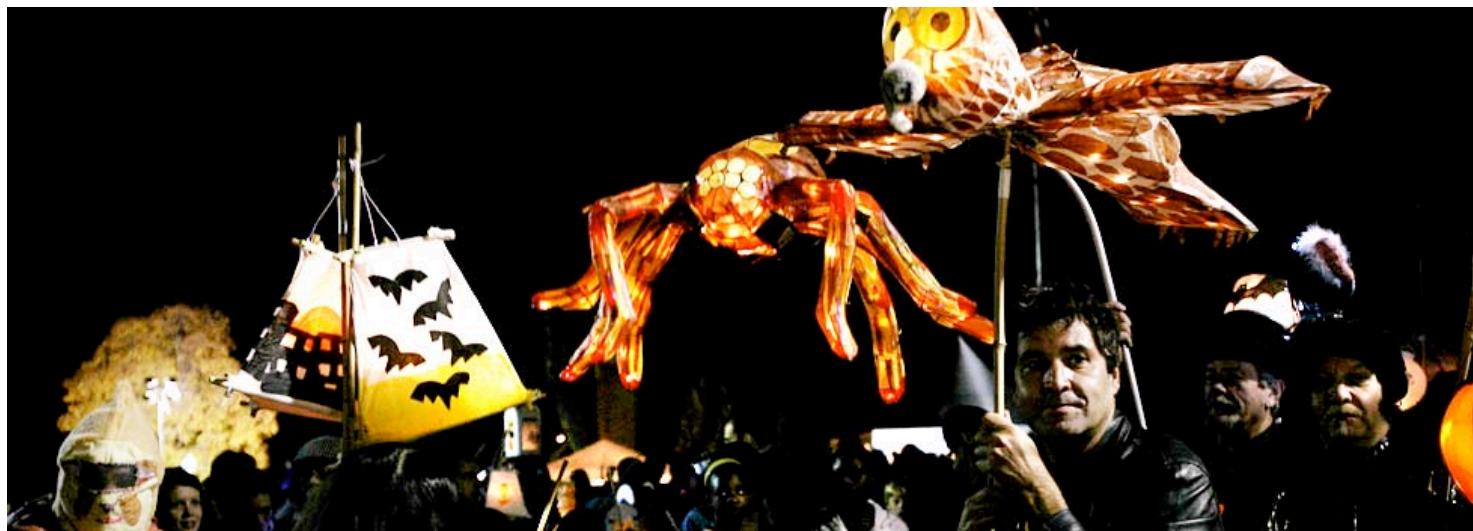


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## Sunday Streets -- From Bogata to Baltimore

WALAIKA HASKINS  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2009

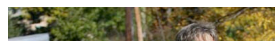
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What if there was a way to help Baltimore's residents become more fit, lessen the city's carbon footprint and create a greater sense of community? Well, that was the question Roland Park leaders sought to answer last Sunday. Under the brilliant blue of October sky along the neighborhood's tree-lined main throughfare, Roland Park Avenue, residents came out to enjoy the first "Sunday Streets."

From friends to families of four and five, Roland Parkers took to the street Sunday, running and jogging, biking, skateboarding, walking with and without a dog in an experiment event organizer Michael McQuestion hopes will become a weekly event not just in his neighborhood, but throughout the city.

#### South American import

It's not a new idea. In fact, finding a way to create a healthier and more connected citizenry has plagued large cities for decades. But, as it turns out for several cities in the South American country of Columbia, the answer was deceptively simple, close the streets to



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cars and open them instead to the people.

Known as Ciclovía, which means bike path, cities including Bogata, Cali, Medellín began shutting down the city's streets to traffic each Sunday since the late '70s. Bogata is where both Greg Cantori and McQuestion first experienced the event.

For Cantori, his love affair with Ciclovía began as he was falling for someone else, his soon-to-be adopted daughter Andrea.

"We worked for a group called Kid Save. They bring orphans from other countries to the United States for eight weeks for a summer vacation basically. The children stay with host families and we hosted Andrea and fell in love with her instantly. She was 11 years old at the time and we went back to Columbia to go through the adoption process," he recalls.

