

A Modest Proposal

To the editor:

I read with interest some of the suggestions your panel of East Siders offered to make life here more enjoyable (“New Ideas for a New Year,” January 2010). As always, some are pretty interesting and most involve some degree of common sense. As one might expect, many of the suggestions involved taxes, which of course remain painfully and inappropriately out of whack as compared with our neighboring states. Well, here’s my modest suggestion: why not treat East Siders the same way the City treats Brown. If you buy a new home on the East Side, you pledge to pay taxes on it for the next fifteen years, at a sliding rate, of course. At the end of the fifteen years, the tax payer gets to own it free and clear, just like Brown, but pledges to make some sort of modest annual payment to the City (at his or her sense of what’s fair). It works for Brown. Why not for us?

Bill Salsburg
Providence

Passport to the Arts

To the editor:

Thank you for the article on “New Ideas for a New Year” that ran as your January cover story. In response to your panel’s wishes that the arts be fully supported by the public schools, I would like to point out that an excellent program is already in place for high school students to experience the arts as patrons. The Arts Passport program, administered through the Rhode Island Arts Learning Network, and working with teachers in the schools and arts organizations, provides students with free tickets to a large variety of arts events. Students can see and hear the quality this state has to offer without the barrier of admission prices. Check it out at www.riartslearning.net

Susan Werner

Good Teamwork on Race to the Top

To the editor:

I was proud to stand side by side with Providence Schools Superintendent Tom Brady and Providence Teachers Union President Steve Smith to announce the City’s historic partnership with the union in support of the state’s application for “Race to the Top” federal funding for education.

It isn’t often you get the chance to change the game

Lights. Cameras. Get Action!

One thing the Cicilline administration has prided itself on, justifiably, is its use of technology to try and improve City administration. For this they are certainly to be commended. We recently read about a new initiative in Boston that seems to be appropriate for the tech-savvy mavens at City Hall to consider – and best of all, it enlists all of us residents to help it succeed.

The City of Boston has recently instituted a smart phone application called “Citizens Connect” that enables citizens to report street-level problems by emailing photos to the

Mayor’s Office for action. Citizens Connect is a free download. The application automatically detects the location of the problem with GPS technology, and then connects the location to the photo of the problem that the user uploads. A Google map shows where all of the complaints are located.

Complaints are reviewed and passed on to be handled by the proper City agency. In Boston, problems are handled on a first-come, first-served basis and are addressed in less than five days.

Providence has always maintained a “complaint line,” but this will alleviate

a lot of the communication issues. If you send a photo of a problem on a certain date, it is a visual guide that is time-stamped and contains the GPS location. Confusion is no longer an excuse. Potholes, graffiti, poor snowplowing, streetlights out, overgrown parks, signs down, sidewalks needing repair, trash not picked up, blatant code violations and any other infrastructure problem can be photographed and reported.

Infrastructure problems occur – it’s the nature of any city. But most residents want Providence to look good and be as trouble-free as possible. Let us help!

the way we have tried to with our aggressive bid to secure much needed Federal education dollars to help our students. We have forged an extraordinary partnership between the Providence school district and the teachers’ union that can pave the way for once-in-a-lifetime federal funding that will provide our teachers with the resources they need to help accelerate student achievement and prepare our kids to compete in the 21st century workforce. It will also provide strong evaluation measures, professional development opportunities, and comprehensive performance assessment standards. This partnership will also provide us with new tools for attacking challenges and solving problems with purpose, creativity, and a shared vision for the future.

Over some intensive weeks last month, the Department of Education, the PTU, and the Providence Public School District engaged in extensive and difficult negotiations to reach this extraordinary outcome. But when it came down to the wire, the leadership shown by Steve Smith made the difference. He understood not just the unique opportunity to provide his membership with the professional resources they deserve, but also to ensure that they would be stakeholders with RIDE and PPSD in determining how the future will unfold in Providence schools. The strong leadership and focused intentions of Tom Brady were also critical to reaching this moment.

What I learned from this experience is that attaining goals of this magnitude – nothing short of transforming the educational experience of every child in the City of Providence – requires revolutionary

thinking, unprecedented collaboration, and the kind of courage of conviction that Steve Smith demonstrated throughout this process. I am thrilled to be facing this remarkable opportunity for groundbreaking urban education reform alongside our great teachers, who mean everything to the success of every single one of our students. I like our chances on Race to the Top – we’ve got what it takes to make amazing things happen in Providence.

David N. Cicilline
Mayor
City of Providence

Missing an Old Friend

To the editor:

We are frequent walkers on the Blackstone Boulevard Path. Can you tell us where they moved the statue of the little girl Constance? Where did she go?

Missing her,
“The Walkers”

Editor’s Note: According to Parks Department superintendent Robert McMahon, the statue, known as Spirit of Youth, remains on Blackstone Boulevard, where it’s been since 1982. Maybe it was snowing that day?