

Election offers chance unlike ever before

Students in Loop and South Loop making economic impact

By James H. Ewert Jr.
City Beat Editor

As voter turn out in Chicago continues to decline and student enrollment rises, the upcoming municipal election presents an opportunity for students to impact the city unlike ever before.

With a run-off election possible in the South Loop's 2nd ward and the Loop's 42nd Ward, a rise in students voting could be the deciding factor.

It's no secret that during the last three decades the character of the South Loop has undergone serious changes, both demographically and economically.

What may be less known, or even underestimated, is that a

Part of The Chronicle's ongoing election coverage

major catalyst for the area's metamorphosis is the student population, according to an impact study conducted by the Central Loop Alliance.

The study by the Central Loop Alliance, a mixture of community organizations, local businesses and merchants, determined that Chicago's Loop and South Loop is the biggest college town in Illinois.

Not more than a few decades ago, burlesque theaters, adult arcades and prostitutes still populated the South Loop along South State Street and neighboring areas, according to Dominic Pacyga, dean of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Department at Columbia.

Pacyga, who taught the History of Chicago class at Columbia, said although universities like Roosevelt and DePaul have had

buildings in the area since the late 1940s, the South Loop really began taking shape when Columbia moved into the 600 S. Michigan Ave. building in the early 1980s.

"It was a pretty down-and-out part of town," Pacyga said. "The arrival of Columbia and expansion of DePaul into the South Loop ... brought not only students into the area, but a sense of safety."

The presence of students in the area, Pacyga said, started a snowball effect that led to a rise in residential development, and later, retail. The last decade, he said, has been particularly important because of Columbia's growth and expansion.

"Students are kind of fearless

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Students enrolled in an institute of higher education in the Loop/South Loop	53,859
Full and part time employees for higher education	12,131
Attendance of education programs and events	499,387
Estimated expenditures of students	\$117,318,000
Square footage utilized by higher education	7,456,468
Number of beds provided	3,789

Source: Higher Education in the Loop and South Loop, 2005

Joshua Covarrubias/The Chronicle

Part of The Chronicle's ongoing election coverage

Voters' information accidentally 'lost'

Chicago Election Board responds to public: Don't panic

By Eric Kasang
Managing Editor

The Chicago Board of Elections may have joined ranks with the Department of Veterans Affairs and several credit card companies in committing a similar snafu: "lost" personal information involving a million or more individuals.

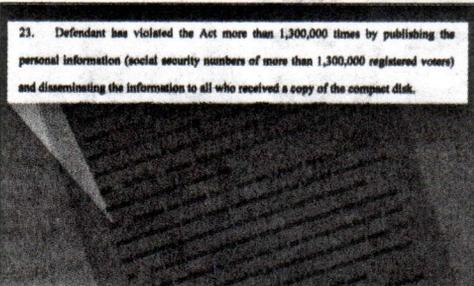
According to Peter Zelchenko, 43rd Ward aldermanic candidate and political activist, at least 106 CD-ROM disks contained social security numbers, birthdates and addresses of 1.3 million past and current Chicago voters. A class action lawsuit filed last week by

Zelchenko, alleged violations against "right to privacy" and "personal information protection" acts.

"The exact ingredients that you need to commit identity fraud are on these CDs," Zelchenko said, standing outside the Chicago Board of Elections, 69 W. Washington St., on Jan. 22. "You couldn't ask for a better package to commit individual and widespread identity fraud."

Zelchenko explained that he requested a disk late last year containing ward information for his aldermanic campaign. After Christmas, he perused the disk and discovered that "social security numbers, non-published phone numbers and birthdates were in plain sight."

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Joshua Covarrubias/The Chronicle

A homeless battle within the city

Buildings torn down as thousands wait for public housing

By Jenn Zimmerman
Assistant City Beat Editor

Although the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation may benefit many current public housing residents, advocates say those on the 30,000 person waiting list, particularly the

homeless, continue to struggle to find homes as more buildings are torn down.

