

Roc City 2.0: Group uses tactical urbanism to promote city of future

A group of self-proclaimed urban operatives have started a campaign to turn Rochester into Roc City 2.0 — the city of the future.

Last week, more than a dozen members of TEDxRochester, an independent TED organization (Technology, Entertainment and Design), initiated the first phase of a yearlong plan to promote social change with low cost, monthly events — tactical urbanism, said Jennifer Indovina, a TED Fellow and co-organizer of TEDxRochester.

TED is an internationally prominent nonprofit organization that has spawned independent chapters in many cities.

Under the cloak of darkness, members zip-tied signs to traffic posts. The signs, strategically placed around downtown, act as road signs to popular destinations and provide the distance it takes to get there by foot and by bike.

“We want people to re-imagine how to get around downtown,” TEDxRochester co-organizer Tony Karakashian said. “When we see downtown Rochester, we see it as a drive-through city — you go to the city for

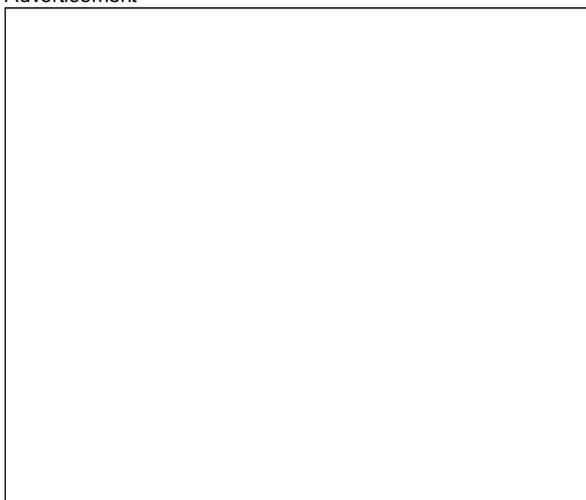
work and drive home. You don’t spend any time downtown. We’re trying to show there are interesting things downtown to see.”

One special feature of the signs is its use of technology, Karakashian said. A QR code printed on each sign takes people to RocWiki.org where users can find more information about the destination.

The QR codes allow for flexibility of what the signs can deliver in the future. TEDxRochester is currently in collaboration with the developers of RocWiki to provide bus schedules as well as where nearby bike racks are located. Installing the signs provides an infrastructure for upgrades in the future that follow the TED philosophy, Karakashian said.

Indovina tells people to expect a TEDxRochester event on the 21st of every month. Some events, such as the first phase, will be done secretly in the night, while others invite the community to attend, but future events remain carefully under wraps.

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“There is no master plan and we’re not going to ask the city for permission,” Indovina said. “But the hope is that we’ll make small changes that will have a bigger impact.” TED, is best known for a series of international conferences that promote ideas for the future. Since 2005, the TED Prize has awarded individuals who have ideas that have global impact. Past winners have included Bono and President Bill Clinton. But this year, the TED Prize of \$100,000 will be divided among 10 regional TED organizations that meet the criteria of a city of the future, or City 2.0.

Bridging the gap between poor and rich, re-imaging education, sharing resources and reducing carbon footprints are part of the criteria for the 2012 TED Prize.

“\$10,000 is kind of small to do a huge facelift for a city, but it’s enough to do small scale projects like we’re doing,” Indovina said.

The winners of the TED Prize will be announced in February, but with or without the prize money, Indovina said TEDxRochester will continue with their events.

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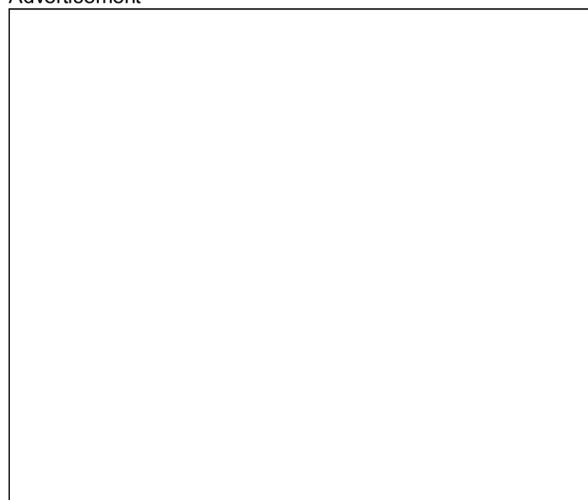
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Jennifer Indovina, Irondequoit, left, and her mother Yvette Indovina, keep watch as they quickly put up a points-of-interest and distance sign at the corner of East Avenue and Pitkin Street on Thursday. The urban activists are part of TEDxRochester working to promote a greener and less car dependent city.
/ SHAWN DOWD/staff photographer