

Boston Artists Fight Gentrification, One SUV at a Time

by Con Chapman

BOSTON. The last nail has been hammered in Boston's "Big Dig", the largest public works project in American history, transforming a formerly dank urban corridor marred by an elevated highway into a greenspace featuring flowers, blue skies, and an influx of tourists and empty-nesters looking to enjoy a newly-revitalized city.



Rose Kennedy Greenway

"I'm dreading it," says Kati Rivers, a visual artist who has lived in the Fort Point Channel district downtown for the better part of a decade. "A bunch of fat suburbanites driving up rents and crowding creative people out of the little cafes and bistros that we've supported since, like forever."



Leather district loft

So Kati and some of her artistic friends in the Leather District and the Ladder District, two similar pocketbook neighborhoods favored by young people and artists because of their low rents and lively street life, have banded together to form an ad hoc group of "guerilla tour guides". Their mission? To give bad directions to the incoming hordes of tourists and suburbanites seeking to horn in on the urban energy that long-time residents have created, but won't be able to afford if their neighborhoods are "gentrified".

"That place is so crowded nobody goes there anymore except suburbanites."

A Saturday night finds Kati and her friend Dalton Patterson, a free-lance writer, patrolling the streets looking for clueless couples trying to find the latest hot restaurant they've read about in *Boston*, the glossy city magazine for those who don't live in the city.



"We're here! We need two parking spaces for our SUV!"

"Excuse me," a man calls out as he rolls down the window of his Cadillac Escalade. "We're trying to find *Endive*-it's supposed to be around here somewhere."

"Hmm," Kati says, with a knowing look at Dalton. "What's the best way to get these people to the restaurant on time?"



Zakim-Bunker Hill Bridge

As she stalls for time, Dalton scans the windshield for some hint of where the two couples in the car have come from. He spots a sticker that says "Municipal Waste Permit - Town of Wellesley", a suburb fifteen miles to the west.

"I know," he interjects. "You want to get on 93 North, so take a left here, get on Atlantic Avenue, and follow the signs to the Zakim-Bunker Hill bridge," which leads cars out of town to suburbs on the North Shore.

"Are you sure about that? It's supposed to be in the Leather District," the man says.

"Well, the Leather District actually extends north all the way to Peabody," Dalton says.

"Yes," Kati adds. "They call their sports teams the Tanners, it's so-leathery up there."



Mr. Peanut takes a break in Peabody, Mass.

The man seems dubious, but his GPS isn't working due to a jamming device that Dalton keeps in his jacket pocket.

"Okay, well--thanks very much," the woman in the passenger seat says. "You'd better do what they say, honey," she says to the driver. "You're always getting us lost."

As the SUV drives away, Kati and Dalton exchange high-fives. "Making our neighborhood a better place," Kati says, and Dalton finishes her sentence for her.

"One Cadillac Escalade at a time."

