

Chicago follows the yellow arrows

'In-the-know' locals aid in new form of sightseeing

Beware the Rats of Nimh," warns one 4.75-inch yellow arrow, stuck to a mailbox and pointing toward some bushes in lower Manhattan, "They are here. Plotting our demise. The electricity they have stolen will electrocute us all."

Another more poetic arrow, on the corner of Morningside Drive and 117th Street welcomes travelers to Harlem with a line from Langston Hughes: "Drink a toast to Harlem! They say heaven is paradise. If Harlem ain't heaven, then mouse ain't mice. Heaven is a state of mind."

It is street art. It is new media. It is a game and a city tour. "What if 'city' was a verb," flashes across the YellowArrow Web site. By giving out sticky small yellow arrows at concerts, art galleries and clubs and asking city-dwellers to point out the locations and things that matter most to them, YellowArrow is making once passive landmarks into active parts of the city.

After placing an arrow (the organization's site warns against vandalizing property) a participant sends a text message to www.yellowarrow.org with the ID number of the sticker, along with an explanation of the locations importance. Upon encountering an arrow, anyone can send the arrow's ID number to the Web site and receive the original message -- turning a "No Diving" sign into nostalgia and an expressway signpost into philosophical inquiry.

First launched this May in New York, the yellow stickers have since spread to San Francisco, Los Angeles and, as of last week, Chicago. But it has yet to take hold in Chi-town -- one club owner, whose venue distributes arrows, seemed confident they were actually postcards and arrows downtown are still few.

You can order your own yellow arrows online (www.yellowarrow.org) or pick them up at the Stage Left Theater, 3408 N. Sheffield Ave.; the Cactus Bar and Grill, 404 S. Wells St.; or the Borders at 2817 N. Clark St. -- along with a few other bars and clubs listed on YellowArrow's Web site. So to arms, with cell phone and stickers, you hipsters! Show us your wit and the cool dives you claim to know or wax poetic about a signpost. Just don't recall the Rats of Nimh ... it's been done.

-- Ryan Bradley



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