



**LEARNING ABOUT URBAN EXCELLENCE**



This is an excerpt from:

# PLACEMAKING FOR CHANGE: 2001 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.

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2001 RUDY BRUNER AWARD FOR URBAN EXCELLENCE

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## THE SELECTION PROCESS

The choice of the 2001 winners by the Selection Committee is the result of the unique collaborative process that characterizes the Rudy Bruner Award. The Committee discussion highlights its assessment of the most significant issues facing our cities today. The Bruner Foundation does not provide explicit criteria for determining excellence. Rather, definitions and descriptions of urban excellence emerge from the RBA submissions themselves. In evaluating the applications, Committee members are asked to make determinations about the importance of a project to its urban setting and to broader urban issues, to articulate the reasons why it was important, and to assess the impact it has had within its urban context. The Committee's collective vision of what constitutes urban excellence evolves from its selection of finalists, its findings from the on-site case studies, and ultimately, its determination of the gold and silver medal winners. For the Selection Committee, this is not an easy process, but it is invariably one that leads to rich and thought-provoking discussions. Faced with an abundance of successful projects and a limited amount of time, the Selection Committee set about making choices and creating a framework of significant issues and themes from which to judge these projects. The themes that emerged relate to the 2001 winners and also recall themes from previous RBA cycles.

## THE WINNERS

The 2001 RBA recognized five projects that have made their cities better places to live and work and represent important models of urban placemaking. These winners have improved the lives of the

residents of their communities and have changed the way people think and feel about their cities. As our Selection Committee noted, “the best urban projects always do.”

**The Village of Arts and Humanities, Philadelphia, PA - *Gold Medal Winner*** - a private, non-profit, community based organization dedicated to revitalizing its host neighborhood through the arts. What began in 1986 as a summer project to engage neighborhood children in building a community park has grown into a major provider of arts-inspired programs in education, land transformation, construction, and economic development. The Selection Committee found The Village “bold...absolutely spectacular” in the way it “involved people doing things with their own hands in their own community...local people creating their neighborhood and developing a new sense of pride in a formerly neglected inner-city neighborhood.”

The Selection Committee chose The Village as the 2001 Gold Medal Winner because of the boldness of its vision; its adaptability to other urban settings; the way in which it showed that one person can make a difference; its being part of and growing out of the neighborhood; and its tackling of difficult (some said impossible) problems without relying on large-scale public programs or funding. Equally important was the way in which The Village addressed the spiritual as well as physical needs of its community.

**Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York, NY - *Silver Medal Winner*** - a unique museum in a landmark tenement building that

was home to an estimated 7,000 people from over 20 nations between 1863 and 1935. The museum's mission is to promote tolerance and historical perspective through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America. LESTM set out to change our understanding of the way cities evolve by illuminating the universal nature of the American immigrant experience. The Selection Committee recognized the importance of honoring the untold story of immigrants to America and found immigration to be a compelling and socially unifying theme.

**New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark, NJ - *Silver Medal Winner*** - opened on October 18, 1997, with the dream of being a world-class performing arts center with a significant social agenda. NJPAC serves as a cultural complex for the world's greatest performing artists, as well as a setting for multicultural performances that attract New Jersey's diverse audiences. NJPAC also strives to be an educational and cultural resource for New Jersey children and families as well as an economic engine to spur the revival of Newark. The Committee was impressed by the breadth of vision and quality of NJPAC as a model for other cities undertaking mega-projects, demonstrating the feasibility of major development that maintains a commitment to serving local residents.

**South Platte River Greenway, Denver, CO - *Silver Medal Winner*** - encompasses 10.5 miles of the South Platte River, running through the birthplace of the City of Denver. Prior to the establishment of

the Platte River Development Committee in 1974, the river was seriously polluted and unfit for recreational use. Since 1974, the river has been fully reclaimed, opening the waterway and its banks for a mix of public recreational uses. The Selection Committee viewed this project as "Olmsteadian" in scale and an important "opportunity to bring disparate parts of the community together" through new public facilities located along the river's edge. The Committee applauded the creation of a major new natural resource in the heart of the city, one that gives Denver residents "a renewed sense of place, and a new sense of pride in the natural resources of the urban core."

