Reinventing Downtown
2005 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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WITH
EMILY AXELROD, MCP; JAY FARSTEIN FAIA, PHD; AND RICHARD WENER, PHD
Every cycle of the Rudy Bruner Award brings new insight into the challenges facing American cities. 2005 was no exception. The 2005 Selection Committee identified many of the most critical themes in urban placemaking today, and chose to celebrate projects that address those themes in new and creative ways. And although our cities face significant issues, it is always tremendously exciting to see that creative city building is alive and well throughout the country.

The 2005 winners embody a renewed commitment to our downtowns. As a group these places have made their downtowns more lively, more beautiful, and more responsive to the needs of changing populations. The community builders, entrepreneurs and policy makers who created these places have contributed new visions of downtown at a variety of scales. Together the 2005 winners show how the public and private sectors can come together in new kinds of partnerships, and they demonstrate once again how the efforts of a single visionary individual can have transformative effects in the life of the city.

We at the Bruner Foundation are always amazed and delighted at the acuity of the Selection Committee observations and discussions, and of course we take great pride in presenting their choice of winners to you. The 2005 winners are a disparate group, united in embodying new visions of downtown, an impressive depth of commitment to...
their respective projects, and imagination in rethinking the concept of place. These winning places have found new ways to reinvigorate downtowns, re-energize neighborhoods, and create new destinations on neglected inner city blocks. Transit oriented development, art based placemaking, visionary leadership, and public/private partnerships are a few of the themes you will recognize in 2005. The reinvention of a first ring suburb is a new theme, and one that holds great promise for cities around the country.

**Portland Streetcar**, our Gold Medal Winner, was recognized because of the creative mix of public and private sector efforts that came together to transform entire quadrants of the city. This transit based project resulted in brownfield remediation, reclaimation of waterfront sites that had long been dormant, major new infill development, and the reuniting of sections of the city that had been virtually isolated. And all of this while improving air quality, reducing automobile traffic, and contributing to a safe and convenient downtown. Amazing.

The revitalization of **Downtown Silver Spring** demonstrates that first ring suburbs can indeed reinvent themselves to respond to changing demographics. No longer isolated bedroom communities, these suburbs are emerging as new and important secondary downtowns, connected to their major hubs by transit, and serving as corporate and business headquarters in their own right. By combining a range of affordable housing, major corporate and cultural headquarters, a new mix of retail uses, and a major new transit station, Silver Spring showed that an aging and under-used suburban center can become a vibrant 24/7 downtown for people of varied ages and incomes. An effective partnership between the city and the private sector affirmed the viability of reconfiguring and reimagining first ring suburbs which are now playing a more central role in the urban landscape.

**Fruitvale Transit Village** demonstrates that a committed community organization like Unity Council can have a major impact on its neighborhood. In a unique and unprecedented partnership with the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) the Unity Council effected land transactions that had never been done before. Their imaginative project unites a major BART station with a neighborhood retail center in downtown Oakland through a lively, colorful mixed use pedestrian space. The genius of the project was to combine services that serve the community with on site housing adjacent to a major transportation node, all connecting to the city’s major retail street and to BART. This was done with an outstanding architectural design, and it is helping to turn the neighborhood around.
In Paducah, KY an historic neighborhood next to the downtown was a center of drug dealing and widespread deterioration. Thanks to the imagination of artist residents and the planning department who worked together to create the **Artist Relocation Program**, Lower Town has now become a new arts district, with artists from all over the country choosing to relocate to historic homes where they can own their own galleries and living spaces. Through creative cooperation between the City of Paducah, a local bank, and artists living in the area, an old neighborhood next to the downtown has been reborn into a gallery district that will help to grow Paducah’s reputation as an art destination in the region, will continue the revitalization of the downtown, and will create a new level of creative capital for the city. Everyone wins.

