

*A drivers' strike has kept the city's two papers off the streets since May. So the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette is giving citizens the news in the colonial fashion.*

# Crying out loud in Pittsburgh

By David S. Rotenstein  
FOR THE INQUIRER

**P**ITTSBURGH — "Hear ye, hear ye, good citizens of the City of Champions. It is I, your town crier, to bring you the latest in news, sports and entertainment," bellowed Brian Boyd, one of two town criers hired last month by the strike-beleaguered Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Since May 17, Pittsburgh's two daily papers, the Press and Post-Gazette, have been idled by a drivers' strike. They've tried innovative ways of getting the news out, from sending daily bulletins over local fax machines to hiring substitute drivers to distribute a short-lived replacement edition.

But in August, the Post-Gazette boldly hired Boyd, an active duty Army captain, and Ann Ivory, an Ohio State University journalism graduate, as old-fashioned town criers.

Each day, at noon and again at 3 p.m., the two march in colonial-era garb to prominent positions beneath Pittsburgh's skyline to shout the news. Boyd stands in a corner of Market Square and Ivory is at Mellon Center.

"Please gather around. Two minutes to the next update," shouts Boyd through a megaphone borrowed from a local high school.

He has an audience of about 200. Many have video recorders and cameras, others in business suits stand attentively, balancing their



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attention between Boyd and their ice cream cones. The homeless share benches in Market Square with businesspeople, secretaries and students.

It's the day after the close of the GOP convention in Houston, and other papers have entire sections blocked out to cover George Bush's acceptance speech as the Republican nominee for President. It's also

the same week that the Pittsburgh Pirates swept by the San Diego Padres during a three-game home series. Just two days before, Pittsburgh hired a new superintendent of schools.

For most news organizations, it would have been a banner week. But for the Post-Gazette, it was just more agony. Imagine having the

See **CRIERS** on C8

**Hear ye, hear ye! Brian Boyd reads the noon news for the Post-Gazette in Pittsburgh's Market Square.**

# Town criers replace paper in Pittsburgh

**CRIERS** from C1

greatest story to tell the world, but not being able to communicate it. You know there's an eager audience waiting for words that will never come.

William Deibler, managing editor of the Post-Gazette, admits that the prolonged strike has been a "major source of frustration."

"Certainly we feel our hands are tied behind our backs because we've been unable to report some of the biggest stories of the year. The two political conventions, the political campaign are just two of the major stories that we have been unable to give our readers," Deibler says.

Boyd, in his white wig and colonial suit, stands in stark juxtaposition to the modern backdrop dominated by the glass walls of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co. towers. It is, after all, 1992 — not 1752.

During his 10-minute news set, Boyd competes with bus engines, police sirens and automobile horns for the attention of his audience.

Sucking on a hard candy between sets, he frets about the biggest challenge facing a contemporary town crier. "My voice. Keeping my voice," he whispers, saving up for the next round of news.

**They're  
cheered on  
and  
applauded  
by  
listeners.**

One bystander noted that Boyd's megaphone ought to be replaced by a more modern sound system. "Even the Mennonites had a whole speaker system," he said, referring to a religious rally the previous day.

Most observers, though, liked the show. The only criticism came from a businessman who would have liked more local news.

"The politicians are stealing the city blind and nobody's reporting it," noted the bystander who explained that the Wall Street Journal and New York Times more than fill the gap for national and international news.

Few people applaud or cry "more news" upon finishing the morning paper or watching the evening news on TV. But Pittsburgh's town criers are cheered on, applauded and laughed with, not *at*, by noontime crowds. Is this news or entertainment?

Says Deibler, "This is news, presented in an entertaining way."

Boyd adds, "It's both. That's what a paper is, as well."

The Post-Gazette is engaged in an innovative public relations stunt. Deibler doesn't deny that.

But the town criers also represent a desperate survival tool by the paper. When publication does resume after the strike, the publication will be faced with regaining its readership. Deibler plans to continue using town criers even after the strike ends.

There's also a subtext to Boyd and Ivory's involvement. Both are looking for employment in one of the tightest job markets in history.

Boyd's hitch in the Army is almost up, and he's been flooding prospective employers with resumes. He has yet to be invited for an interview. Besides earning \$25 per day as a town crier, he's been pushing himself to a recessionary job market.

"I'm trying to sell myself, as well," says Boyd.