



127 N. Wyman St.
PO Box 4331
Rockford, IL 61110
P: 815-964-6221
F: 815-963-8716
Toll Free: 800-724-8431
Email: info@riverdistrict.com
www.RiverDistrict.com

NEWS *Release*

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Contact: Kim Wheeler Johnsen
Executive Director, River District Association
Phone: 815-964-6221; Cell: 815-289-1102

Heart of Rockford Award Recipients Announced

Rockford, IL – River District Association is pleased to announce the recipients of the **2009 Heart of Rockford Awards**. The winners were announced at a dinner and ceremony on Thursday, August 6, 2009 held at the American Lombardi Society (Lombardi Club), 209 Olive St. The event included a social hour with entertainment by Frank Calvagna & Opan Jii from 5 – 6 p.m and following the dinner. The program and dinner started at 6 p.m. Entertainment was sponsored by theFRANAGroup. Media Sponsors: WTVO/FOX39/MyNetworkTV.

This was the 23rd annual event that recognizes personal and financial investment in the heart of the City of Rockford, Illinois. Since 1987 198 awards have been handed out which represents millions of dollars of investment in downtown Rockford. Every year there are between 20 and 30 nominees and even more projects that could have been nominated and weren't. This represents even more investment in the community.

"The awards program is important because it recognizes and rewards individuals and businesses that make an investment. It heightens awareness of what is happening downtown and validates the blood, sweat, and tears that have gone into creating a new business, doing a renovation, producing an event, and preserving community assets," said Kim Wheeler Johnsen, Executive Director of River District Association. She also added, "the Heart of Rockford Awards is an event that inspires others and instills courage to those who have a vision to pursue their own dreams."

Award Categories, Sponsors, Recipients

New Business - Sponsored by: Oliver, Close, Worden, Winkler & Greenwald LLC

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: Noah's Ark Animal Hospital

In 2008 Noah's Ark Animal Sanctuary at 111 N. First St. expanded their mission with the opening of a new business, Noah's Ark Animal Hospital, 125 S. Madison St. They invested thousands of dollars to open the veterinarian hospital and did renovations to the existing building. Services include small animal medicine and surgery, ultrasound, veterinary massage, physical rehabilitation, and small animal reproduction.

Commitment by a Business

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: Adams Letter Services and Magnum Creative

Scott Saporiti devotes countless hours to the pursuit of a better city, a better River District, and a better downtown. He actively supports causes and organizations that support education, arts, culture, environment, and health in our city. And he also brings his businesses, Magnum Creative and Adams Letter Services, into many of his efforts to help. Some of the organizations and efforts he has been involved in are Rockford Art Museum, Rockford Area Arts Council, Year of Innovation, No Idle Zone, Rockford Public Schools, Rockford (Youth) Chess Federation, Alzheimer's Unforgettable Art, and River District Association. It's hard to separate Scott from his two businesses.

Commitment by an Individual

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: George "Doc" Slafkosky and Jerry Kortman

George "Doc" Slafkosky and Jerry Kortman have been committed to downtown for 23 years. At a time when downtown more closely resembled a ghost town Doc and Jerry became stalwarts for downtown. Both firmly believe in the preservation and re—use of downtown's commercial and residential buildings which is seen in their purchase and renovation of their own building designed by renowned local architect, Jesse Barloga, at 107 N. Main St. They helped in the effort to save the former Paragon building, which

resulted in the entire block being named a historic landmark. And they are not afraid to voice their opinion on projects that do not further revitalization efforts for the area. They have worked with other businesses and organizations to make positive changes for downtown over the years and have supported the arts downtown on an ongoing basis.

Commercial Renovation/New Construction

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: GrahamSpencer – Office Building Remodeling

GrahamSpencer was founded in 1987. In 2008 they purchased the mid-century International Style building at 333 Locust. The firm retained the services of SaavedraGehlhausen Architects to help it envision and produce a design that would make the most of the building's available square footage, while remaining true to its International roots. The building had been subdivided into many very small offices over the years and was dark and oppressive. GrahamSpencer wanted to open up the space, let in the light, and provide a welcoming place in which to do creative work. GrahamSpencer is an award-winning strategic communications firm with offices in Rockford and Ridgway, Colorado. The company provides research, brand strategy, graphic design, web development, advertising, public relations, event management, media placement and other marketing services.

