



615 East Capitol Avenue
P.O. Box 165023 Little Rock,
Arkansas 72216
(501) 371-0075 • fax (501) 374-8142

Media Advisory

Contact:
Rhea Roberts
501.371.0075
rroberts@quapaw.com

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Quapaw Quarter Association Presents Greater Little Rock Preservation Awards

On **Thursday, November 18**, the Quapaw Quarter Association presented the 2010 Greater Little Rock Preservation Awards at its annual membership meeting. The meeting was held at **Curran Hall, 615 East Capitol Avenue in Little Rock**, approximately 70 people attended. Daniel Carey, President and CEO of Historic Savannah Foundation was the guest speaker.

This year, six **Awards of Merit** were given to recognize people and projects from around Little Rock and North Little Rock. This year's award recipients are the eStem Public Charter Schools, Jennifer Carman, New Argenta Fund LLC, Lakresha Diaz and the Board of Directors of Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries, Anita Davis, and David and Mary Ann Rawls.

Awards of Merit

Since 1982, the Quapaw Quarter Association has presented more than eighty (80) Awards of Merit to recognize a very wide array of preservation accomplishments throughout Greater Little Rock's historic neighborhoods. Individuals, businesses, and organizations have been honored for rehabilitating buildings and otherwise furthering the cause of preservation in the Quapaw Quarter, Hillcrest, and Argenta.

eStem Public Charter Schools

At the corner of 3rd and Louisiana Streets in downtown Little Rock, there's a new and vibrant hub of activity that has nothing to do with offices or restaurants or shops. eStem Public Charter Schools – an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school – opened in the fall of 2008 in the 100-year-old Arkansas Gazette Building, which was thoroughly and beautifully rehabilitated for this new use. Opening initially with grades K through 9, eStem needed more space to allow the high school to grow through grade 12. So, another important historic structure – the 1925 Federal Reserve Building just across the street – was rehabilitated and opened this fall as the eStem High School. The eStem project is so unique and well done that it caught the attention of

the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has featured the project on its website, saying: “Downtown Little Rock has a whole new category of weekday commuters: K-12 students.”

Needless to say, lots of different people – building owners, architects and builders, school administrators and teachers, parents, and students – were needed to make this large and complicated project successful. We can’t mention everyone who played a role, but we have with us tonight representatives of the buildings’ owners, the architectural firm that designed the rehab of both buildings, and the nonprofit that operates the schools.

Lynn Hamilton represents the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, which owns the Gazette Building. John French is here – all the way from Arkadelphia – representing Southern Bancorp CDC, owner of the old Federal Reserve Building.

John Greer of WER Architects/Planners was the project architect for the rehab of both buildings.

John Bacon is CEO of eStem Public Charter Schools, the nonprofit charter school management organization that operates the eStem schools.

Thank you all for a wonderful project that has greatly enhanced downtown Little Rock.

Jennifer Carman

Jennifer Carman probably could give all of us some tips on rehabbing and maintaining historic houses. Since buying an American Foursquare at 2315 Summit Street in 2004, she has repaired plaster, refinished floors, restored windows, installed tile, and sanded and painted the entire exterior of the two-story house, learning how to do many of these old-house tasks simply by reading books. Granted, her background in art restoration gave her a head start. Plus, her dad helped with carpentry, and she hired some licensed experts for things like wiring, plumbing, and roofing. But to a remarkable extent, she has single-handedly resurrected this wonderful old house.

And she’s not stopping at just this one house. She’s also working to revitalize the entire 2300 block of Summit Street, which is a very special block. Located in the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District, the block is the only one in Little Rock – and perhaps in the state – that is comprised exclusively of American Foursquares. Jennifer successfully nominated the block to the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas’s 2010 list of Most Endangered Historic Places, and with the help of this listing, she convinced the Little Rock City Board to halt the planned demolition of one of the houses in the block. She subsequently found a buyer for that house as well as two others and now is helping the new owners with their rehab projects.

