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It takes a Little Village

Iowa City monthly magazine nears 10 years

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Little Village publisher Matt Steele and special events coordinator Lisa Stark host a Little Village podcast Wednesday at Public Space One in Iowa City's Jefferson Building. The Chicago-based band Santah was the show's guest. / Press-Citizen / Benjamin Roberts

Written by **B.A. Morelli**
Iowa City Press-Citizen

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When Matt Steele took over the torch as publisher and managing editor of Little Village magazine last summer, he inherited a few unpaid invoices and enough cash to print the magazine for a couple of months.

There were no major negotiations or teams of lawyers, just a good faith agreement to get it printed each month and continue its mission to provide an alternate look at Iowa City. At the last minute, though, then-publisher Andrew Sherburne called and asked Steele for \$10.

"I asked what for, and he said, 'I just want to be able to say I sold it for twice what I bought it for,'" said Steele, 31.



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Little Village Publisher Matt Steele prepares before Little Village radio goes on-air at Public Space One in Iowa City's Jefferson Building on Tuesday, March 23, 2011. / Press-Citizen/Benjamin Roberts

That captures the life of the monthly, which published its 100th issue in February and is approaching its 10-year anniversary in July. Probably not unlike alternative staples in other communities, different champions have stepped up over the years to keep the brand afloat, never with visions of riches, but rather as a labor of love to fill a niche.

"We aren't getting rich off of it. Basically everyone involved is doing it because they feel it is important to have a different

perspective than the other media we have in town," said Kent Williams, 53, the arts editor, and one of the original contributing writers.

For Steele and Williams, like most of the other writers and editors, Little Village is a part-time affair.

The magazine emerged after a former weekly called The Icon folded. Several Icon contributors helped launch Little Village in July 2001. The name Little Village was dubbed by musician David Zollo after a song by bluesman Sonny Boy Williamson, Steele said.

Little Village is devoted primarily to local culture through music and arts, but also delves into politics, food and news of the day. As a monthly, they don't see themselves in competition with other media outlets, yet they have a devoted following.

The magazine has a circulation of 15,000 and is available for free at 200 locations in the Iowa City area.

"The ultimate dream of the magazine is to be a reflection of Iowa City," Steele said.

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