

January 20, 2010 Annual Report of Northfield Citizens Online (NCO)

Current Board members

Cynthia Child, David Gonnerman, Adam Gurno (secretary), Rob Hardy, Jeff McLaughlin (treasurer), Jane McWilliams (vice chair), Joey Robison, Nathan White (chair).
Joey Robison and Cynthia Child are new on the board in 2010.

Annual Achievements

In 2010, the Cannon River flooded. Northfield.org provided up to the minute news, photos, and video to the community during the flood. In the aftermath, we worked with the city to quickly setup online tools which helped to connect volunteers and equipment with people who needed help. Our mission is to create an electronic commons that strengthens the fabric of community in the greater Northfield area. During the flood we demonstrated our ability to quickly utilize technology for community good, and showed why Northfield.org is a valuable community asset.

Shifting to the everyday, we continue to provide to Northfield a stable platform for the community to share news, information, and events. Here are some 2010 highlights in the areas of content development, outreach and collaboration, and technical improvements.

Content Development

Over the last couple years, we've been working with the colleges to engage students in content production through work study programs and internships. In 2010 we had a work study student from Carleton, Maia Rodriguez, and an intern from St. Olaf, Elle Kaskinen. Rob Hardy was the point person for both students. These partnerships help us produce more "feature story" type content while providing a great opportunity for students to gain experience with writing and editing for the web.

Maia backed up her stories for Northfield.org with in depth interviews and research. She contributed a 3 part series on the history of Way Park, and a 4 part series looking at how various segments of the community view Professional Learning Communities in Northfield. Elle, our summer intern, helped Northfield.org during a traditionally slow time for user submitted content. She wrote stories about the arts and sports, including a feature about the Vintage Band Music Festival in August.

Northfield.org joined Twitter this year. Joey Robison has been tweeting regularly, and we have nearly 100 followers. We also have created a special "Tweets Around Town" list where we highlight folks who tweet about Northfield. We show recent tweets from people on this list on the front page of our website, providing a real time snapshot of Northfield.

Outreach and Collaboration

Northfield Citizens Online is always looking for opportunities to strengthen the community by using technology. In 2010 we had some notable collaborations.

- We collaborated with the Northfield Grassroots Transit Initiative, moving closer to the goal of a centralized hub for transportation information.
- We supported the NDDC and the Chamber by offering free promotional space for the "Be Local, Buy Local" campaign.
- We partnered with the League of Women Voters in the development of a comprehensive Election 2010 page, with questions and answers from candidates for local offices.

Technical Improvements

After a tumultuous 2009, Northfield.org switched to private hosting at Dreamhost, and we have seen much improved performance in 2010. We upgraded to Drupal 6 in May, 2010, and the "page not found" and other errors have vanished. While our hosting costs have increased somewhat, the stability is welcome. Some specific technical accomplishments include:

- Hardly a blip of downtime in 2010.
- We are now using an HTML editor used is simpler and performs better with content copied from Microsoft Word.
- We've started using a module that makes image attachment much simpler for users and Northfield.org volunteers.
- We rolled out sophisticated custom integration with our Twitter account for our Tweets Around Town box.