**Swan's Marketplace, Oakland, CA - *Silver Medal Winner*** - an adaptive reuse of an historic downtown public market, incorporating mixed-income residential units and 24 separate commercial and arts-related uses organized around a shared courtyard. The project houses the 93-year-old Housewives Fresh Food Market, Old Oakland Co-Housing, and 18 units of affordable housing in a combination of new and restored architecture in downtown Oakland. It is an excellent example of mixed use and socially and historically sensitive development, and it is important as a model for a city that is trying to create 10,000 new housing units in a downtown that had been depopulated by the impact of suburbanization and urban renewal programs.

## CREATING MEANINGFUL URBAN PLACES

The process used in selecting RBA winners typically results varied in group of finalists, and 2001 was no exception. These five finalists

cover a broad spectrum of geography, scale, setting, purpose, and approach. No two were in the same city or addressed precisely the same urban issue. What they had in common was a foundation of core values as they addressed basic human needs in their own original ways.

This year's finalists all had social agendas that permeated their primary missions. The Village built gardens and filled them with art, but at a more basic level, it was about re-building a community and providing opportunities for residents to create personal meaning in their lives. LESTM created a showcase of tenement housing and immigrant lives, but its underlying purpose was to use the lessons of the past to reveal important commonalities among diverse immigrant groups. NJPAC was built to bring world-class performing arts to New Jersey, but it spends equal time and effort bringing children to the arts and art to classrooms throughout the state. The South Platte River Greenway cleaned up a river and opened some parks, and in the process it connected long-separated neighborhoods and brought a city back to its natural and historic beginnings. Swan's Marketplace saved a well-known and beloved shopping site while it worked to create a much-needed presence and vitality, as well as mixed-income housing in Oakland's neglected downtown.

A number of issues emerged in the process of researching and writing the site reports and the ensuing Selection Committee discussions. These issues relate to the nature of creating meaningful and important urban places. They are reflective of issues that have

been noted in past RBA cycles but are still in many ways unique to the people, projects and contexts of these five winning sites.

## **ART AS AN ENGINE FOR URBAN REDEVELOPMENT**

Efforts at rebuilding urban areas have traditionally focused on providing shelter and jobs. While no one would argue with the need for economic development and affordable housing, Strom (1994) cites a growing list of cities that have used culture and creativity as a focal point for revival. Art and culture, in museums, theatre, and public settings, have historically been an important part of what makes urban centers vital. What is new, as illustrated by several recent RBA winners, is the number of projects that make art the central focus and driving force in urban redevelopment. For example, Circle in the Square (RBA 1997) in Roanoke, Virginia, took a variety of museums and theatres, each too small to have an impact on its own, and brought them together in a cooperative facility. Together they provided a critical mass of cultural opportunities sufficient to significantly boost visitorship, while also helping to support the revival of downtown Roanoke. Project Row Houses (RBA 1997), in Houston's low-income Third Ward, saved a series of historic row houses by converting them into exhibit spaces and, in the process, provided critical support services and a sense of identity and cohesion to an underserved neighborhood. In ARTScorpsLA (RBA 1999), young people promoted community building and pride by transforming blighted parcels of abandoned land into public art. Museums and cultural sites are also a key part of Yerba Buena Gardens (RBA 1999), a revitalization that is drawing people back to the South of Market area in San Francisco to live, shop and play.

This theme is even more explicit in the 2001 RBA, particularly as demonstrated by The Village and NJPAC. While these two projects could not be more different in scale and style, they are both impressive and successful in how they have used art to directly address creative needs and to initiate broad urban development. For The Village, the use of the arts for social programs is a clear, explicit, and founding philosophy. Lily Yeh came to a neighborhood in which social and physical systems were disintegrating. She felt that the human spirit of residents had to be nurtured and strengthened before “bricks and mortar” could have a lasting effect or value. The Village engages in many different kinds of community-building activities -- housing, landscaping, job-creation — but making art and using art to change the environment is central to it all. The process of creating art serves multiple purposes for The Village. It provides a way to engage children — to get them off the street and into supervised programs and give them an experience of success. Adults have also discovered their own creative interests and abilities and from there have developed self-esteem and leadership potential. Sculptures, mosaics, and parks beautify the neighborhood as they reclaim spaces and personalize them to fit the character of the community. The arts serve to help people discover and address personal and spiritual issues that then become a basis for personal growth and community building.