The Quapaw Quarter’s historic neighborhoods have been reclaimed house by house, block by block – and Jennifer Carman is a great example of why and how that strategy works.

New Argenta Fund LLC

Through various partnerships, John Gaudin, has been involved in many of the projects, new construction as well as rehabilitation, that are bringing life back to Main Street in downtown

North Little Rock, also known as Argenta. But tonight we want to focus on the rehabilitation of two historic buildings, the McPherson Building at 411 Main Street and the Stacy Building at 521 Main Street, both in the Argenta Historic District. The buildings have been rehabilitated by John, Harold Tennenbaum, and Greg Nabholz, comprising the New Argenta Fund LLC.

The Stacy Building, dating from the late 1940s, originally housed Stacy's Finer Foods, a grocery. Sixty years later, it's a grocery again, the Argenta Market, which is making high-quality, Arkansas-grown foods easily accessible to those who live in or near Argenta and, on the other side of the river, in downtown Little Rock. The building's rehabilitation was aided by the use of both the federal and Arkansas state investment tax credits for historic rehab.

Tax credits also helped the New Argenta Fund bring the McPherson Building back to life. Built in 1927 as a furniture store, this building has found a new use as the Starving Artist Café.

Both of these buildings are important anchors for the continued revitalization of Main Street in Argenta, and it is our pleasure to recognize the New Argenta Fund LLC.

John Gaudin, Greg Nabholz and Harold Tennenbaum are here to accept the award.

Lakresha Diaz, Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries, B'nai Israel Cemetery, Agudath Achim Cemetery
Many Little Rock residents probably have no idea that there are seven historic cemeteries just east of I-30, near downtown Little Rock. But a group of individuals and organizations has been working very hard over the past couple of years to bring these cemeteries and their fascinating histories to the attention of the general public.

The cemeteries – Oakland, Fraternal, National, two known as “Confederate,” and two Jewish cemeteries – border the southern edge of the Hanger Hill neighborhood. Hanger Hill residents, along with cemetery board members and volunteers, were instrumental in initiating and supporting work that led to two great projects. First, the cemeteries were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in April of this year. Second, an innovative cell phone tour of the cemeteries was unveiled in September.

Although she is quick to point out that she's had lots of help, Hanger Hill resident Lakresha Diaz has played a particularly important role in both of these projects. Lakresha expects to graduate this spring from UALR with a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts with focuses in history, nonprofit management, and fine arts. As part of her course work, she was able to arrange internships that allowed her to devote a great deal of time to the National Register nomination, including doing much of the necessary research and writing. The project, however, originally was initiated by former Hanger Hill residents Scott Shepard and the late Randy Jeffery, along with the boards of Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries and the Jewish cemeteries.

With funding from the Arkansas Humanities Council, Lakresha also led the project that created the cell phone tour of the cemeteries – and what a great way to convey information about these historic places. At 82 different points throughout the cemeteries, visitors may dial up information about the cemeteries and their “residents.” Particular assistance with the Jewish cemeteries was provided by Carolyn LeMaster, Jim Pfeifer, and Michael Margolis. And, some 83

descendants, community leaders, and city officials donated their time to the project by recording the tour stops.

We are very pleased to present this Award of Merit to Lakresha Diaz and the boards of Oakland-Fraternal Cemeteries, B'nai Israel Cemetery, and Agudath Achim Cemetery.

Anita Davis

It's an unlikely place for a garden: the corner of a busy downtown intersection, on what once was the site of a Captain D's fast-food restaurant. But there it is – the Bernice Garden on South Main Street in Little Rock – described by its creator, Anita Davis, as a “public park on private land.”

Low-maintenance plantings – crepe myrtles, water oaks, bamboo, tall grasses, lavender, and wildflowers – mingle with sculptures by Arkansas artists, reclaimed telephone poles, and a fabric canopy for some shade. In collaboration with Ecological Design Group, Inc., the garden was designed to celebrate the community, and it plays host to community events in an effort to foster community interaction and a sense of pride in the neighborhood.

