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The DNC In The CLT

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Media At the DNC, Part II: The Garden

The new media spot at Packard Place is, incredibly, as envisioned: Pretty damn cool

BY GREG LACOUR

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Greg Lacour

The PPL newsroom, on the fourth floor of Packard Place. By golly, those crazy kids pulled it off.

I'm seated at a table on the fourth floor of Packard Place on Church Street, home to **The PPL**, the much-anticipated alternative media hub set up for the DNC. It's pouring outside. In here, *mirabile dictu*, the WiFi works. Behind me, I hear this:

"Instagram. Insta-motherfucking-gram."

It's just one of those things you don't hear every day. This marriage of social media app and gutter profanity emerges from the filthy but tech-savvy mouth of a 20-something guy named Adam. He works for a startup company called Bright Box, which sells a massive smartphone recharging station for use in professional settings. Adam does not know how he got a media pass, but here he is, chillin' and Instagramming, Insta-motherfucking-gramming. "I'm just using Instagram too much. I'm, like, Instagramming everything," he says. "I told myself I wouldn't, but I'm doing it anyway. I've become everything I hate. It's just so much *fun*."

And here's the deal: He's welcome here. Of course he is. This is what the founders of The PPL had in mind from the outset. I've **written about them before** for this magazine. Folks have **written about them** for other publications. It's a great story, splicing perfectly all the prevailing narratives about the creative class, the rise of new media, the ubiquity of blogging, the citizen journalism barbarians/wunderkinds at the gate of *something*; plus, it's a homegrown Charlotte thing, put together by three youthful social media consultants: Desiree Kane, Justin Ruckman and Matthew Tyndall.

I'm still on the fourth floor as I write this. It's humming. Justin's doing a TV interview. Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now!*, who's led a discussion already and will host shows from here at 8 a.m. tomorrow, Wednesday and Thursday, is across the room with her staff, conferencing. Arianna Huffington is scheduled to moderate a panel on female entrepreneurship. The PPL's executive director, Bruce Clark, a seasoned political consultant at 32, is laughing with guests and handing out business cards. Earlier, a political comedian named Tone-X had stood on a table and urged the masses to catch his show on the main stage downstairs, improvising jokes as he went. Plenty of energy here. This ain't **the scene at the Convention Center**.

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About This Blog



The **DNC In The CLT** covers all things surrounding the 2012 Democratic National Convention. Want to know who the real power players are? Where the best parties are? What the national media is saying? Hang with us, and we'll share the scoop.



The **DNC In The CLT** is written and compiled mostly by **Jarvis Holliday**, a freelance journalist who has lived in and covered Charlotte since 2005. He's interviewed CEOs, politicians, university presidents, professional athletes, entertainers, and more. Follow him on Twitter @HollidayInk. Other *Charlotte*

magazine staffers will make periodic contributions as the convention unfolds.

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"We are all really tired, but the energy of all this just keeps us going," Desiree tells me this afternoon. "We're fueled by sheer adrenaline and awesome. Also, cookies." Justin trudges up. He's a cherubic young man with a voice coarsened by lack of sleep. He's clearly running on generator power. "Justin's face right now," Desiree says, "is the face of how we all feel."

Yet, Justin says, what they have — more than 400 credentialed bloggers, video producers and other media, plus an events stage, a Ustream channel, free WiFi, a massive newsroom, plus free coffee and cookies; what more could you want? — is essentially what they were seeking all along.

"Our goal from the beginning has been to take what's gone before at these co-working spaces for bloggers and other new media and each time make it better and better and better," he says. "This time, everyone involved — since we all had experience with TEDx events and other creative endeavors that really stressed having your act together — was really set on having top-notch production values and access for bloggers and new media." Desiree breaks in, adding that about 40 percent of the media that The PPL credentialed also have free reserved space at the Convention Center "but decided they'd rather hang out with the cool Internet kids."

One cool Internet kid who flew in all the way from Vancouver is Kris Krüg, a 35-year-old self-described "designer, writer, photographer and webmonkey" who's been a fixture at these new media spaces since 2006, when he helped set up an early social media hub at the Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy. He's the perfect embodiment of the unpigeonholable new media dude, with his unruly, reddish-brown Antietam beard and huge stones embedded in each earlobe; he's here to produce online content for PBS.

"This kind of media center comes from a line of similar spaces that sprang up starting around '06 in Torino: from the Beijing Olympics in '08 to what I think was the real turning point, the climate change conference in Copenhagen in '09," Krüg says. "Things before Copenhagen were a lot more organic, it seemed: 'Oh, hey, I'm in Beijing for the Olympics, you're in Beijing for the Olympics, let's set up in this coffee shop and kind of make it our base for a week.' Starting in '09, people began realizing the opportunity to get a lot bigger and more influential with some organization."

He co-founded the W2 Culture + Media House, a PPL-like co-working space for new media, for the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010. It outlived the Olympics and exists still **as an arts and cultural center**. It seems likely that The PPL will outlast the DNC. "All kinds of interesting shit happens," Krüg says, "when you get people together like this."

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