NJPAC appeared as a bright spot in what was an otherwise bleak and lifeless part of downtown Newark. It has effectively married excellent design with top-notch artistic programming to overcome significant psychological barriers in bringing arts patrons to this

beleaguered city. NJPAC is unique in its fusion of the traditional functions of a performing arts center with an attention to the social needs of its community. NJPAC has made arts education its social banner and has channeled significant fund-raising efforts, personnel, and resources into its educational programs. NJPAC’s art education programs were in full swing years before the Center itself opened, sending artists to school systems around the state to support local curricula and teachers and providing lessons and resources to young artists. Currently, NJPAC offers hundreds of learning-based concerts each year for children and their families. The new Lucent Technology Center for Arts Education provides enhanced opportunities for lessons, classes, training, and practice space. NJPAC found a way to have a significant impact on Newark’s (and New Jersey’s) school children and, in particular, its low-income and under-served population, thus managing to avoid being an institution solely of and for the cultural elite.

The Museum of Children’s Art (MoCHA) in Swan’s Marketplace has played a similar though more limited role supporting art education in Oakland. MoCHA offers free art classes in a number of Oakland public schools. The Oakland public school system has been largely without an arts program since California’s Proposition 13, which led to years of reduced state funding for education. These classes are the only opportunity for a regular, structured, creative experience in the arts for many students.

## PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF PLACES AND VALUES

Preservation of places with great personal meaning for individuals and communities is another theme in this year's RBA, as it has been in past award cycles. This is no surprise or accident – historic preservation as a meaningful movement in American communities has its basis in saving and restoring those sites that have the most symbolic importance to communities. Local preservation movements have frequently been founded on coalitions formed when landmarks are threatened. Preservation movements support the community by helping maintain places that are beautiful, familiar, and/or historically important (Goldstone and Dalrymple, 1974).

LESTM is in some ways unique as a site for building preservation. The building at 97 Orchard Street has been meticulously studied and restored with extraordinary care, and the resultant spaces have been viewed by many people. It is unusual in that it was not, by typical preservation standards, “special.” The building is not a work of architectural significance or opulence and did not house figures of historical note. It was typical of a building type, and at many points in the twentieth century, its demolition would have been seen as a sign of civic improvement, not as a great community loss.

LESTM was preserved and restored precisely *because* it is ordinary and represents a critical part in the lives of thousands of immigrants makes a statement that, contrary to traditional preservation sites, ordinary lives are also worthy of rigorous research and interpretation. It has helped foster a new attitude among preservationists towards addressing the artifacts of the lives of common people. By saving and

preserving this building and telling the stories of immigrant families who lived there throughout its history, LESTM has made those lives significant and has created a place with broad appeal. The idea behind LESTM — to honor the immigrant experience and use immigrant history as a social tool — has impact because of the visual and symbolic importance of the building. It is similar in some respects to Houston's Project Row Houses, which preserved and adaptively used the “shotgun houses” of freed slaves to provide resources and a sense of identity for a neglected community.

The development of Swan's Marketplace in downtown Oakland also took strength from preserving a place of importance to ordinary people. There is symbolic value in having maintained the visible elements of the facade and the superstructure of a building which generations of Oakland residents had come to know. The restoration of Swan's Marketplace provided continuity to the neighborhood whose downtown landscape had been visibly assaulted by the construction of an intrusive concrete convention center. The market has helped preserve the practical functions and services of the nearby Housewives Market, which provides everyday goods for the area's underserved residents.

