — architect and founder of CityProwl Cleveland — is digging them out, cleaning them off and sharing them for free.

CityProwl offers digital walking tours of Cleveland's neighborhoods that you

download to your iPod, MP3 player or cell phone.

Sponsorships and advertisers on the Web site — www.cityprowl.com — pay the bills so listeners don't have to.

Just slap on some headphones and start walking as Coleman explains the architecture, history and culture of the buildings and areas you see.

You'll also hear from developers, business owners and residents.

Coleman heard tales of the city's buildings while working as an architect. As her collection of historic tidbits grew, she began brainstorming ways to share it with others. A book wouldn't show people the buildings live and in person, and she didn't have time to lead regular walk-

ing tours.

Then she discovered podcasts, and her business plan quickly took shape.

"The idea jelled, and that was it — I took a deep breath and just jumped in the pool," said Coleman, who also owns an architecture firm called Jennifer Coleman Creative.

She took an outline of CityProwl to the Civic Innovation Lab, a Cleveland Foundation project designed to mentor entrepreneurs and provide financial support.

Director Jennifer Thomas said the lab awarded Coleman \$15,000 because of her creative, civic-minded business idea. She can collect up to \$15,000 more if she hits predetermined benchmarks.

SEE IDEAS | C3

CityProwl Cleveland

Location: Cleveland

Service: Free audio walking tours of downtown Cleveland that download onto your iPod or other MP3 player.

Employees: 1

Backing: \$15,000 grant from Civic Innovation Lab

Inspiration: While working as an architect, Jennifer Coleman learned fascinating tales about Cleveland's architecture and history. She brainstormed cheap, easy ways to share the information with others and stumbled onto podcasts, which would allow listeners to take the tours for free and on their own time.

IDEAS

FROM C1

Architect creates audio walking tours of city

"She's capturing and relating the richness of the core city of Cleveland, combining stories of its residents with the beauty of architecture, and she's doing it all using new technology," Thomas said. "It's wonderful."

The first tour details the lower Prospect Avenue area and boundaries of the Ingenuity Festival, where you'll find Coleman spreading the word about CityProwl July 13-16.

"There's an incredible history of small- to mid-sized businesses in that area, as opposed to the Rockefeller and Standard Oils

that built up other parts of the city," she said.

The tour is chock full of tales and facts that few people know, she said.

Coleman designed the site as a blog so listeners can post comments about the tour, sharing what they liked or venting about what they didn't.

The feedback will help her tweak the second tour, which will focus on the downtown Arcade. She plans to develop other tours downtown before branching out to neighborhoods such as Ohio City.

The goal is to get people walking and talking about Cleveland, she said.

"The more you know about it, the prouder you'll be," Coleman said.

CityProwl can spread that enthusiasm to visitors, too, said

Kathy Coakley Barrie of Barrie Projects, Coleman's mentor through the Civic Innovation Lab.

"It puts you into a little time tunnel to give you insight into why things are the way they are and why they're there," Barrie said. "Visitors can plug into the city and leave with a sense of what distinguishes us from the Detroit or Pittsburghs."

Coleman said she hopes eventually to share those cities' stories, too, extending CityProwl into other under-appreciated areas.

Every city has great stories to tell, she said.

"If no one tells them," she said, "they'll just get lost."

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