

Finding Aid for the New River Free Press Collection 500

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids History and Special Collections

111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

localhis@grpl.org

URL: <https://www.grpl.org/research/history/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids History and Special Collections
Title:	New River Free Press
ID:	Collection 500
Date [inclusive]:	1974-1977
Physical Description:	2 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The New River Free Press was a community newspaper published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from November 1973 through May 1977. New River Free Press covered a wide range of topics, including housing, health, labor, education, and social justice. The paper included articles, book reviews, recipes, artwork, short stories, and poetry. Other topics that were covered included feminism, tenant rights, urban homesteading, sexual assault, ecology and the environment, local politics, nutrition, religion, and the peace movement.

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Biographical / Historical

The New River Free Press was a community newspaper published in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from November 1973 through May 1977. It was started by a group of citizens interested in providing an avenue for speech outside of traditional news media. The December 1973 issue said that "we at the NRFP felt that no vehicle existed by which we could make ourselves heard."

The initial group included Joyce Hodge Stellema, Teresa Podgorski, and Michael Chacko Daniels, along with many others. Daniels would go on to become the editor and publisher of New River Free Press and Podgorski the advertising manager. Other community members, local politicians, and community activists wrote columns and articles and contributed to the newspaper.

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Biographical / Historical

A brief history of the New River Free Press by Michael Chacko Daniels:

At the core of the short history of the New River Free Press is the love story of two immigrants: one, an Indian Protestant — Michael Chacko Daniels, who became its editor and publisher in June 1974; the other, a Polish Catholic—Teresa Podgorski, who became its advertising manager.

Michael often said that his involvement in the development of New River in Grand Rapids, after his long non-Michigan journey, was not a matter of chance, that Teresa was the key to making it happen.

Michael was born in 1943 to south Indian migrants in Aden, when it was under the British. He grew up in Bombay (1944-1967), where his father was a renowned newspaperman and a deacon of the Bombay Baptist Church. He graduated from the University of Bombay with a degree in economics, and then took a six-month internship as a sub-editor on Deccan Herald, the leading English-language newspaper in Bangalore, India.

In 1967, Michael came to the United States and earned a master's degree at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism within a year. He then worked as an assistant editor for The Asia Foundation in San Francisco for four years. In 1973 Michael joined the US Government's domestic "War on Poverty" as a Volunteer In Service To America (VISTA) participant. He was sent to work at the Grand Rapids Urban League Tenants Union. This assignment included joining a coalition of agencies working on fair housing issues. Activities included exposing redlining and preventing the further destruction of Black neighborhoods in Grand Rapids' central city.

At the coalition's meetings, Michael got to know Teresa, who was then an urban agent for Kent County Community Action Program's North East Complex. Her strong social justice commitments and history of speaking truth to power impressed him. Michael firmly believed that if he hadn't gotten to know and trust Teresa's commitments, he wouldn't have gone, after just a short time in Grand Rapids, to meet Joyce Hodge Stellema and her collaborators. They were planning to start a free community newspaper focused on social justice issues, for which, Teresa said, he would be a perfect fit. Because of Teresa's introduction, Joyce and her collaborators welcomed Michael into their group. During his year as a volunteer, out of deference to the requirements of his local VISTA-sponsoring agency, Daniels appeared in New River's staff credits and non-poetry bylines as "Chiki," "Shanti," "Citywatcher," or just "Michael." His full name appeared in the newspaper's commentaries and interviews only after June 1974, when he was no longer a VISTA.

In August 1974, Michael and Teresa got married under a tree in Kent County's Johnson Park and lived on Carlton Ave, from where they produced New River until its "Goodbye" issue in May 1977, when they signed off with the following summation and a note of thanks by Michael:

"With this issue New River ends its flow. We have fulfilled our central purpose in publishing New River from June 1974: exposing the hidden City Planning agenda of writing off a significant portion of the Central City.

"Since our expose on the subject in the November [1976] edition, we have been following up, tying up loose ends, and saving up our resources for this final issue. "Like every edition since June 1974, the issue in your hands is designed as a handbook for Urban Survival and Improvement. . . .

"The organizing principle behind the monthly handbook has been a poetic one—somewhat hard to define in its effects, but they are there nevertheless. . . .

"Having participated in every aspect of the paper during its first phase (October 1973 to May 1974) and having edited and published New River thereafter, I know there are many people I would like to tip my hat to:

"First, there's Joyce Hodge Stellema, without whom the first phase would have been a chaos. Then, there are the many who wrote and sketched, without whom New River would not have been a community newspaper. Then, our regular advertisers, without whom our shoestring [budget] would have [had] a fragile hairline. And, above all, the numerous faithful, habitual readers of New River, without whom New River would have been an isolated effort.

"For Teresa and I, New River has been a continuing adventure of passing through several layers of illusion. Such, we believe, is life. We loved it."

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Content Description

New River Free Press covered a wide range of topics, including housing, health, labor, education, and social justice. The paper included articles, book reviews, recipes, artwork, short stories, and poetry. Other topics that were covered included feminism, tenant rights, urban homesteading, sexual assault, ecology and the environment, local politics, nutrition, religion, and the peace movement.

The newspaper also provides information on the development of neighborhood associations and the allocation of federal community development funding in Grand Rapids. Other local stories that received coverage included Coit School, Model Cities, and the Model Neighborhood Citizens Committee.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was donated by Michael Chacko Daniels in 2019 and 2020 (2019.097).

Existence and Location of Copies

The New River Free Press is digitized and available online here:

https://digital.grpl.org/Browse/Objects/facet/collection_facet/id/6/view/images

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Controlled Access Headings

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History -- 20th Century
- Publishers and publishing -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Community newspapers
- Housing -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- Politics and government
- Neighborhoods -- Michigan -- Grand Rapids -- History

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances
New River Free Press, vol. 1, no. 1-2, November-December 1973	Box 1
New River Free Press, vol. 1, no. 5, April 1974	Box 1

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New River Free Press, vol. 1, no. 6-9, May-August 1974	Box 1
New River Free Press, vol. 1, no. 10-12 and vol. 2, no. 1, September-December 1974	Box 1
New River Free Press, vol. 2, no. 2-5, January-April 1975	Box 1
New River Free Press, vol. 2, no. 6-8, May-July 1975	Box 1

General

No copy for August 1975

New River Free Press, vol. 2, no. 10-12 and vol. 3, no. 1, September-December 1975	Box 1
New River Free Press, vol. 3, no. 2-5, January-April 1976	Box 1
New River Free Press, May-August 1976	Box 1

General

Volume and number are no longer listed on the front page starting with the May 1976 issue.

New River Free Press, September-December 1976	Box 1
New River Free Press, January-April 1977	Box 1
New River Free Press, final issue, May 1977	Box 1
New River Free Press, duplicate issues	Box 1