**The Heidelberg Project** owes its success to its visionary artist founder Tyree Guyton who saw beauty in his childhood neighborhood, a place that had been abandoned and neglected for many years. By turning the discarded refuse of everyday life into new art forms, Guyton dignified the lives of his neighbors, and brought a new sense of identity to his neighborhood. Despite two cycles of demolition of his work by the City of Detroit, Guyton has made the Heidelberg Project into the third most visited destination in a troubled city, creating beauty, and bringing new energy into a formerly neglected and abandoned site. It is a privilege to recognize such a project, and
salute the vision of an individual who continues to make a tremendous difference in his city.

We share the excitement of the 2005 Selection Committee in recognizing these outstanding projects which have contributed to the vitality of five cities across the country. We know the thinking behind these projects has application in any number of places, and we hope that this publication will bring the ideas to each of you.

Simeon Bruner, *Founder*
Introduction: The 2005 Rudy Bruner Award

The Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence (RBA) is a national award for urban places that seeks to promote fresh and innovative thinking about cities and the urban built environment. Established in 1987, the Rudy Bruner Award celebrates urban places that are distinguished by quality design and by their social, economic, and contextual contributions to our nation’s cities. RBA winners often transcend the boundaries between architecture, urban design and planning, and are frequently developed with such vision and imagination that they transform urban problems into creative solutions to some of our cities’ most persistent problems.

The RBA is unique among national awards because of its emphasis on the complex process of placemaking as well as on the ways in which a place impacts its city or neighborhood. Understanding that every urban place grows out of complex layers of social, economic, aesthetic, and personal interactions, the RBA asks some important questions. What kinds of places make our cities better places to live and work? How do these places enrich the urban landscape? Do they contribute to the local economy? Do they create community pride? Do they build bridges among diverse populations or create beauty
where none existed before? And perhaps most important, what can we learn from the creative thinking inherent in RBA winners, and how can that learning be applied in cities across the country?

The criteria for submitting an application for the RBA are intentionally broad, encouraging applications from a wide variety of projects. In the last two award cycles, over 40 states have been represented. It is no surprise, therefore, that RBA winners are diverse. Many represent new models of urban placemaking that have successfully challenged conventional wisdom about what is possible. Most are products of hard-won collaborations among diverse groups of people, often with differing agendas. And all RBA winners have contributed to the vitality of the cities and neighborhoods in which they are located. By celebrating their success, the RBA highlights the intricate and challenging process of urban placemaking, emphasizing the complexity of the processes and values that produce significant urban places. Studying the varied stories of RBA winners, their histories, and their processes of development, we can discover creative ways to respond to some of our cities’ most intractable problems.

**THE SELECTION COMMITTEE**

A new Selection Committee is named for each award cycle. To ensure lively and informed discussion, every selection committee is made up of an inter-disciplinary group of urban experts. Selection Committees always include the mayor of a major city as well as architects, developers, community organizers, philanthropists, and financiers. As the Selection Committee members discuss the applications considering a wide variety of questions to include but not limited to:

- What kinds of places make neighborhoods and cities better places in which to live, work, and play?
- How did these places come into being?
- What visions powered their creation?
- How did these visions become a reality?
- What obstacles had to be overcome to make the place a reality?
- What makes these places important in their urban contexts?
- Do the winners offer new ideas that could be adapted in other cities?

In this way, the Selection Committee explores the dynamic nature of urban excellence and contributes to a broader understanding of the issues that are currently critical to the urban built environment.
THE 2005 SELECTION COMMITTEE

ANDREW ALTMAN, Executive Director, Anacostia Waterfront Corporation, Washington D.C.

LELAND COTT, FAIA, Founding Partner, Bruner/Cott and Associates, Cambridge, MA

MAURICE COX, Former Mayor, Charlottesville, VA; Assistant Professor, University of Virginia, Founding Partner, RBGC Architecture

CHRISTOPHER B. LEINBERGER, Land Use Strategist and Developer, Founding Partner, Arcadia Land Company; Chairman and CEO, Historic District Improvement Company, Albuquerque, NM

LOUISE MANUEL, Senior Project Manager, LISC, Los Angeles, CA

DEE WALSH, Executive Director, REACH Community Development Corp., Portland, OR

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Since the RBA seeks excellence in places where it may not be expected, eligibility criteria are intentionally few. First, the project must be a real place, not a plan. It must be sufficiently complete to demonstrate its excellence to a team of site visitors from the Bruner Foundation, and it must be located in the continental United States. Site visits are integral to the award process, and it is not feasible to conduct visits to international locations.

