

THOMAS TRESSER

Chicago, IL

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Social entrepreneur committed to championing creativity in business, civics, and community change. Innovator in developing community-based programming, cause-related marketing initiatives and cross-disciplinary civic campaigns.

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY AND CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Shirley Mordine & Company (9/08 to 12/08)

Managing Director

Part-time position for this premiere contemporary dance company, as they celebrate their 40th anniversary season in 2009. Responsibilities include board development, marketing, program and audience expansion.

Creative Strategies, Chicago, IL (4/01 to present)

Chief Creative Officer

Principal of consulting service offering strategic marketing, special events production, community affairs and loyalty-building programming initiatives. Recent clients: Columbia College, regional government of Saskatchewan, Canada, Second City, Chicago American Marketing Association, Hudson-Highland Center for High Performance, DePaul University, Jazz Impact, Jellyeye Action Drummers, McClurg Court Theater Performance Center, Information Technology Resource Center, Building Solutions Chicago, Synectics, Chicago Theater Club, Ltd.

Collaboraction Theater, Chicago, IL (8/06 to 9/07)

Marketing and Audience Development Consultant

Providing branding, fund raising, and product development services for this innovative theater company. Received ArtsWork grant of \$10,000 for this work. Created Human Capital Campaign to raise \$50,000 during 2007; leading branding and marketing initiative.

Dramatic Diversity, Chicago, IL (9/05 to 12/06)

Marketing and Product Development Consultant

Provided marketing, publicity and new service development services for minority-owned theater-based diversity consulting firm.

OurHouse.com, Evanston, IL (9/99 to 3/01)

Marketing Director

Seventeenth hire at this e-commerce start-up. Worked on launch and ongoing marketing, merchandising and communications programs. Major involvement in establishing the brand identity, the tone of the site and the customer experience.

- Established the editorial tone of the site and developed a great deal of the original copy.
- Championed improvements to the point-of-sale experience on the site, increasing sales and customer satisfaction. Results were consistently high consumer ratings as reported by BizRate.
- Proposed a number of innovative on and offline solutions to build traffic, increase time-on-site, increase loyalty, boost sales and increase repeat sales: OurHouse University, OurHouse Radio, The Accessible Home Store, The Wired Home Store, The Earth-Friendly Home Store.
- Created position of Manager of Community Relations. Represented company to community organizations and civic efforts.

Executive KnowledgeWorks, Palatine, IL (9/97 to 9/99)

Marketing & Client Services Director

Responsible for strategic development and implementation of traditional and web-based marketing plan and development of new products for Fortune 500 executive development consulting firm.

- Wrote, produced and maintained firm's first website, which brought in \$1 million in new business in less than one year
- Championed and led branding effort for the company's intellectual services offerings -- created "Building the Smart Company" tag line, logo and collateral, which led to increased lead generation and new business development.
- Designed and delivered innovative executive education programs.

Chicago Park District, Chicago, IL (4/96 to 9/97)

Cultural Planning & Marketing Consultant

Researched, planned and executed cultural development plan that transformed an underused major regional park, Douglas Park in West Lawndale, into a thriving community cultural center.

- Conducted and led over 100 community meetings, planning sessions and public forums to enlist community support and develop programming.
- Wrote grants, recruited teachers and artists, developed programs and instituted institutional alliances that led to over 20 classes, festivals and ongoing programs that served over 10,000 people annually.

Peoples Housing, Chicago, IL (4/93 to 12/95)

Director of Cultural Development

Responsible for innovative program development, fundraising and resource creation, talent and volunteer recruitment, marketing, publicity for community arts program at organization which resulted in it being recognized as one of Chicago's most innovative developer and manager of low-income housing.

- Raised \$250,000 and designed and managed extensive series of classes, special events, festivals and performances employing a staff of seven. Grew program from scratch over three years, reaching over 15,000 neighborhood residents annually.
- Pioneered the use of the arts and culture for community development and micro-enterprise creation. Awarded special grant and recognized by Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the nation's premiere enabler of low-income housing.
- Generated outstanding public relations response with over 30 stories in the local media, including press, radio and television.

ACTIVISM EXPERIENCE

Francis Parker Neighbors (2011)

Strategy Consultant

Advised group of neighbors on their successful campaign to stop private school from installing light towers on soccer field.