According to the city's 10-year plan to end homelessness formulated by the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness and the Chicago Continuum of Care, one of the top causes of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing. In other words, as the homeless population continues to grow so does the need for

Family tree may get a bit bigger

Genetic project aims to uncover ancient migration patterns

By Allison Riggo
Associate Editor

Most high-schoolers read about the history of humankind in a textbook. But for more than 700 students in the Chicago Public Schools, the lessons are getting personal.

Thanks to a donation from the Geographic Project, 150 students at Charles Allen Prosser Career Academy, 2148 N. Long Ave., submitted samples of their own DNA to determine the migratory patterns of their ancestors.

Teacher Brian McKay's 10th grade European history class studied the ideas of human migration before actually testing their own DNA. National Geographic explorer Dr. Spencer Wells visited the class Jan. 23 to introduce the Geographic Project to the students and distribute testing kits.

"Everybody has some sense of their history for the last few generations, [but] everybody hits a brick wall at some point," Wells said.

The Geographic Project is a worldwide venture that aims to trace the migratory patterns of humans out of Africa more than 60,000 years ago. Researchers are collecting DNA samples from indigenous tribes—natives that have lived in areas of the world for many years—to find steady patterns in their genetics.

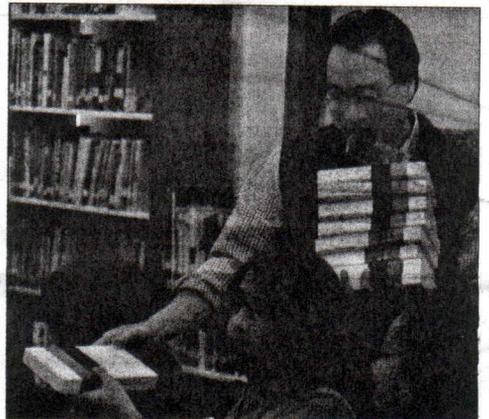
Samples from the general public

more affordable housing.

The main goal of CHA's Plan for Transformation is to beautify Chicago's public housing complexes, as well as provide more programs to its residents to help overcome poverty, according to Derrick Hill, CHA's press secretary.

However, it seems to be working against some of the objectives the city is trying to establish in its goal to end homelessness.

"It's a real problem," said Monika Desmond from the Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness. "Essentially, more people can't access [public housing units] because there is a huge waiting list."



Andrew Nelles/The Chronicle

Yo-Yo Ma passes out DNA sampling kits to students at Charles Allen Prosser Career Academy, 2148 N. Long Ave. The students were collecting samples for use in the Geographic Project.

are then compared against this data to make connections that can uncover the ancient migratory path of humans.

The theory Wells and his team are using to assess their data is that land masses were once connected because sea levels were lower thousands of years ago. Wells theorizes that all of humankind originated in Africa and migrated to other places of the world when all of the Earth's continents were connected.

By finding patterns and connections in the DNA of people across the world, the Geographic Project hopes to uncover consis-

tencies that will prove people all originated from the same area, Wells said. As generations pass, it becomes increasingly important to uncover these connections before cultural differences blend together, he added.

"The idea that we're all related to each other and we're part of one big family is very important in today's [world]," Wells said. "There are so many things that seem to be dividing us and splitting us apart from the world."

Five Chicago public high schools were each given 150

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at Chicago's Coalition for the Homeless, said she sees the Plan for Transformation as a contributor to the city's homeless population, because the number of public housing units the CHA is tearing down could house those on the streets or those already in a CHA unit.

"They have one plan which is creating homelessness and another plan to end homelessness," she said. "Demolishing the high-rise buildings isn't a problem in itself, but the way that they have been taking the buildings down before there was housing for people to go to is really the problem."

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Genealogy: Students speak with scientists, cellist Yo-Yo Ma

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participation kits to allow them to take part in the Genographic Project's worldwide quest for DNA samples to add to their database. An additional 50 kits were donated to each of five Chicago Sister Cities International partner schools in England, France, South Africa, Jordan and China.