THE SELECTION PROCESS

The Selection Committee meets twice; first to select the five finalists from a field of about 100 applicants, and then to select the Gold Medal Winner. Between these two meetings, Bruner Foundation staff researches the finalists and visits each site for two or three days, exploring the projects and pursuing questions raised by the Selection Committee. The team members tour the projects, interview fifteen to twenty-five or more project participants (including community participants), take photographs, observe patterns of use and collect secondary source documentation on the project. This year’s site visit team was led by Robert Shibley, Professor of Architecture and Planning at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Other site
The 2005 Rudy Bruner Award winners were selected from a field of 133 entries from over 30 states. The applicants included a rich diversity of projects that are contributing to their respective communities in a variety of ways, and the committee commended the work of many applicants.

GOLD MEDAL:

Portland Streetcar Project, Portland, OR

The Portland Streetcar Project includes 2.4 miles of double track streetcar linking five districts on the west side of Portland. The Streetcar Project has resulted in reclamation of a 70 acre brownfield site, and in $1.4 billion of private and institutional investment since 1999, encompassing both residential and non-residential uses. It has contributed to the continuing development of a high quality, livable urban environment in Portland by serving high density areas, reducing auto trips, and delivering safe, clean, cost-effective transit services.
SILVER MEDALS:

Fruitvale Village, Oakland, CA
Fruitvale Village is a 225,000 square foot “transit village” built by the non-profit Unity Council. Located on former BART parking lots, Fruitvale Village is a mixed use development that creates a pedestrian street and public plaza, 47 units of mixed income housing, a health clinic, a public library, a senior center, office space, and 40,000 square feet of neighborhood retail shops and restaurants. One of Fruitvale’s major goals is to strengthen community institutions and catalyze neighborhood revitalization – physically, economically and socially.

Artist Relocation Program, Paducah, KY
Paducah’s Artist Relocation Program encourages artists from across the country to relocate to the Lower Town neighborhood of Paducah. The City provides incentives for artist relocation, including historic homes offered at affordable rates, and a local bank lends relocating artists funds to restore the houses. The Artist Relocation Program contributes to the revitalization of a blighted historic neighborhood, strengthens the creative economy of Paducah, and creates a renewed residential community in the downtown.

The Heidelberg Project, Detroit, MI
The Heidelberg Project is a series of art installations by artist Tyree Guyton, located in an inner-city neighborhood in East Detroit. It includes a variety of art works, three art education programs, and space for a visiting artist. Despite partial demolition by the City of Detroit on two different occasions, the Heidelberg Project has been rebuilt and is now the third most visited site in the city of Detroit, building bridges among a diverse group of visitors from around the world.

Downtown Silver Spring Revitalization, Silver Spring, MD
The revitalization of downtown Silver Spring, developed in the context of Maryland’s Smart Growth policies, represents a re-invention of first ring suburbs through a creative public/private partnership. The revitalization effort has resulted in over one million square feet of retail space including movie theaters, restaurants, office space, multi-family dwelling units, civic space and parking garages, and the world headquarters for Discovery Communications. The revitalized downtown, located adjacent to a Metro stop, also includes four reconstructed main streets with extensive new streetscape for safe and attractive pedestrian movement.
2005 AWARD PRESENTATIONS

Because the Rudy Bruner Award is intended to stimulate a national discussion on the nature of urban excellence, award presentations offer an important opportunity to raise awareness of the issues addressed by each winning project. Past awards have been presented at the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and in many of the cities in which winning projects are located. At the presentations planners, community organizers, architects, and developers speak about their projects, and mayors are often present to recognize the contributions these projects have made to their respective communities.

