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Preserve R.I. and RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission honor 6 projects

November 12, 2009 - Rhode Island

A neighborhood advocacy project that led to statewide protection of properties in historic districts and the rehabilitations of a historic hotel, a mill building, a bath house, a city school, and a single-family home were honored at the Preservation Celebration. Together, Preserve Rhode Island and RI Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission are presenting the Rhody Awards to recognize people and projects that contribute to the preservation of Rhode Island's historic places. Preservation project awards will be presented to Greystone Lofts in North Providence and Hampton Inn Suites, Nathan Bishop Middle School, Fox Point Bath House, Joseph Cooke House, and the Gas Meter Initiative—all of Providence.

Two rehab projects completed in 2009 represent the positive impact of the Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit program on Rhode Island's economic development. Located on the Woonasquatucket River in North Providence, Greystone Mill was used to produce textiles from the 1910s to the 1970s. Beginning in 2005, Urban Smart Growth (USG) teamed up with the architects of Annino Inc. and the general contracting firm of Metric Construction to develop 150 residential units in the mill. The completed project, now known as Greystone Lofts, demonstrates the versatility and enduring quality of Rhode Island's historic mill buildings.

Downtown Providence's neo-federal Old Colony Bank building projected tradition and confidence when it opened on Weybosset Street in 1927. After a decade-long stint as St. Francis Chapel, the building became a 110-room Hampton Inn and Suites developed by First Bristol Corp. Newport Collaborative Architects and Stonestreet Construction preserved significant interior spaces and designed a compatible addition for a challenging downtown site. Both the Greystone Lofts and Hampton Inn and Suites will receive Historic Rehab Tax Credit Project Awards.

In summer 2008, when National Grid began to install gas meters on the façades of houses in the Broadway-Armory Historic District, activist Jessica Jennings and the West Broadway Neighborhood Association (WBNA) rallied to oppose this threat to the visual integrity of historic properties. The neighborhood outcry attracted the attention of local and state lawmakers. Councilman John Lombardi sponsored a city ordinance to protect property owners' rights and neighborhood character whenever a utility company undertakes a large project. State senator Paul Jabour and representative Steven Costantino drafted legislation to require natural gas companies to consult with homeowners about utility upgrades and new equipment. On houses in historic districts, the legislation prohibits the installation of gas meters or regulators on the exterior altogether unless the owner and local historic district commission consent. This initiative reached from the grass roots to City Hall and the State House to protect the visual character of Rhode Island's historic districts and offers a model to the nation. Together, Sen. Jabour, Rep. Costantino, Councilman Lombardi, Jennings, and the WBNA will receive the John Chafee Public Service Award for their work on the

Gas Meter Initiative.

The city of Providence is steward of many historic schools. Erected as emblems of civic responsibility, these buildings are workhorses that adapt to serve changing populations and needs. Two recent projects demonstrate the City's commitment to providing enduring, high-quality facilities; the two projects will receive Public Works Awards. In recent years, the abandoned Fox Point Bath House (1926) was a neighborhood nuisance. School and local leaders, the Providence School Department, Providence Historic District Commission, and councilmen David Segal and Seth Yurdin led the effort to turn a historic eyesore into a community resource. Studio JAED, The S/L/A/M Collaborative, and Gilbane Building Co. oversaw the exterior restoration and created separate spaces for school library and community gatherings inside. All cleaned up, the Fox Point Bath House adds sparkle to its neighborhood.

In 2007, Providence released a School Facility Master Plan that proposed to demolish and replace many city schools. With Nathan Bishop Middle School on the chopping block, Providence Preservation Society and Councilman Cliff Wood organized education activists and neighborhood residents to advocate for the building's reuse. Rehabilitated and reopened in September 2009, this neighborhood landmark features handsomely restored spaces, especially the auditorium and front entrance, as well as well-designed new ones. From classrooms to corridors, Nathan Bishop Middle School embodies how historic school buildings can make state-of-the-art, green learning environments.

Rhode Island has a wealth of historic houses and a growing number of homeowners who dedicate time, energy, and resources to their preservation. Providence's Joseph Cooke House (1819) is an ample Federal house that has undergone a series of changes over the years. These included relocation, Colonial Revival alterations, and division into apartments. In 2005, new owners Nick Oldenburg and Paul Carter engaged Clifford Renshaw Architects, Heritage Restoration Inc., and Site Specific LLC to restore the house inside and out. Refurbishing historic interiors and renewing the distinctive roof and trim details, the team returned this fine house to its position as one of Providence's most impressive Federal landmarks. The Joseph Cooke House will receive the Homeowner Award.

The Rhody Awards, chosen by Preserve Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission from nominations by the public, honor individuals, organizations, and projects for their contributions to the preservation of Rhode Island's historic resources. Awards are presented in the categories of Public Works, Stewardship, Projects, Homeowner Projects, and Historic Rehab Tax Credit Projects. PRI and RIHPHC also bestow four special honors, for Volunteer Service, Professional Leadership, Public Service, and Artisan.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540