No Games Chicago (11/08 to 12/09)

Volunteer organizer, Communications Coordinator

Helped launch citizen's coalition opposing bid for 2016 Olympics, organized rally, raised funds, developed web site, acted as spokesman for radio, print and TV communications.

Protect Our Parks (11/07 to 12/08)

Co-founder, President of Board

Led organization of grassroots citizens organization to protest the privatization of Lincoln Park, successfully sued the Chicago Park District, the City of Chicago and the Latin School to halt construction of a private soccer field on public land, raised \$30,000 and helped recruit dozens of volunteers, maintained the web site and email communications.

43rd Ward Democratic Ward Organization (2/07 to 11/09)

Member, Executive Committee; Chair, Education & Culture

Help elect progressive, independent person to Democratic Committeeman in 2007, part of organizing team that ran the 43rd Ward November 2008 elections, organized voter registration drives at Columbia College and DePaul University that registered 1,700 students.

Creative America Project, Chicago (1/04 to 12/08)

President and Lead Organizer

Organized national nonpartisan, nonprofit effort to inspire and train creative professionals to lead in the public sector. Developed national board and advisory council of distinguished experts in cultural policy and deliberative democracy, created brand for organization with website and have developed and presented educational and civic training programs in eight states.

Mayor Daley's Digital Divide Working Group (6/00 to 12/02)

Committee member

Joined this committee when Community Affairs Manager at OurHouse.com. Authored a proposal for creating a network of neighborhood technology centers called The Accelerator Project that has been funded by a \$3 million grant and that has been put into operation by Lumity (formerly, the Information Technology Resource Center).

United Power for Action and Justice (1/96 to 12/00)

Citizen-Leader

Volunteer organizer for this metropolitan-wide organizing effort initiated by Cardinal Bernadin and other major religious and union leaders and coordinated by the Industrial Areas Foundation. Instrumental in bringing the Jewish community into this effort and spoke at the Founding Convention at UIC Pavilion in October, 1997 before 10,000 people.

Organized and helped design the organization's website, www.united-power.org.

Greater Chicago Citizens for the Arts, Chicago (6/90 to 12/94)

Founding President

Founded and led this political membership organization that raised money for candidates for public office who were pro-arts and pro freedom of expression. Organization recruited 60 artists who were deputy registrars and who registered over 1,300 people to vote, trained artists to run for local school council, endorsed candidates for local and federal office and created arts policy statements for candidates for Alderman, State Representative, U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate. Directed artist volunteers to our candidates and raised over \$30,000 for our slate.

Center for Cultural Policy and Advocacy (9/90 to 12/91)

Founder

Organized this center inside the Institute for Metropolitan Affairs at Roosevelt University. Received grant from MacArthur Foundation to visit eight cities to research how the arts are supported and how artists support themselves. Created research and event agenda for the Center and was worked with senior program officers at the MacArthur Foundation for a \$250,000 grant. Taught "Arts & Public Policy" at Roosevelt for two years.

Independent Voters of Illinois – Independent Precinct Organization (IVI-IPO) (1992-93)

Board Member

On state board of this independent political activist organization, founded in 1944, that endorses and supports progressive candidates in the Chicago metropolitan area.

OTHER EXPERIENCE

- Actor/Producer -- Performed in over 40 shows, including 25 Shakespearean productions. Co-founder of Chicago Shakespeare Company (originally Free Shakespeare Company). As Managing Director for Pegasus Players, produced over 30 shows in Chicago, which were awarded 22 Joseph Jefferson Citations for excellence. Created the Chicago Young Playwrights Festival in 1986, now in its 21st season.
- Ideation & Promotion Development -- Freelance assignments for consumer packaged goods and retail establishment clients of Leo Burnett, Frankel, Simon Marketing and Unicom.
- Internet columnist -- Wrote and uploaded bi-weekly column, "What's Hot Chicago", a preview of outstanding cultural attractions for CultureFinder.com, an Internet magazine.
- Radio producer/Host -- Created, wrote and hosted monthly 1/2 hour "Rogers Park Alive" radio program for Loyola University, covering the fine arts in northeast Chicago.