Anita Davis is an artist herself and a collector of vintage handbags – some of which have been exhibited at the Historic Arkansas Museum. In addition to the Bernice Garden, she owns the two buildings on Main Street immediately south of the garden as well as the old Sweden Crème drive-in, now sporting a new “green” roof.

Anita has made a very significant contribution to the revitalization of South Main Street, and we are happy to recognize her with this Award of Merit.

David and Mary Ann Rawls

Since purchasing the Charles L. Thompson-designed Keatts House at 2216 Main Street in 1999, David and Mary Ann Rawls literally have rehabilitated it from top to bottom – or, more accurately, from bottom to top, starting with foundation work that was needed. And, much like Jennifer Carman, they have done an incredible amount of the work themselves, even tackling the box gutters. As anyone who owns a historic house with box gutters knows, the gutters generally were not adequately maintained over the years, causing lots of rot – and putting them back into working order is not for the faint of heart. The Rawlses did it themselves. Following instructions they found on the Internet, they relined the gutters with copper. It took between two and three years, but they did it. And, as they worked up there on and around the eaves, they also evicted a large colony of bats from the attic. Clearly, “little” projects like refinishing woodwork would be a snap for these folks.

Why did they do it? Well, they “fell in love with” the house, and they also enjoy fixing things up. Built between 1904 and 1906, the house is a good example of Charles L. Thompson's work – “understated but solid,” as David puts it – and it clearly gave the Rawlses lots of opportunity to fix things up. With most of the exterior work on the house behind them, now they are building a new but architecturally compatible garage which was designed by John Jarrard.

We are delighted to present an Award of Merit to David and Mary Ann Rawls as a way of saying “thank you” for doing such a good job of rehabilitating this wonderful house.

Tom Wilkes Award

In 2000, the Quapaw Quarter Association Board of Directors created an award to honor outstanding board service. It's called the Tom Wilkes Award, in memory of the Quapaw Quarter realtor and developer who for some 30 years was active in the QQA. Tom served on the QQA board in the 1970s and again in the 1980s and 1990s. He was president of the board in 1991.

The award is not presented annually. Rather, it is given only when the QQA board believes one of its members deserves special recognition. Since 2000, the award has been given just three times. Tonight will be the fourth.

Dana Nixon has been a member of the QQA board since 2004, and for the past two years she has served as president. During her tenure, she has been instrumental in reviving both the Spring Tour and the Holiday Potpourri. This year's Spring Tour was the most successful in 10 or so years. And, when I say she was "instrumental in reviving" these events, I don't mean she simply helped plan them. She was totally "hands-on." She talked homeowners into opening their houses; she solicited sponsorships, donations of food items, silent auction items; and . . . she cooked.

Dana also has worked diligently on bringing back the Quapaw Quarter Chronicle – which was defunct for several years – and doing so in a 21st century electronic format. The e-Chronicle goes out quarterly to a growing list of supporters.

But perhaps Dana's most lasting legacy will be the article about the history of the Quapaw Quarter Association that she wrote last year for the *Pulaski County Historical Review*. Businesses and organizations pay good money to have their histories written; Dana did it for free and did it well. And now the QQA will forever have a comprehensive history of how the organization began and of its accomplishments from 1968, when it was incorporated, to 2009.

For these and many other reasons, the Board of Directors of the Quapaw Quarter Association is pleased to present the 2010 Tom Wilkes Award to Dana Nixon.

Peg Smith Award

The Peg Smith Award has been given annually since 1980 to recognize "a Quapaw Quarter Association member whose volunteer work on QQA projects and programs has been particularly exemplary." It is named for its first recipient, Peg Newton Smith, who truly was an exemplary volunteer, not just for the Quapaw Quarter Association but also for many other organizations whose focus was Little Rock's or Arkansas's heritage. She was one of the incorporators of the Quapaw Quarter Association in 1968, she served on the QQA board for several years, and she remained an active supporter until her death in 2003.

