



THE PLAIN DEALER

Uncovering Cleveland

Tours venture off beaten paths to reveal city's cool character

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PREVIEW

Emerging Cleveland Tours

What: Two-hour van tours of cool Cleveland places presented by Justin Glanville and Erin Aleman.

When: Friday and Saturday, Nov. 24 and 25; Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec. 26 and 27.

Tickets: \$5. Reservations required by calling 216-269-0779 or 216-687-5264, or going to emergingcleveland.com.

A blustery breeze sweeps across the rooftop patio at the Cleveland Environmental Center, where native plants and a solar grid make the building ecologically friendly.

Erin Aleman and Justin Glanville are fans of EcoCity Cleveland, which promotes green development, and the "green roof" atop the Lorain Avenue building that the agency calls home. When they have the chance, the urban-planning students bring others to see the place. On this sunny October day, the two are surrounded by treetops and church steeples and sky. In their company, Cleveland suddenly looks like 77 square miles of bright future.

Glanville, 31 and Aleman, 26, last year created Emerging Cleveland, a series of city tours aimed at showing off the cool that lies beyond the obvious. The tours don't stop at the well-traveled West Side Market and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum; they do amble around Chinatown on the East Side and Battery Park, a 327-unit housing development in progress in the Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood, on the West.

"They just believe in cities, and they're in this one, and they're going to do what they can to help it," says Wendy Kellogg, director of the master's program in urban planning at Cleveland State University, where Aleman and Glanville are a little more than a semester away from earning their degrees. "We have students who come through this program who are top-notch, and they are two of them."

The nonprofit venture targets young adults who have abandoned their Cleveland upbringing to settle elsewhere.

Exploring the places that make city cool

The two would like to help reverse brain drain, but Glanville says, "we're not doing the hard sell because we just feel that would be sort of lame."

Glanville grew up in Brecksville, earned his bachelor's degree in classics at Grinnell College in Iowa, then moved to Manhattan and worked for The Associated Press. As time passed, Cleveland started looking good.

"After seven years in New York, I was really missing that sense of community," he says. He knew he was interested in CSU's master's program, but it wasn't just the academics that drew him home. "I specifically wanted to come back here," he says. He lives with roommates in the former rectory of St. Josaphat Catholic Church, now Josaphat Arts Hall, on East 33rd Street in Cleveland.

Aleman grew up in southwestern Michigan and earned a degree in fine arts and printmaking at the University of Michigan. She calls herself a Cleveland "implant" and lives in the Ohio City neighborhood. Not long after she moved here, she found, "I was always being asked the cool place to eat or where to shop." The questions came from longtime residents who live in the suburbs and feel out of touch with downtown.

The friends hatched a plan to lead two van tours of some of their favorite spots during the 2005 holidays, when young adults would likely be home visiting family.

"Having been an expat myself, I thought that maybe we could show other expats what's going on," says Glanville. They made some fliers and emailed everyone they knew, and by the time the first tour rolled around, their 15-seat van was packed and they were turning away business. One young woman had brought along her sisters, who resorted to following the van in their car.

Josiah Madar, a 31-year-old real estate lawyer who lives in Manhattan, says he pays attention to Cleveland events out of a "sort of mysterious, lingering, intense loyalty and interest in the city. I still identify with the city a great deal."

Madar took a tour while home for a visit - he grew up in Shaker Heights - and was glad to see the insides of buildings he'd only driven past. "One of the coolest things for me was to see the inside of a live-work space on the near East Side."

In June, Aleman and Glanville teamed up with Cool Cleveland founder Thomas Mulready to present a "mystery tour" that highlighted Chinatown. It drew about 75 locals who were curious about the central city.

One side effect of suburban sprawl, Mulready says, is that it creates "psychological expats" who need to be reintroduced to the urban center. During their stop at Tink Holl, the Asian food market on East 36th Street, tourgoers were "waiting in line to buy fish heads," Mulready says. "It was like we were on some bus trip to Niagara Falls."

This year, Aleman and Glanville are planning four expat tours: one each on the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving (Nov. 25 and 25) and on Tuesday and Wednesday, Dec. 26 and 27.

The \$5 patron tickets and some backing from Levin College will cover the \$1,600 cost of presenting the tours. (Note: Reservations are required; go to www.emergingcleveland.com.)

Glanville sounds committed to his old hometown. He's concerned about the economic health of the region but says, "I don't think that people from the outside dwell on it as much as we do. And I think there's lots of opportunity to attract people from places like Chicago and New York, which are really getting so expensive and are difficult in a lot of ways."

Aleman has more complicated feelings about planting roots here.

"As an outsider, I had to learn to understand the self-loathing [of Clevelanders]. Sometimes I just want to live anywhere else because people in other places don't say crappy things about their central cities. But part of me thinks I might stay in Cleveland. I like changing people's minds."

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