This year’s Gold Medal award of $50,000 was presented to the Portland Streetcar Project at an event that honored not only the project, but the many people who were instrumental in its implementation. Silver Medal winners were each awarded $10,000 at events in their respective cities, with local press and elected officials present to recognize their achievement.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

As part of an ongoing effort to facilitate a national dialogue on the meaning and nature of urban excellence and to promote important new ideas about urban placemaking, the Bruner Foundation publishes a book containing case studies of the winners. Each book recounts the story of the winning projects, and the dialogue and debate among SELECTION COMMITTEE members. Each project case study is prefaced by a “project at a glance” section that briefly summarizes the project and the SELECTION COMMITTEE discussion. This overview is followed by detailed accounts of the history, character, financing, and operation of each winning project. In addition to describing the five winners, a concluding chapter identifies the most important themes recognized by the SELECTION COMMITTEE.
Bruner Foundation books are currently in use in graduate and undergraduate programs in universities across the country. The work of the Rudy Bruner Award and its winners has been recognized by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Environmental Design Research Association. Recent articles on the RBA have appeared in Foundation News, New Village Journal, Architectural Record, Design Book Review, and Architecture magazine. See also the chapter on the RBA in Lynda Schneekloth and Robert Shibley’s Placemaking: The Art and Practice of Building Community (John Wiley and Sons, 1995), and in the McGraw Hill compendium on the state of the art in urban design, Time Saver Standards for Urban Design published in 2003, edited by Don Watson, Alan Plattus, and Robert Shibley.

Case studies contained in Bruner Foundation books are now also available on the Foundation’s web site, www.brunerfoundation.org.

Bruner Foundation books, some of which are available from the Foundation, include:

An earlier Bruner Foundation endeavor revisited the winners and finalists from the first four cycles of the RBA to learn how the projects have fared over time. The book asks which places have continued to thrive and which have struggled, and why. Partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, teams of Foundation staff and consultants, HUD regional staff, and past Selection Committee members revisited 21 projects. The conclusions these observers reached can be found in:

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robert Shibley, AIA, AICP, is a professor at the School of Architecture and Planning at the State University of New York, Buffalo. He is also a founding partner of Caucus Partnership, a consulting practice on environmental and organizational change. At the University at Buffalo, he is a former chairman of the Department of Architecture and now serves as the director of The Urban Design Project, a center in the school devoted to the study and practice of urban design.

Emily Axelrod, MCP, is the director of the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence. She holds a masters degree in city planning from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and has worked in urban planning in both the public and private sectors in San Francisco and Boston.

Jay Farbstein, PhD, FAIA, is an architect by training. He leads a consulting practice in Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo, CA, specializing in helping public sector and private clients develop and document their requirements for building projects as well as in evaluating the degree to which their completed buildings meet those requirements.

Richard Wener, PhD is associate professor of environmental psychology in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at Polytechnic University in Brooklyn, New York. He has done extensive research on the effects of built environments on individuals and communities.

ACCESS TO OTHER RUDY BRUNER AWARD MATERIALS

Winner applications are also on line. This archive of applications allows both perusal of original application material, and the ability to select winner projects by keywords in seventeen categories including housing, historic preservation, art, land use controls, commercial development, transportation, etc. The University at Buffalo site is coordinated through The Urban Design Project, directed by Robert Shibley and developed by the staff at the University at Buffalo’s Lockwood Memorial Library. It is a valuable tool for students and others interested various aspects of the urban built environment.

http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/bruner/
Also, all RBA applications through 1999 have been recorded on microfiche and are accessible through:

Interlibrary Loan Department
Lockwood Memorial Library
State University of New York at Buffalo
Amherst, NY 14260
Phone: (716) 636-2816
Fax: (716) 636-3721

An abstract and keyword identification has been prepared for each application and can be accessed through two major databases: RLIN/Research Library Information Network and OCLF/First Search.

The Bruner Foundation also maintains a web site for the RBA. The site contains an overview and history of the award, summary material and visual images of all winners, biographical material on Selection Committee members; and online versions of every Bruner Foundation publication. The web site also contains information on how to apply for the RBA. The Web site address is:

http://www.brunerfoundation.org

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