

Heritage Preservation Awards Recognize Key 2008 Achievements (Part I of II)

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National Historic Preservation Month was never a more fitting backdrop than at this year's 2008 Plano Heritage Preservation Awards, celebrated May 6, 2008. Now a Plano landmark, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Interurban Railway Museum in historic Downtown's Haggard Park was the site of the awards ceremony. Recognizing not only the 100 year centennial of the Texas Electric Railway, but the achievements of Plano preservation over the past year, Master of Ceremonies Jamie Schell provided his own touch of history as a fourth generation Planoite.

"I grew up on 18th Street next to Rice field and we used to ride bikes down to the creek to fish and wonder what that empty shell of a building was, standing here behind us," he said. "It was a mysterious place to a 10-year old and I think it was filled with old motors and junk back then. Who could ever imagine it would become the museum that it now is."



Fresh from a long walk through the Downtown Plano area, Keynote speaker Mr. F. Lawrence Oaks, Executive Director of the Texas Historical Commission lauded the efforts of Plano and the dedicated preservationists who both identify and protect our historical assets. "In Texas it's our natural and built landscapes we need to preserve to keep that special sense of who we are. The investments people made in our society in the past are our assets today and we develop strategies to preserve and manage them so we can enjoy these places and preserve the memories and people they represent. Keep up the good work, Plano."

Key among the recognitions of the day was the dedication of the **Johnnie J. Myers Research Center**, housed in the Interurban Museum. It was Mr. Myers who partnered with then Director of Parks and Recreation Danny Muzycka to initially look at restoration efforts for what is now the Museum. "My family moved to Plano in 1869, had a farm out by where Southfork Ranch now is, and rode a wagon into town to catch the first trains through here, then later rode the Interurban Rail. I got involved with Danny and we decided this old run-down eyesore of a building needed to be preserved."

Mr. Myers had a family friend who owned one of the original Interurban rail cars. "It was sitting down on his property in Waxahachie," said Mr. Myers. "Danny and I spent the entire day down there with him and at the end of the day we had the rail car. Our promise was that it would be fully restored to its original appearance and use. There would be no neon paint with flames going down the side!"

Mr. Myers spent the next two decades overseeing the restoration of Texas Electric Railway Post Office Car No. 360, placing it as item Number One in the Museum's artifact collection. It stands as a centerpiece of the Museum, being one of only a handful of surviving rail cars. Mr. Myers was also recognized for his expansion of Museum artifacts through the donation of literally hundreds of historical rail and Plano-related items. "I have more to go...I'm not done yet!" he said when accepting the honor.

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Joined by Plano Heritage Commission member Ms. Janice Cline, Mr. Oaks presented the following awards:

Certificate of Appreciation:

Plano Independent Social Studies

Department. PISD affiliates Donna Koch, Phyllis Stoup and Polly Schlosser were on hand to accept the certificate, recognizing the partnership between PISD and the City's preservation efforts. The three were integral in integrating heritage education into the PISD curriculum, including field trips to the Interurban Railway Station and development of educational materials such as a traveling trunk, telling the story of local pioneers.



Polly Schlosser, Phyllis Stoup, Donna Koch



Janice Cline, F. Lawrence Oaks, Kelly Wesner, Gabe Whatley

The Fillmore Pub Project. Gabe Whatley and Kelly Wesner were on hand to be recognized for their work with William Cravens for supporting Downtown economic development efforts through the restoration and conversion of the building that is now a new visual anchor for the Downtown district.



Excellence in Preservation Award:

Clint Haggard and Daron Tapscott stepped forward to accept recognition for their preservation of the Aldridge House, 1615 Avenue H. One of the few remaining examples of early 20th century (1907) architecture left in Plano, the four-square style home belonged to Charles Aldridge, an important landowner, cotton buyer and school board member. Mr. Schell advised several persons had looked at purchasing and restoring the Aldridge House over the years but turned away, daunted by the condition of the house and the scope of the project. Mr. Haggard, whose family ties to Plano date back to the 1850's, stated he and Mr. Tapscott share a passion for historic preservation and look to do much more in the community.



Daron Tapscott, Janice Cline, F. Lawrence Oaks, Clint Haggard

Additionally, two persons, Ms. Sheila Huckaby and Ms. Lolisa Laenger, were inducted into the Plano Preservation Hall of Fame. This prestigious honor will be covered in Part II of this article.