Residential Renovation/New Construction

Sponsored by: B & B Properties

TWO AWARD RECIPIENTS:

Bliss Building Loft Renovation

The Bliss building is an original Rockford live-work space. Hans Rupert and Amy Young have completed a stunning transformation which returns the Bliss to its roots as a live-work space. They have a growing family with two young children and a professional photo studio, *noir*, occupying the sleek, stylish, Nordic-Modern interior. Some of the words used to describe the project include inspired décor, abundant daylight, cool shade, distinguished surface, superior performance, serenity now, slide-ways, stack and spin, innovative design, fine lines, and there's even room for child's play. Hans and Amy are proud to return this building to its well-deserved place on Rockford's historical and cultural map. Their live-work renovation re-engages the Bliss building's legacy as a cultural asset to the Rockford community.

Lantow Lofts

Lantow Lofts are probably the "greenest" residential units in the Northern Illinois/Southern Wisconsin area. The lofts boast 12 foot ceilings, expansive 8 foot tall windows and highest quality doors and wood trim. Many units have fireplaces, exposed brick walls, beamed ceilings and lots of natural light. Ten solar panels pre-heat water so effectively that the in-line water heaters are usually unneeded throughout most of the year. Other amenities include extreme sound and thermal insulation, 5,000 sq. ft. garden deck, garage, remote, entry intercoms, Katie's Cup restaurant on the first floor, and meeting and storage space.

Festival/Event

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: Light the Night (Leukemia & Lymphoma Society)

Since 2003, *Light the Night* has brought over a thousand people to the River District each year to participate in the Walk and related activities to raise money and awareness to fight leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma. *Light the Night* is a fun event for persons of all ages. Participants carry balloons along the walk and enjoy food and live entertainment. *Light the Night* is a nationwide walk to celebrate and commemorate the lives touched by cancer. The event begins with a party in Davis Park. The Walk route follows the Rock River north to Beattie Park and returns to Davis Park for live entertainment and celebration.

Historic Preservation

Sponsored by Community Foundation of Northern Illinois

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: The Emerson House by Mendelssohn PAC

The historic 1912 home at 420 N. Main St. was purchased by Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center in 2005 and renovations were completed in 2008 with care to restore the historic integrity of the building. It was the first location for Keith Country Day School, which opened in their basement in 1916. A chalkboard and child sized hooks can still be seen in the lower level. Kurt and Sarah Bell, specialists in historic home renovation have done a superb job in bringing the home back to life, updating and adding modern amenities while ensuring the integrity of the original design, décor and structure. With its unique architecture, 7 grand fireplaces, and stunning windows, the Emerson House is a beautiful venue for concerts and gallery events.

Youth Service Award

This was a special award presented that was created by the Heart of Rockford Awards Jury because they wanted to reward and recognize a young person who worked on a special project that educated young people about historic preservation while at the same time providing an experience in leadership and project coordination.

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: Brian Peterson

In 2008, eighty five of the two hundred chairs historic chairs in the balcony were restored and reinstalled. These chairs are unique in their design: with a swivel pedestal they provide a fast exit in case of a fire or other emergency. These unique interior fixtures also have a place on each back to hang guests' wraps or hats. The chairs were removed, sanded and refinished to their original luster. The work on the chairs was done by a Boy Scout working towards his Eagle Award. This project furthered the scout's awareness of historic preservation issues while engaging future scouts and youth leaders in additional volunteer projects here at the site. Many features of the site require attention and Winnebago County is committed to preserving this site for future generations.

Best of Heart of Rockford Award

RECIPIENT OF AWARD: Garrison School Lofts

Garrison Elementary School was built in 1887 in the Queen Anne architectural style and is the oldest school building still standing in the city. After years of neglect the Morrissey family purchased the building and surrounding properties with the vision to make the area a unique integrated community which would serve as an attractive anchor and catalyst to stimulate renewed pride and investment in a broader surrounding area. A highly gratifying result has been the positive change in attitude by the neighbors. Initially unsure of the result and perhaps fearing the worst, they now see significant improvement in their own property values. Back inside the once-again gorgeous old school, hugely vaulted ceilings, expansive windows, spectacular lighting, stone countertops and window sills, exposed beams, open staircases, high tech, eco-friendly insulation, central air and heat (95+ efficiency), in-unit laundry, garage parking, and decks and patios give new meaning to the phrase, "back to school."

The mission of River District Association is to promote a growing, thriving, prosperous business and residential community in Rockford's downtown neighborhood, River District. Thank you to the 2009 Platinum Sponsor Partners: WTVO/FOX39/MyNetworkTV; Primary Sponsor Partner: LaMonica Beverages; Sponsor Partners: Hayes Beer Distributing Co., Morrissey Law Offices.