

If it's news of the city, Chicago exiles want to know

by Mario Fox | August 30, 1986

CHICAGO — Tom Schaffner sends news of this Toddlin' Town to California, Spain, Ireland — even Hobbs, N.M., and Vestal, N.Y. — how ever Chicagoans in exile are longing to know how things are doin' back home.

"I see a story in the newspaper and give it a different spin," Schaffner said. "Chicagoans never lose their roots and always want to know what is going on here."

He provides tidbits, trivia — whatever he can lay his hands on — about the city's lives and times in Chicago File, a four-to-six-page newsletter he mails to 810 news-starved former Chicagoans in 40 states and eight foreign countries.

A year's subscription costs \$12. His scribes include comedian-actor Shelley Berman, a Chicago native living in California.

Another Chicago File reader, Jerry Bishop, a former Chicago TV and radio personality now living in San Diego, says he gets the newsletter because "I like to know what's going on back home. You see, I still call it home."

Bishop, Berman and the others can read about where the White Sox baseball team plans to move to in the suburbs, or how certain city neighborhoods are on their way up and others are on the way down, or why longstanding restaurant Café Bohemia is closing its doors.

They also can find out such tidbits as the name of the popular Chicago radio disc jockey who's moving to afternoon afternoons after years of spinning records on mornings.

From the basement of his North Side home, Schaffner writes a column for the newsletter called "Only in Chicago," where he comments on things unique to the city.

"like the special ability it takes to be a Chicago thief. There was a story about a guy convicted of robbery who made off with the court recorder's machine on his way out the courtroom. Mow that's Chicago. Even the thieves here have a special knack," he said in a telephone interview this week.

Schaffner, 30, an assistant director of communications with the National Live Stock and Meat Board, said he got tired writing letters to people who wanted to know the goings-on back in Chicago.

So, he took \$15,000 from his saving account to start the newsletter last year.

He still isn't seeing a profit. "But I've stopped writing letters," he said.

Most customers learn of the newsletter by word of mouth, but Schaffner has advertised in Arizona newspapers, and on visits to various cities he keeps an eye out for prospective subscribers in Bears T-shirts and Cubs caps.

And the telephone directory in retirees-rich

Sun City, Ariz., helped Schaffner find new subscribers by listing not only where everybody lives in that town but where they're from in the Snow Belt, including Chicago.

Schaffner said most former Chicagoans living elsewhere don't blend in.

"They choose not to on purpose because they are proud of where they come from," he said. "when it's convenient, you rave about Chicago.

"I asked them why did they move to the Sun Belt. They say, 'Because the weather.' But when I ask what they miss most about Chicago, they say, 'I miss the snow at Chistmas.'"



Chicago Tribune

No Need To Worry, Chicagophiles

April 18, 1988|By Clarence Petersen.

In the three years since Tom Schaffner began publishing the Chicago File, a monthly newsletter aimed at former Chicagoans, he has discovered in his readers a passionate craving for reassurance.

They want to be reassured that nothing is being done to tarnish Chicago's traditional corruption, vote fraud, political chicanery and losing teams.

"They take a perverse pride in these things," says Schaffner, 32, editor, writer, photographer and desktop publisher of the four-page Chicago File.

"We've got subscribers as far away as Thailand, Northern Ireland and Brazil who want to know how many votes were stolen in the last city election, what city official was most recently indicted and how patronage and political favors are alive and thriving."

Appropriately, the four-page newsletter is printed on slick paper. Even the name is two-faced: The Chicago File, as Schaffner points out, is for Chicagophiles. His subscription roster lists 950 of them nationwide and in 10 other countries. For \$12 a year, he gives them what they want.

In the current issue, that includes a story of 13 City Hall visitors stuck between floors in an elevator, its alarm-button broken, for 30 minutes before their plight is discovered. A city engineer is quoted: "The elevators jam all the time. So what's new?"

In what passes for good news, the Chicago File's lead story, headlined "New Skyscrapers, Stadium Giving Chicago's Skid Row the Bum's Rush," is more of a wistful look at the blighted area than a celebration of its seemingly inevitable demise.

To celebrate three years of operating in the red, Schaffner has devised an unseemly promotion—"a chance for current and former Chicago-area residents to take our publication to the cleaners."

Through June 30, he's offering 12 issues at half price to new subscribers who call or write

Chicago File (222 W. Adams, Suite 354, Chicago 60606; 782-2666) and mention the publication's third birthday.

"I have other projects that do make money," Schaffner explains. "I do Chicago File for fun." Not that it's always easy. "Some months," he says, "there's not enough fraud to fill the issue."



AMERICAN OBSERVER

Edited by Julie Bain

ONLY IN CHICAGO

Seems there was a car thief who actually returned a stolen car and, by way of apology, included a pair of concert tickets. During the concert, of course, the thief returned to burglarize the car owner's residence.

Native Chicagoan Tom Schaffner believes that such a sting could happen only in **Chicago** — and "Only in Chicago" has become a popular feature in the *Chicago File*, a newsletter for Chicagophiles throughout the world.

"The *Chicago File* is for former Chicagoans or for anyone anywhere else who has an interest in Chicago — these people are the alumni of the city," says Schaffner's editor and publisher of the monthly update. Schaffner's knowledge of who's who and what's what in Chicago is so extensive that a public-relations agency once hired him to squire celebrities around the Windy City.



A recent issue of the *Chicago File* included stories on corruption in the Cook County judicial system, a television broadcast in China of the Chicago Bears' Super Bowl victory, the surprising revitalization of formerly seedy Ontario Street, and overseas impressions of Chicago: "gangster galore and hog heaven."

Such diversity, says one Chicago business publication, has won the *Chicago File* a cultlike following among former residents who long for the Loop. An annual subscription is \$12. For more information write to Schaffner Publishing, PO Box 11229, Chicago, Illinois 60611 or call (312) 929-3224.

—Charles Marsh