The Greenway is an example of environmental conservation that, by restoring water quality and returning the river to public use, has evoked a sense of Denver's history. Denver was founded on the river, it was critical to the development of a city in an arid environment. The city is now finding a way to grow back to instead of out from its roots, and this success is being shared by communities along Denver's economic and racial spectrum.

The Village supports preservation of another kind — neighborhood preservation. The threat to this area of North Philadelphia was not so much to individual buildings as to the fabric of the community itself. Many of the small houses and apartment buildings there had been abandoned and destroyed at such a rate that the neighborhood was fast becoming depopulated. Vacant lots in turn became dangerous eyesores filled with debris and weeds that provided a safe haven for drug dealing and crime. By transforming these abandoned spaces, in some cases taking historical symbols from other contexts (such as statues of African “angels”), The Village has succeeded in preserving the scale, the ambience, and possibly even the very existence of this community.

Historic preservation has been a regular theme running through RBA cycles. Past winners with strong preservation components have included The Times Square (New York City, 1997), Parkside Preservation (Philadelphia, 1999), Tenant Interim Lease Program (New York City, 1989), Project Row Houses, Campus Circle (Milwaukee, 1995), and the Maya Angelou Community Initiative (Portland, 1995), all of which used restoration and adaptive reuse to honor, save, and support housing for low-income people. Other winners, like Pike Place Market (Seattle, 1987), Lowertown (St. Paul, 1995), Circle in the Square, and the Cleveland Historic Warehouse District (Cleveland, 1997) have shown how community-based preservation, often combined with innovative development strategies, can revive a neighborhood and provide important symbolic landmarks for residents.

The built environment in general, and preservation in particular, can play an important role in establishing what has been called the “psychological sense of community” (Sarason, 1975). Preservation, in typical as well as non-traditional ways exemplified in these winners, help provide the familiarity of landscape, consistency of scale, and meaningful symbols that can enable people to establish and maintain their sense of attachment to an area. The Village has helped support the development of a renewed pride in and connection to the community, and there is some evidence that people have begun moving back to the neighborhood, slowing or ending the long trend of abandonment. There are shoppers who come for miles to buy goods at Swan’s Marketplace, not because they find items that cannot be purchased anywhere else, but because of tradition, comfort, and familiarity. Newness has its place, as the striking success of NJPAC in Newark has shown. But even there, part of NJPAC’s goal and benefit has been not to create a new Newark but to help support, revive, and bring people back to the old city.

### **PLACE AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

Sometimes buildings themselves are artifacts of a broader social agenda and are the physical manifestation of a philosophy or goal for social change. This has been true of many past RBA winners. For example, the beautiful restoration and reuse of The Times Square was undertaken to provide shelter for homeless individuals, low-income adults, and persons in need of social service. The massive Tenant Interim Lease Program was designed to assist low-income tenants in becoming homeowners.

The idea behind LESTM expresses itself in the physical facility of the museum, but it also goes well beyond that site. Ruth Abram began with the concept of the “usable past,” a notion that historical lessons can be practically instructive for confronting current social problems. Without historical context for their situations, she reasoned, communities were likely to repeat past mistakes or ignore more effective strategies for change. Abram’s challenge was to find a way to make history salient and prominent – to deliver the lessons in a way that was visible and easily accessible. Once she identified the critical social problem she wanted to address – the plight of immigrant populations – she conceived of LESTM as a solution. By saving and restoring this tenement building, she hoped to tell the stories of a variety of immigrant families in a way that would unite different racial and ethnic communities, helping them to understand their common situation. In many ways, the museum has been successful beyond anyone’s imagination, and thousands of school groups and other visitors have learned from the building’s history and message. Frank Sanchis, formerly with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, notes that it was the first such museum to engage in social programming. The educational, social, and community development programs supported by LESTM show the power of an idea to affect change, working out of and through the physical presence of the museum.

While NJPAC’s primary mission was and is to present great performances, the presence of the building, organization, and staff provided an opportunity and a base from which to create one of the largest arts education programs in the country. The performances

and educational programs have a symbiotic relationship. NJPAC’s facilities, personnel, and fundraising make possible a variety of outreach programs and on-site support. Many of these programs do not explicitly require the presence of the NJPAC buildings (and operated effectively before the structures were built). However, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to support arts education programs at their current level without the synergy they have with the facility. The prestige and prominence of NJPAC enhances the education program. These programs, in turn, help NJPAC raise operational and endowment funds; the social benefits attract individual and institutional donors who might otherwise overlook a purely artistic enterprise.

