



# 9th Ward E-News

From Minneapolis Council Member Gary Schiff

March 13, 2009

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## City steps up new anti-prostitution efforts

[Electronic billboards and tougher prosecution](#) are two ways Minneapolis is getting tough on people who try to solicit prostitutes in the city. Clear Channel Communications is donating space on electronic billboards to send a clear message to would-be johns. The billboards feature a blurred mug shot and a reminder that Minneapolis now posts photos of people arrested for soliciting prostitutes on its website, [www.johnspics.org](http://www.johnspics.org).



“Prostitution harms the family and the entire community,” said Ninth Ward City Council Member Gary Schiff, who came up with the idea for the billboards and expanded website. “To those who come into Minneapolis looking for a prostitute, these billboards send a message loud and clear: You will be caught and your neighbors, your coworkers and your family will find out.”

The Minneapolis City Attorney’s office has recently changed its prosecution standards to get tougher on johns. City attorneys will now seek convictions on all those who solicit prostitutes in Minneapolis, including first-time offenders. Previously, johns who were first-time offenders in Minneapolis would complete a restorative justice and education program as part of their probation to prevent a conviction from appearing on their record. Under the new plea standards, johns will still complete a restorative justice and education program, but their criminal record will now include a conviction. Restorative justice programs work with criminals to understand the personal accountability of their crimes and how it impacts the community.

“Prostitution is not a victimless crime,” said City Attorney Susan Segal. “Street prostitution damages our neighborhoods and the prostitutes themselves often are as much victim as offender. To further combat this problem we are strengthening our focus on the demand side of the prostitution equation—the johns. With our new, tougher plea bargaining standards, we want johns to know there are real consequences for their actions. We’re also seeking legislative changes to make clear that prostitution activity involving vehicles on the street is a gross misdemeanor crime. We want the word to get out that soliciting prostitution is not okay in our city, on our streets, or in our neighborhoods.”

The Minneapolis Police Department will continue to conduct “john stings” in areas where prostitution has been a problem. According to Third Precinct Inspector Lucy Gerold, “Our aggressive enforcement efforts have not been enough to change this behavior. We need a campaign like this that tells everyone that these are family neighborhoods and not the marketplace for prostitution.”

## Free dry cleaning offered to the unemployed



Elite Cleaners has been a landmark on the corner of Minnehaha Ave and East 31<sup>st</sup> St., for nearly 60 years.

Local business owner Don Chapman is donating [free dry cleaning](#) to people who are unemployed and looking for work. “You read all the bad things and see the unemployment rate getting worse by the day. This is how we could help,” said Chapman, whose family has owned Elite Cleaners & Launderers on 31<sup>st</sup> Street East and Minnehaha Avenue nearly sixty years.

Through Chapman’s generosity, [2,000 coupons for free dry cleaning](#)

will be distributed by [job counselors](#) who work with the city’s [Employment and Training Program](#).

“In a competitive job market like this, it’s very important that job seekers do everything they can to put their best foot forward,” said Cathy Polasky, city economic development director.

“People cut back on extras like dry cleaning in a tough economy, and even though Don’s business is down, he’s reaching out to help others who are even worse off,” noted Gary Schiff. Chapman has a more humble view of his contribution. “Come interview time, first impressions are critical,” Chapman said. “It’s not much but it’s what I could do to help people.”

## Islamic financing aides entrepreneurs

The City of Minneapolis has partnered with the [African Development Center](#), [Neighborhood Development Center](#), and the [Minneapolis Consortium of Community Developers](#) to launch an [alternative financing program](#) for small business owners. This new type of financing is an opportunity for Muslim entrepreneurs whose religious beliefs restrict them from receiving traditional interest-based financing.

“This could only happen in Minneapolis, such a progressive city that enables small businesses that would otherwise be left behind and not able to participate,” Hussein Samatar, Executive Director of the African Development Center said. “Sixty percent of the people who take advantage of this financing are women. It has expanded opportunities without any added cost to the city or taxpayers.” Samatar explained that unlike traditional financing, the rate of return is based on an up-front payment and paid off over the life of the financing.

“Up to now, traditional interest-based loans were an economic barrier for Minneapolis’ Muslim population. In tough economic times like these, the more opportunities for entrepreneurs we can provide, the better,” said Council Member Gary Schiff. The program is available to all small Minneapolis businesses, such as neighborhood retail, service or light manufacturing. It allows small businesses to purchase equipment or to make building improvements

## Legislators will discuss 2009 legislative session



State Senators and Representatives from the Ninth Ward will speak at March's Breakfast with Gary on Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009. [Sen. Patricia Torres Ray](#), [Sen. Linda Berglin](#), [Rep. Jim Davnie](#), [Rep. Karen Clark](#) and [Rep. Jeff Hayden](#) will attend along with Gene Ranieri, Director of the City's Intergovernmental Relations Committee and [Council Member Betsy Hodges](#), Chair of that committee.

Clockwise from top left: Sen. Patricia Torres Ray, Sen. Linda Berglin, Rep. Jeff Hayden, Rep. Jim Davnie and Rep. Karen Clark

"The budget will be dominating all discussion at the Capitol this year as legislators deal with a \$4.85 billion deficit over the next two years. It will be a year of tough choices as Minnesota faces the effects of the national economic crisis. Aside from budget, issues that may be at the forefront include solutions to the foreclosure crisis, creating opportunities with "green jobs", early childhood education programs and transit funding to prevent fare hikes," Gene Ranieri said.

Breakfast with Gary is a monthly meeting for 9th Ward constituents held from 7:30 to 9:00am the final Friday of the month at the Mercado Central, 1515 East Lake Street. \$5 buys breakfast.

## Sustainable Communities Conference



The [Alliance for Sustainability](#) is partnering with the City of Minneapolis and other organization to sponsor the Sustainable Communities Conference.

The Twin Cities Sustainable Communities Conference is being held on Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from 12:30 to 9:30 p.m. at the Paul & Sheila Wellstone Center for Community, located at 179 Robie Street East, St. Paul, MN 55107. The keynote speaker is Mayor Ken Melamed of [Whistler, British Columbia](#), which will host some events for the 2010 Olympics.

From noon to 6:00 p.m., local government staff and elected officials, citizen and business leaders will learn about model policies and ordinances they can adopt for expanded energy efficiency, renewable energy, active living, walking, biking, transit use, and zero waste and storm water management. This first portion of the conference is the Local Government Sustainability Workshop.

In the second part of the conference, the Neighborhood Sustainability Conference, 500 citizen volunteers from neighborhoods, congregations, schools, businesses, service clubs and city environmental commissions will find resources for hands-on projects and learn how to help to shape sustainable local and state policies. This portion will run from 4:45 to 9:30 p.m.. For more information, [email Sean Gosiewski](#), Program Director for Alliance for Sustainability or call him at 612-331-1099 ext. 1.

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