

Creating an online community telephone pole in New West



By New Westminster News Leader

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New Westminster residents have a new, high-tech way to communicate with their neighbours about local issues, events or simple needs like finding a lost cat or getting a babysitter recommendation.

Imagine Facebook tacked to a telephone pole.

That's kind of the premise behind Neighbourhoods, a free private community communication platform created by PlaceSpeak. The company has partnered with the city of New West to launch Neighbourhoods for each of the city's 11 defined neighbourhoods such as Massey Victory Heights, West End, Quayside, Queen's Park and Brow of the Hill.

The service allows neighbours to connect privately with each other within the boundaries of their neighbourhood using an online Geosocial platform. After registering and creating a profile on the PlaceSpeak website, users are verified and then placed into their appropriate neighbourhood site. They can then use the platform to raise issues of hyperlocal concern, organize neighbourhood events or meetings, find a nearby babysitter, locate a lost pet.

It's not unlike the way people used to post notices on wooden telephone poles, but with the added electronic component of also being able to communicate with each other.

Jason Lesage, the president of the Massey Victory Heights Neighbourhood Association, said New West's emerging demographic of younger professionals makes the city an ideal proving ground for this high-tech community bulletin board.

"They're more attuned to communicating online," said Lesage, who sees the service as an adjunct to online tools he already uses extensively like Facebook, Twitter and email to alert members of his association of happenings in their neighbourhood.

He said those online connections have helped make his “sleepy” residential neighbourhood one of the most active associations in the city. It’s also not afraid to take on divisive issues like the upcoming transit referendum.

“This is a great way to raise an issue,” said Lesage. “Issues that are current and have an impact on liveability, that’s what really engages people.”

Colleen Hardwick, the CEO of PlaceSpeak, said “All too often we hear that people don’t know who lives on their own block. There’s a lot of hyperlocal information that can be shared online.”

For details go to www.PlaceSpeak.com.

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