Cantori and his wife spent five weeks in Bogata as they completed the adoption process. During their stay, Andrea asked if they could go "do Ciclovía together."

"I'd heard about it and asked what it was. She said every Sunday, 52 weeks a year, they close 90 miles of streets to traffic. It's amazing and Bogata is a city of 7 million people. Every Sunday they do this from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m., they open the streets to the people. Whole families and even apartment buildings of people get out and walk, bike, skate and do other things. They have between 500,000 to 1 million people on the streets every Sunday," he explains.

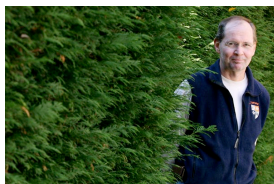
**Sunday Streets take one**

Bouyed by his experience, when he returned to Baltimore Cantori was determined to bring the event to Baltimore. Though he initially received a very positive response from City Hall officials, with plans in the works to create a "Sunday Streets" that would extend from Lake Montebello to Druid Hill Park, the realities of providing security for the miles long route scuttled the plan.

"We met with all the officials and everyone that needed to be part of this, police and fire, and traffic enforcement public works and on and on. We got them all together and they said we can do this, but the police cost became an issue because they would be paid time-and-a-half to double time," says Cantori.



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Bogata uses volunteers to staff intersections and Cantori thought the same would be possible in Baltimore. However, concerned about public safety the police demanded that they be there at every intersection. "That added up and it very quickly became close to a \$15,000 and \$25,000 a day cost, making the police 85 to 95 percent of the cost. That kind of sank the whole thing. Then the economy tanked and that was the end of that," he says.

**Roland Park rises to the challenge**

"I lived in Bogata, Columbia where I first saw it and knew that it was a fantastic thing for any big city to convert a street for just one day, one period of time into a public use. I had that idea, and then Phil Spivak, our president for the Roland Park Civic League had the idea that this year for his term he wanted to focus on sustainability to do things more practically in our neighborhood and get people to be more sustainable in their lives," McQuestion says.

McQuestion and Spivak thought about reducing the number of cars, making homes more energy efficient and then joined the Baltimore Neighborhood Energy Challenge, one of the eight neighborhoods participating in the program.

"The third thing we thought of was physical fitness and getting people to get exercise. I said you know Phil, they have this thing called Ciclovía and so we went to City Councilwomen Sharon Green Middleton and Mary Pat Clark. They said, they'd help us get a permit," he continues.

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The groundwork laid by Cantori three years earlier helped McQuestion and Spivak gain their permits as the plans for Sunday Streets had been included in the city's sustainability plan.

"It was always something the city was going to implement. So we said we'll take your plan and do it the way you want. We'll pay for the field test. And we did. We have the police here and the transportation department. The problem is its costly and we need to get more volunteer input," McQuestion says.

**Opening the streets**

Aside from a few glitches that saw residents along the southbound lane of Roland Park still parked along the street Sunday morning, which forced volunteers to knock on their neighbor's doors to prevent their cars from being towed, the event came off without a hitch.

Spivak, hopes that the successful event will encourage other neighborhoods in the city to come together to co-host more extensive Sunday Streets. He points to other cities such as New York, Chicago and El Paso who held regular events this summer.

"We're helping people become healthier, promoting a greater sense of community and building community pride," he says.

Tentative plans are in the work for the second Sunday Street to take place next spring. "We have to build the will to do this more broadly first and then I think it will happen."

Photo captions:

A young participant colors with chalk during the first "Sunday Streets" off Roland Ave. in Baltimore.

The southbound lane of Roland Ave. was closed to motorists during the first "Sunday Streets" off Roland Ave. in Baltimore.

City Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke participates in the first "Sunday Streets" off Roland Ave. in Baltimore.

Greg Cantori, one less car, poses for a portrait.

Mike McQuestion, Sustainability Committee co-chair Roland Park Civic League and "Sunday Streets" event organizer, poses for a portrait.

One less car stickers were handed out at the first "Sunday Streets" off Roland Ave. in Baltimore.

photos by Arianne Teeple - managing photographer, [www.bmoremedia.com](http://www.bmoremedia.com)

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