Amber Jones

Much like Mrs. Smith, this year's recipient of the Peg Smith Award – Amber Jones – has done just about every volunteer job there is to do for the QQA, beginning in 2001, when she chaired the Holiday Potpourri at the Villa Marre. She has worked on every Spring Tour since 2001; she

served on the QQA board for seven years; and last spring, she revived the QQA Easter Egg Hunt. And, although this award is for volunteer work on QQA projects and programs, it's appropriate to note that she also has served on the board of the Downtown Neighborhood Association, is a member of Capitol Zoning's Mansion Area Advisory Committee, and is active in both the Quapaw Home and Garden Club and the MORE Group – all organizations that work on behalf of historic neighborhoods in downtown Little Rock. Last but not least, Amber and her husband, Scott, have rehabilitated two houses in the Governor's Mansion neighborhood: their first home on State Street and their current residence on Arch.

Amber unfortunately could not be with us this evening. She is the new executive director of Friends of Dreamland, and right now she's at the Governor's Mansion, where she's in charge of an event being held to raise money for the rehabilitation of the Dreamland Ballroom in Taborian Hall. We hope they're raising lots of money for this worthy project, and the Peg Smith Award will be delivered to Amber at the Governor's Mansion later this evening.

Jimmy Strawn Award

Like the Peg Smith Award, the Jimmy Strawn Award has been presented annually since 1980. It is considered the QQA's most prestigious award because it's given to "someone whose efforts on behalf of the preservation of Greater Little Rock's architectural heritage are an inspiration to the entire community." The list of recipients is a veritable "Who's Who" of preservation in Greater Little Rock.

The award is named for James W. Strawn, Jr. – better known as Jimmy – who in the mid-1960s saved the Villa Marre, which was considered the second "official" Quapaw Quarter restoration project when it was completed in 1966. He also was one of the incorporators of the Quapaw Quarter Association in 1968 and served on the QQA board into the early 1970s. In other words, he was a true preservation pioneer in Little Rock. He probably is most widely-remembered, however, for donating the Villa Marre to the Quapaw Quarter Association in 1980, a hugely generous gift which even today is helping to support the QQA's work through a fund that was established when the house was sold in 2002.

Randy Jeffery

This year, for the first time, the Jimmy Strawn Award is being presented posthumously. The recipient, Randy Jeffery, passed away unexpectedly in March, which was a very sad surprise for his friends and colleagues in the preservation field. At the time of his death, Randy was director of the Capitol Zoning District Commission, a position that was the culmination of a long career in preservation.

Randy graduated cum laude from Lyon College in 1980. His degree was in history with an emphasis on historic preservation. After a slight detour into the world of interior design, Randy began working for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program in 1989. He was with the Preservation Program for ten years, holding several different positions in the Federal Programs division. In 2000, he left the Preservation Program to become Capitol Zoning's Deputy Director for Planning and Preservation. The next year, he moved up to the Director's position.

But Randy didn't just work in preservation, he lived preservation. His personal preservation projects included a bungalow in the Capitol View neighborhood; an unusual turn-of-the 20th century concrete-block house in the Hanger Hill neighborhood; and, finally, a Queen Anne-style house on Broadway that he and his partner, Scott Shepard, were rehabilitating at the time of Randy's death.

Scott has continued to work on that house, and now has moved into that house, which stands as a reminder to all of us of Randy's contributions to historic preservation in Greater Little Rock.

The Quapaw Quarter Association is Greater Little Rock's only nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of our architectural heritage through advocacy, marketing and education. For more information about awards or other programs, contact Rhea Roberts at rroberts@quapaw.com or 501.371.0075 or visit www.quapaw.com.

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