In The Village, the visual arts draw young people off the streets and into a safe haven, where they can become engaged in education, training, and service programs that may affect their lives in profound ways. Through direct exposure to artistic production, many discover modes of creativity and self-expression that provide the basis for a renewed sense of self and connection to the community. In addition, art in The Village Heart defines the neighborhood. It is the physical incarnation of Yeh’s ideas. You know where you are and when you have arrived at The Village by the distinct visual cues that help it stand apart from the rest of the community.

## NATURE AND THE URBAN EXPERIENCE

Cities are the epitome of the built environment – places where growing, organic forms take a distant second place in focus and

quantity to streets and buildings. It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that access to the natural environment, to growing and living things, is critical to human comfort and development and to creating livable urban places (Whiston Spirn, 1984; Wilson and Kellert, 1993; Appleton, 1996). Natural landscapes in cities provide visual relief, comfort, protection from wind and sun, and benefits to air and water quality. There is increasing evidence that access to natural settings for active or passive recreation can play important roles in relieving stress and alleviating mental fatigue (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1998; Ulrich, 1993). Nowhere is this more relevant than in the poor inner-city core where one often finds neighborhoods with restricted access to city parks and the most daunting environmental degradation from dumping and industrial spillover. In these neighborhoods, residents lack the resources to escape to more natural, restorative settings. The restoration of Harlem Meer (RBA 1995) provided a connection with nature for lower-income residents in the midst of New York, the most urbanized city in the United States. ArtsCorpLA had a similar impact when it transformed blighted land into an arts space with lush vegetation and, in one instance, a pond for inner-city Los Angeles residents.

Among the 2001 winners, The Village and the Greenway engage significantly with the urban natural environment. The Village provides important connections to nature for North Philadelphia residents, especially children, through its small parks, organic gardens, and tree farm, as well as the opportunity for residents to design, plant, and grow things in these spaces.

The Greenway provides access to a living river at a scale that may be unprecedented as an addition to an established urban core. This previously polluted industrial zone, ignored for years by most of Denver's citizens, has become 10.5 miles (much more if one considers the full length of the improvements beyond the municipal borders) of grass and trees, bike and jogging paths, water recreation, commerce, and sports and cultural centers. The revitalized South Platte River and Cherry Creek have played an important role in connecting and "re-knitting" the disparate parts of the city. Denver has a reputation for having citizens with a passion for outdoor activities; and the Greenway provides a way to connect that passion to the urban core. It is similar in some respect to the Lincoln, Nebraska Radial Reuse Plan (RBA 1989), the Brooklyn-Queens Greenway (RBA 1991) and the Stowe Recreation Path (RBA 1989), all of which were opportunistic in finding ways to create access to nature in urban contexts and important links among local communities.

With respect to its river, Newark may be where Denver was 15 years ago. With NJPAC as its entry point and anchor, Newark is looking to create access to the Passaic River. The development of a pedestrian promenade along the river right at NJPAC's back door will provide the first major public recreational water access in centuries. Such a reclamation could significantly change the image and feel of this gritty industrial city.

## THE BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS OF SCALE IN ADDRESSING URBAN PROBLEMS

The Selection Committee was well aware of the disparities of project scale among the five finalists. The Village, LESTM, and Swan's Marketplace are relatively small in terms of physical size and budget, whereas NJPAC and the Greenway are mega-projects involving hundreds of millions of dollars of building and development. Smaller organizations can be more nimble in responding to changes or new opportunities. Such agility was demonstrated by LESTM in its dealings with the National Park Service and various neighborhood organizations. The Village has shown the ability to respond rapidly when neighborhood sites become available, implementing clean-up, planting or other more ambitious activities.

