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Citywide scavenger hunt highlighting Boston's hidden history kicks off: 'See the city with fresh eyes'

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Know Boston like the back of your hand? That could pay off starting this week, as civic action non-profit Elevate Cities launches a city-wide scavenger hunt designed to test, and reward, Boston pride and historical knowledge.

Known as #FindTheGood Boston, the free three-week hunt begins at noon on Friday, offering players more than $15,000 in prizes that can be redeemed by completing challenges on a mad-dash around 100 of The Hub's best-known landmarks and historical gems.

The team that racks up the most points will nominate a Boston nonprofit of their choice to receive a $10,000 grant when the game ends on Nov. 13, or World Kindness Day, Elevate Cities CEO Kim Coupounas said in an interview Thursday.

"The idea is really simple, to get people out of their routines and to see the city with fresh eyes," said Coupounas, whose organization was founded last year investment advisory firm founder and philanthropist Joe Deitch, a native of Dorchester.

"Boston has so much to be proud of, and I can't think of a better way to celebrate my hometown than by bringing people together to discover it, one neighborhood at a time," Deitch said in a statement.

For city officials, who collaborated on the event, the game is a way of "breathing additional life," into the historic markers initiative, according to Alexander Meadow, deputy director of partnerships for Mayor Michelle Wu, which aims at highlighting underserved histories with 25 new plaques across the city this summer.

"Historic markers are incredible, but they're only as valuable as the number of people that visit them," Meadow said. "The scavenger hunt ... to incentivize some of that learning is really beneficial."

The nonprofit first tried their charity scavenger hunt concept last year in Miami, using a different formula where organizers deposited $500 cash in locations around the city and sent hundreds of players running for it with a series of "cryptic online clues," according to a press release.

When the cash was found, the player would present a local nonprofit with an additional $1,000 donation paid for by Elevate Cities in order to claim their reward, organizers said.

But after hosting a few of these single day cash-drop events, including in Boston last August, Coupounas said the non-profit is shifting its focus and scope for its next hunt to bring together a whole city.

“We wanted to reach more people,” she said, adding that the new event, which pits teams of up to six players against each other using the FindTheGood website, will have even more local ties.

Rather than cash, rewards for the hunt will include complimentary dinners at local restaurants, tickets to the zoo, or gift cards to vintage stores around the city, said Michael Farber, CEO of Breakout, an experience development firm which designed the hunt. The first reward is unlocked at 50 points, he said, and every 50 points after that something new is unlocked until players reach 500 points.

Clues will be peppered across 12 of Boston’s 23 neighborhoods, Farber said, though the majority of the game will take place in Deitch’s old neighborhood of Dorchester as well as Roxbury.

The 20 highest-scoring challenges ask players to locate or interact with various new historic markers which the city installed for its 250th anniversary this summer, Farber said, with another 60 easier challenges placed within a one block radius of those more high-value clues, aiming to highlighting additional local gems like community murals or cherished small businesses.

The last 20 challenges, which include assignments like spotlighting something good in your community, can be completed anytime, even from home for those who can't get outside to experience the game, Coupounas said. The hunt is points rather than time based, she added, meaning players can explore neighborhoods at their own leisure during the weeks of competition.

"The clues are meant to be challenging enough that you're walking around figuring things out … but the fun thing about it is going around to a lot of these neighborhoods," said Farber.

From a Hyde Park house where women voted in a local election 50 years before the 19th Amendment, to a workshop in Jamaica Plain where the first stitched baseball for mass production was created, Meadow said many of these sites are buried deep in residential areas where you may not find them unless you going searching for a piece of history.

"You would probably have to be working for the city behind the scenes to know where [the markers] all are," added Farber, who along with other members of his New York-based firm spent months pounding pavement throughout Boston with local historians and stakeholders to prep the game. "We want people to have fun being tourists in their own city."