By swiping the inside of the cheek with a cotton swab, enough DNA can be obtained to study the lineage of a given person, Wells said. Scientists at IBM developed a database to cross-reference and compare the samples to find patterns.

Renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma became involved with the Genographic Project through his ensemble's work with Silk Road Chicago. He and Wells taught the Prosser sophomores how to properly swab for their DNA sample and explained they could retrieve their results online in roughly eight weeks.

While the Genographic Project wants to discover overall migratory patterns through time, individuals are encouraged to use the information to learn about their own genealogy, Wells said.

In their lesson with Ma and Wells, most of the Prosser students said they were excited to learn about their own past as well as help answer deeper questions about human migration.

"What I'd hope that my students find out of this project,



Andrew Nelles/The Chronicle

Yo-Yo Ma speaks about his instrument and his music following a brief performance for 10th grade students participating in the Genographic Project.

and out of talking to [Wells and Ma], is that you can't just be happy with what's in your textbook," McKay said. "You have to go out there and explore and find out what interests you in the past and attack it and make it yours."

Sixteen-year-old Diamond Howard was chosen to conduct a question-and-answer session with Wells and Ma at an assembly following the lesson

McKay's class had with the men. She said she was most excited about being able to compare her lineage results with her fellow classmates.

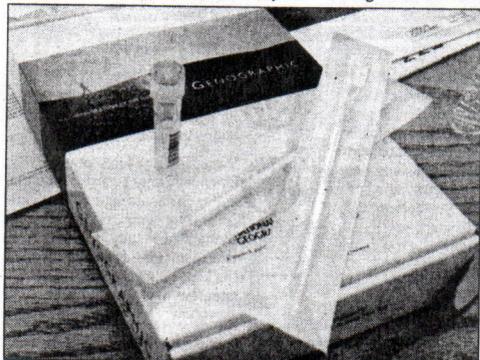
"Some of [the students] are scared, but it's nothing to be scared of," Howard said. "You find your history and you should want to find your history—where you came from. [I want to] go tell everybody and see who I'm related to."

School officials think this information may help students realize that although they seem different, they might be related to one another, according to Frank Cassello, a retired teacher who works in the administration of the high school.

"When some of this information starts to come back the kids will start to realize we all put our pants on the same way," Cassello said. "That's what's great about this project."

The general public can purchase participation kits online through nationalgeographic.com/genographic for \$99.95 each.

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Andrew Nelles/The Chronicle

The Genographic Project DNA sampling kit contains two cheek swabs and containers for collecting the DNA sample.

Lawsuit: Dispute among number of missing disks

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Along with arguing how the Chicago Board violated voters' rights, Nicholas Kefalos, who filed the suit in Cook County Circuit Court, stated his demands from the complaint. Kefalos is currently Zelchenko's attorney.

"The remedy is to, first of all, get the disks back," Kefalos said. "Secondly, contact every-one who's been affected; thirdly,

create an endowment for people to dip into to take care of any damages they have suffered [and fourthly, confirm that the Chicago Board] remedied any further ongoing disclosures of sensitive, personal and private information."

Although Kefalos did not have an exact amount for the endowment, or general fund, that would cover credit checks, he said at \$50 per person, it could run into the millions.

However, Chicago Board of Elections spokesman Thomas Leach said the public should not fret about the situation.

"We don't want the message to get out that there should be panic in the streets," Leach said. "We have absolutely no evidence at all that there's been any identity theft or that information

has been used inappropriately."

Leach said the Chicago Board first created the disks after the County Building fire in October 2003. After evacuating the building, Chicago Board employees couldn't gain access to their files for several days; aldermen and ward committeemen couldn't get their ward information either.

The disks originally contained a registered voter's full social security number. However, since last November the CD-ROMs only contain the last four digits of a person's social security number.