The size of these smaller projects makes them accessible as models for other communities. Because the time and fundraising horizons are comparatively modest, citizens in other neighborhoods or other cities can more readily imagine how to replicate aspects of such projects, and by imagining them, can be spurred to develop plans of their own. Given scarce resources and the inconsistent levels of public support common in many urban areas, these projects do great service by showing how even a few committed people operating independently with minimal funding can improve a community.

Their small scale, however, also carries with it limitations and added burdens. It is hard for an effort of modest scope to leave a significant imprint on the broader landscape of urban needs. Swan's

Marketplace covers a square block of downtown real estate with a program intended for (and needing) a larger swath of land that it was eventually denied. The Village is changing a neighborhood in important ways, but the problems of North Philadelphia are vast. LESTM is a single building in the midst of one of America's most densely populated communities. Some will be impatient with the ability of smaller projects to address the huge and seemingly intractable problems of our cities. However, others, like Lily Yeh, founder of The Village, note that efforts benefiting even a single life or neighborhood are valuable, and that locally developed and small-scale projects could be an antidote to grandiose and often misdirected attempts at urban renewal.

By way of contrast, NJPAC and the Greenway (and the 1999 Gold Medal winner, Yerba Buena Gardens, in San Francisco) have broad political and geographic reach and multi-million dollar budgets that allow them to leave a significant mark on their cities. NJPAC has had much to do with a change in the way Newark is perceived and is the anchor in the restructuring of a significant portion of its downtown area. Only a very large lever could move so heavy a weight in a short period of time. The Greenway is changing the manner in which one of America's most successful and fastest growing cities orients itself and is attracting a significant share of Denver's new development. As it expands and matures, the Greenway promises to be an even more powerful force affecting the way Denver's population plays and lives and its awareness of its historical roots.

The funding, time frame, and political connections needed to make such large-scale projects happen are daunting. Even NJPAC was over ten years in the making. This makes the success of NJPAC and the Greenway all the more impressive, and there is no denying that they have become significant forces in shaping their metropolitan areas. It is hard, though, for the average involved citizen, or even an active community organizer or public official, to imagine pulling together the energy and resources required to create something similar. Who can undertake such efforts without the complicity and active support of significant government bodies and without major funding in the coffers?

The RBA has from its inception recognized places of widely varying scope, expense, and ambition, from an urban park (Harlem Meer; Park at Post Office Square), art galleries (Project Row Houses) or a farmer's market (Greenmarket; Pike's Place) to initiatives that changed the shape of major urban centers (Portland Downtown Plan; Yerba Buena Gardens). Together these winners demonstrate that excellence is independent of scale. The 2001 Selection Committee wanted to recognize both kinds of endeavors. Committee members thought the stories of a few people "making a difference" by dint of their own efforts offer stirring and important models. They were also impressed that NJPAC and the Greenway showed how a massive urban development project could maintain a focus on and sensitivity to the social needs of the entire community.

## LEADERSHIP, VISION, AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN CHANGE

An important theme in the 2001 RBA is the ability of one committed person to have an impact. Each of the 2001 winners had leaders who were deeply committed to creating urban places that would not only change the urban landscape, but would also change lives. As each project evolved, it was the vision of this key person that governed crucial policy decisions in the service of explicit values and clear priorities. This clarity of vision is invariably an important element in the creation of significant urban projects and has been notable in many RBA winners.

The 2001 winners show that an individual can affect change, even when facing challenges of daunting magnitude with few material resources at hand. Yeh's vision has led to an effort that has dramatically transformed places and lives. Similarly, Ruth Abram set out to address significant social issues with no initial funding or organizational backing. While the Greenway is now a large and well-funded effort, the polluted river languished until Joe Shoemaker took it upon himself to find a way to clean it and reintegrate it into Denver's urban fabric. These leaders had a vision and deep commitment to what was possible and important in their city.

