

Salemia's Twitter Frenzy

In 2011 Salemia touched off a craze among Salem's Twittersphere. It began when filmmaker Mike Perron tweeted, "Salemia. Opening scene: five hipsters fighting over a half smoked cigarette outside Chelsea's place..."

For those who aren't tuned in to all things social networking'ish, on Twitter you share thoughts in 140 characters or less, a tweet. This generates a sort of communal consciousness via searchable hashtags like #Salemia and mutual Twitter account follows.

Perron's creative notion, soon realized in a well-received "Salemia" video, was to imagine a local version of the Independent Film Channel's Portlandia, which pokes fun at our oh-so-cool neighbor to the north.

Opening episode's classic line: "Portland is the city where young people go to retire."

Keep Portland Weird is a rallying cry for residents who want to preserve their city's uniqueness. Since I feel a need to Strange Up Salem, my guess was that when other Twitter'ers started sharing their own "Salemia" scene ideas, boring would be a more common theme than bizarre.

I was right. Here's some favorites from the first wave of #Salemia tweets.

- Woman choosing the right pajamas for going to Winco. At 12:30 in the afternoon.
- Visitors mistakenly believe zombie apocalypse has hit the town because shops close and streets empty before dark.
- Man with Decemberists ringtone receives call downtown after 6 p.m. Arrested for noise violation.
- County also changes motto from "Where Good Things Happen..." to "Where Good Straight Things Happen..."
- The Salem Airport returns non-stop shuttle service to PDX.

- New York Times feature 36 Hours in Salem only features must-hit pawn shops.
- La Capitale opens up and Salemites get confused when the word French is used to describe it, and it isn't followed by fries.
- National Guard called out for crowd control after opening of 148th Subway Restaurant in Salem creates frenzied joy among locals.
- Stylish NY woman in high heels and designer miniskirt arrested in downtown Salem for streetwalking. Also, breaking blue jean law.

The last two tweets came from me, so it's no wonder I like them.

Humor is a terrific window for opening up a view of someone's or something's essence. Often what makes us laugh is an exaggerated insight that makes us think, "over the top, yet so true."

The Salemia Twitter frenzy pointed out a lot that is strange about our city. Problem is, much of that strangeness isn't adorable. It's irritating, depressing, a downer.

What we've got to do is embrace, foster, and magnify the uniquely creatively quirky side of Salem. Our city never will be as weird as Portland or Eugene. And that's fine.

After all, our comparative normalcy can be honored as the stabilizing force between two Weird Poles, keeping the cosmic energy of the Willamette Valley I-5 corridor in balance.

Salem just needs to be all the strange that it can be. We can turn up the Wow! dial of our CityVision monitor a lot further without running the risk of getting an over-bizarre picture.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com