EDUCATION

- University of Chicago, Graduate School of Business, Chicago, IL -- Certificate in Business Management
- Spertus College, Chicago, IL -- M.S., Urban Development
- Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL -- Certificate in Nonprofit Management
- Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH -- B.A., Sociology

PUBLICATIONS

"America Needs You! Why You Should Become a Creativity Champion" book via Lulu.com

Regular contributor to the Chicago edition of the Huffington Post – 2008 to present

"Shifting the Burden – Tax breaks for big industry hurt homeowners in Lake County," *Conscious Choice*, October 2007.

"Meet the Millennials," cover story for *Conscious Choice Magazine*, July 2007.

"If You're Reading This: Run!" *Inside Arts*, Association of Performing Arts Presenters, May/June 2007.

"Run, Baby, Run," op-ed piece in *American Theatre*, September 2004.

"The Artistic Side of Sustainable Communities," *In Business*, March/April 1997.

"How Do the Arts Build Communities?," *Cultural Policy*, Vol. 3, No.1, 1996.

"Artists and Community Organizers: Possibilities for Partnerships," *Chicago Artist Coalition News*, November, 1993.

AWARDS/RESIDENCIES

Presentation to student body at College for Creative Studies, Detroit, 2006 and 2011.

Visiting Fellow, DePaul University College of Commerce, Ryan Center for Creativity and Innovation, 2003-07.

Visiting Lecturer, University of Oregon at Eugene, Institute of for Community Arts Studies, October 2003.

Edwin Astrin Special Service Award for arts and politics work, IVI-IPO, June 1993.

MacArthur Foundation grant awarded to travel to six cities in 1990 to research arts advocacy programs.

Fellow, Leadership Greater Chicago, 1989-90.

TEACHING

"Got Creativity? Strategies & Tools for the Next Economy" – IIT Stuart School of Business, 2011, 2012

"Nonprofit Management" – online for Loyola School of Social Work, 2010, 2011

"Introduction to the Creative Economy" – online for The Polymath Foundation, 2011.

"Tools & Techniques for Creative Leaders" – IIT Institute of Psychology, 2009

"Nonprofits & Social Change" – DePaul College of Communications, 2009

"Acting Up – Using Theater & Technology for Social Change" – DePaul Distance Learning Program, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

"The Artist as Activist" – DePaul Art Department, 2010; Loyola Theater Department, 2007

"Introduction to Nonprofits as Social Change Agents" – DePaul PAX Program, 2008, 2009

"The Art of Crossing the Street – The Artist as Citizen" – School of the Art Institute, 2007, 2008

"Who's Lying To You Now?" (critical thinking & media literacy) – DePaul School for New Learning, 2006-2008

"Creative Tools for Social Change" – DePaul Program on Peace, Conflict Resolution and Social Justice (PAX), 2007, 2008

"Creating an Online Catalog for Civic Activism in Chicago" – DePaul School for New Learning, 2007

"The Politics of Creativity" - DePaul Political Science Department, 2007

"How To Be a Cultural Activist," "Who's Lying to You Now?" – DePaul School for New Learning, 2006-2008

TRAINING

Leadership training: "Community organizing 101" via CommuniTeach 2011; Columbia College Leadership Week 2008 – 4 different workshops on the artist as leader and introduction to community organizing; The Creative America Project 2005 – three full day training sessions for artists on how to become a community organizer, campaign manager or candidate.

Workshops: Elgin Community College 2009 performance/workshop on creativity & democracy; Alliance of Artists Communities conference keynote 2008; National Performing Arts Convention 2008; Imagining America conference 2007; University of Chicago Graduate School of Business 2007; Loyola Theater Department 2006 Arts Rally; College for Creative Studies, Detroit; ArtPride New Jersey; Arts Midwest; ArtServe Michigan; Arts Wisconsin; National Community Arts Summit, Louisville; League of Chicago Theatres Annual Retreat; First National Performing Arts Convention, Pittsburgh.

ELECTIVE OFFICE/COMMUNITY SERVICE

- Green Party candidate for Cook County Board President, 2010
- Lincoln Park Advisory Council – Secretary of Board, 2008-2009
- Chicago Access Network (Chicago's public access network) – Board of Directors, 2006-2011
- Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, Chicago – Local School Council Community Representative, 2004-2006