There is an inherent contradiction, however, in focusing on visionary leaders as the crucial link in creating urban excellence. Although a charismatic leader may be essential to project development, sustainability often depends upon the development of broad-based collaborations. Too much emphasis on one strong leader may limit

the ability of others to feel a connection to the processes and successes of the project. Each of these winners has sought ways to broaden the base of leadership within the community. While all of these projects needed and had strong leadership to get them off the ground, they succeeded because they were able to develop deeply collaborative processes and organizations. Yeh was always aware that she was an outsider to North Philadelphia. The work of The Village – including sculptures, gardens, and murals – is maintained and sustained because of the level of participation and ownership of the community. The Village’s future depends upon the community’s continued participation in shaping its vision, decisions, and operations.

While a focus on community involvement is intrinsic in a project like The Village, it is more surprising to find a deep community commitment in NJPAC. The nature and scale of a new performing arts center could have easily resulted in a top-down, management-by-fiat organization. Instead, through Goldman’s vision and leadership, NJPAC has developed a decentralized management style and has included community leaders in the decision-making process. NJPAC’s ability to work collaboratively with community leaders and with staff at all levels of the organization will help sustain the high level of its community and arts education programs in the future.

The East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC) is unique in having twice been an RBA winner – in 2001 for Swan’s Marketplace and in 1997 for another community development effort in Oakland, Hismen Hin-nu. EBALDC’s continuing success is in no small measure related to the organization’s proven ability to tap into

community resources and work collaboratively with a wide variety of groups. EBALDC showed great skill and professionalism in the way it managed the myriad of organizations, agencies, community groups, and lenders to make Swan’s Marketplace a reality, just as for Hismen Hin-nu it created partnerships with neighborhood organizations to make its first foray out of the Asian community a success.

In Denver, Shoemaker’s approach to cleaning up the South Platte River provides another example of leadership using collaborative models to create a sustainable base of support. Shoemaker made sure that representatives of Denver’s marginalized communities were on the Platte River Development Committee from the start. He also invited activists from groups he thought might oppose his efforts. When project costs limited the initial clean up to two sites, Shoemaker’s committee made sure that one was in a low-income, minority community, helping to build support for the effort and avoiding the label of a project for the elite.

In addition, an over-dependence on the founder inevitably leads to concerns about transition, succession and long-term viability. The more success is seen as the product of a single dedicated genius, the more dubious others (community members, politicians, and funders) are of a project’s ability to thrive after the leader leaves. A truly excellent project has to be able to survive the eventual loss of the first generation of founders. How well the organization recognizes and plans for transition is a critical process that affects institutional longevity. All of the 2001 RBA winners have confronted that

problem directly and have begun planning for new leadership. The Village, for example, has recently gone through such a process. For many years the organization was small and planning could be done on an informal, ad hoc basis by Yeh or one of her compatriots. But The Village now has an impressive portfolio of properties and programs and a large, competent staff that was feeling insufficiently involved in the planning and goal-setting processes. Following a series of introspective retreats, The Village transformed its organizational structure into one that involves more of its staff in planning and management and one that, it hopes, is capable of carrying on when its founder chooses to leave. Yeh has made no secret of her desire to reduce her direct involvement in day-to-day decision-making, which has in turn spurred the organization to focus on the upcoming transition.

### **PUBLIC, NON-PROFIT, AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP**

Excellent urban projects are rarely the creation of one organization or even one sector of the economy, but rather the result of collaborations between non-profit, private/for-profit, and public (government) entities. The kinds of projects that emerge as RBA winners almost always involve close cooperation among organizations from two or all three of these sectors, even though many are created and driven by non-profit organizations. The resources and income stream that are available for most of these efforts simply do not make them attractive for private, for profit enterprises. Governments often have their resources and attention focused elsewhere, on basic responsibilities or longer-range planning. Similarly, innovative models of urban placemaking (like The

Village) may not fit established categories of government funding. Non-profits are more likely to have both the public-spirited mission and the motivation to focus on ‘niche’ issues with the single-minded dedication needed to bring them to fruition.