Currently, only six disks with

Students: Transportation safety remains top concern among peers

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and walk the streets without thinking much about anything," he said. "When there are more people on the streets, it makes them safer and when streets are safer they attract more people who are willing to buy into the neighborhood," he said.

Safety is still a concern for many students. In early 2005, the Central Loop Alliance, a community organization of local businesses and residents, conducted an economic study and survey on the impact of education on the Loop and South Loop. A survey of female students found that only 24 percent felt "very safe" or "safe" while by themselves in the evening.

The study also found that education's impact on the area was much more significant than what many had previously thought. Of the nearly 54,000 students attending institutions of higher education in the Loop and South Loop, 24 percent work in the area, and the 23 schools employ more than 12,000 people.

Ty Tabing, executive director of the Central Loop Alliance, said the student population is more visible because more students are beginning to move into the area. As this continues, Tabing said the type of retail development going on will be impacted as well.

"It seems that there is a critical mass of students now in a way there used to not be," Tabing said. "I mean, you see people going to classes, hanging out in front of various college facilities. Even though there were schools down here previously, you never saw that kind of social element to the downtown education corridors."

Tabing said Mayor Richard M. Daley has been a proponent of schools in the area and has previously mentioned creating additional dormitories similar to the University Center of Chicago, 525 S. State St.

"The reality is, the city had a real vision when it came to saving

the [eastern portion of the] Loop," Tabing said. "As a result of that, the city wanted to create alternative uses for all these old buildings and that allowed them to be saved instead of torn down. That's why so many of the buildings were converted to student use."

Despite the growth, expansion and development of the area, many students still feel short-changed.

"Well, there's the park and museums and I can go get a cup of coffee, but other than that there's not much to do," said Eric Sorensen, a sophomore film and video major at Columbia.

Sorensen, who lives in the University Center, said finding things to do during the day isn't nearly as hard as it is at night.

"There isn't all that much to do down here at night if you're not 21 [years old]," Sorensen said. "I came here to go to school, but that's only half [of my] time."

Sorensen is not alone. The survey of students conducted by the Central Loop Alliance also found many are in need of a 24-hour facility where they could meet with others from different institutions.

Maggie Carsons, 22, a psychology major at Roosevelt, said having something to do on campus for those under 21 is only important for half the students. She is more worried about transportation.

"It's not as bad during school because I have a U-pass, but during the summer and on winter break, I

hardly leave my apartment because I don't have money to take the train," Carsons said. "And when the CTA is breaking down all the time, it's definitely not worth my money."

Carsons, who lives in the Logan Square neighborhood, said she plans on voting in the upcoming election, but said many of her friends aren't going to.

"It's easier for me since I've been at the same place for over a year, but for a bunch of my friends who move all the time, they have no idea where or how to vote," Carsons said. "There's not all that much that can be done about that. Unless the aldermen are going to individually come up to everyone's door and walk each person through the process, a lot of people I know aren't going to vote."

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"We don't want the message to get out that there should be panic in the streets."

—Thomas Leach, Chicago Board of Elections spokesman

the social security numbers may still exist in the public. Leach said the disks have an average life of six months before aldermen request new ones. The Chicago Board is also analyzing past Freedom of Information Act requests to see who asked for a ward disk.

Although the disks could be downloaded and copied, Leach does not suspect that happened.

"I don't think elected officials are interested in identity theft," Leach said.

This is not the first time the Chicago Board has misplaced voters' personal information. Last October, Zelchenko discov-

ered that the Chicago Board's website contained a programming error in its database that allowed people to potentially view voters' full social security numbers.

Zelchenko said he tried to warn a Chicago Board member about the web glitch but was ignored. The Chicago Board corrected the problem only after the Chicago Sun-Times reported on the web problem. Now these "lost" data CDs only compound the problems at the Chicago Board, according to Zelchenko.

"The apathy and arrogance that we see in the public sphere led to problems like the ones we are seeing today," Zelchenko said.

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