On the other hand, non-profits usually don’t have the resources to bring about broad social change and need to partner with others to achieve longer-term goals and sometimes to gain an added degree of legitimacy. LESTM, for example, succeeded admirably in creating its organization and museum facility and in working with various neighborhood groups. It stands ready, however, to make a quantum leap in the impact it can have in the Lower East Side by virtue of its new partnership with the National Park Service (NPS). That partnership will provide an infusion of resources, in terms of funds and skills, as well as access to a much broader audience. Conversely, the NPS would not have created LESTM by itself. It had never focused on that kind of site (housing for poor immigrants) and had neither the mandate nor the creativity to develop the museum as it now stands. This new liaison will not only change the reach of LESTM, but also the way NPS sees its own goals and mission.

NJPAC is the result of a significant effort by the state government and funding and support from non-profit and private sources. It took the strong lobbying of significant business figures and others to maintain state support through three successive administrations. Funds from the state were clearly critical for this project with its nine-figure development tab. It could never have emerged as the

force it is, however, without the assistance of other groups. It shares with LESTM an attention to detail and quality in design and planning that would have been unlikely to result under a government agency. It took the single-minded focus of Lawrence Goldman, as head of a special non-profit agency, to develop a mission for NJPAC. It went well beyond the initial concepts and included the meaningful social and educational agenda that has been so critical to NJPAC's success.

The Greenway's history is similar to NJPAC in several respects. City government and a non-profit organization worked hand in hand from the start, with public funding as the underpinning, to clean the river and create the Greenway. For the Greenway, private sector investment played an important role in bringing some "there," creating the housing, shopping and event sites that make the Greenway a path to somewhere important. The non-profit Greenway Foundation has provided the day-to-day dedication, management and coordination; the city government has invested in parks and critical infrastructure; and businesses have done what they do best and have taken advantage of an increasingly attractive site to provide necessities and amenities for the public. It is reminiscent, in some respects, of the Greenmarket in New York City, which operates as a non-profit affiliated with a city agency, and providing a highly desirable amenity that has helped stimulate development and improve the quality of life in the neighborhoods it inhabits.

The Village for many years accomplished a great deal and operated largely on its own with little private investment, minimal public

funding, and, at best, benign neglect from the city. As it has grown and expanded, however, its connections to and support from other entities has become more significant. The Village now has an annual budget of over \$1 million and gets funding from an array of public as well as non-profit sources. The new affordable housing in The Village Heart, for example, is funded by the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development. The Village has supported local businesses and has also started its own for-profit operation to create an income stream that can fund other village activities.

## CONCLUSION

Each round of the Rudy Bruner Award is separate and distinct; for each cycle, a new Selection Committee works with the raw material of a unique set of submissions. Yet together the Award represents a growing body of knowledge of people, places, issues, and approaches to creating excellent urban places. Each group of winners contributes to this body of knowledge by providing new ideas and supporting earlier hypotheses. Some issues, like the role of preservation, have appeared in RBA-winning projects regularly through the award cycles. They serve to remind us of the failures of the "urban removal" strategies of the mid-twentieth century and of the importance of continuity, history and shared memory in creating urban excellence.

Other issues, such as the use of art as an urban redevelopment strategy and the importance of natural environments in urban areas, are clearly growing in importance in the RBA winning projects. One NJPAC interviewee argued that the redevelopment of Newark should

not be a “jobs versus arts” competition. Jobs are critical, he said, to give people the chance to make a decent living. The arts, he added, help us understand what we are living for. The same might be said about natural settings.

As a group the RBA winners add to our common knowledge about the elements and processes of successful placemaking. The RBA has always believed that every city and every neighborhood must create its own approach toward finding excellence. None of our winning projects can provide a blueprint for change. Each place has a unique historical, social, political and organizational context that requires individualized solutions. What the winning projects presented here can offer, however, are ideas, approaches, and inspiration for community leaders dealing with the daunting challenges faced by American cities. It was this belief that led the Bruner Foundation to sponsor and organize a conference following the 1992 Los Angeles disturbances (“An alternative conference seeking power in stories drawn from the Rudy Bruner Award”) in which community leaders and residents from South Central Los Angeles met representatives of RBA winners to exchange stories and ideas. We hope the stories presented in this book can start conversations in other communities about ways people can work together to find solutions to our cities’ problems and in so doing promote urban excellence.

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