

Renovation project receives state honors

Photos



Courtesy Photo

Nancy McPherson, far right, state director for AARP, toured the historic Bastrop High School project with Main Street Manager Marc Vereen, far left, during judging for the Great Places of Louisiana program.

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By Enterprise News Service

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The Historic Bastrop High School project is among three from across the state recognized as winners in the 2011 Great Places in Louisiana program.

The annual awards program - sponsored by AARP's Livable Communities Council, the Center for Planning Excellence and the Louisiana Office of the Lieutenant Governor - recognizes communities and community leaders who have pioneered new methods in planning, design, construction services and programs that make it possible to live in a community throughout a lifetime.

AARP state director Nancy McPherson said the award winners "represent what it means for a community to be livable.

“These projects promote accessibility, walkability, sustainability and community engagement from inception to implementation,” McPherson said. “With a larger and more diverse applicant pool this year, it is evident that more people are truly embracing the idea of livable communities and aging in place.”

Elizabeth “Boo” Thomas, president and CEO of the Center of Planning Excellence, said the winners exemplified programs that “turn good communities into great places.”

“These projects are shining examples of what can be accomplished when citizens are engaged in their communities and working together to make where they live a vibrant place,” Thomas said.

The judges’ panel was comprised of seven professionals from a variety of fields who closely evaluated each nomination using specific criteria that defines a livable community or community program. Judges critiqued the applicants’ affordability, accessibility, connectivity, sustainability, community engagement, walkability, public transit and successful implementation among other measures.

Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne said the projects are representative of the state’s diverse culture “that makes Louisiana the most fascinating place in America.

“These are places where all people of all ages or abilities can live healthy, independent lives, and it’s these people who contribute to the diversity that makes Louisiana famous,” Dardenne said.

Each Great Place award winner will receive \$1,500 and will present their community or community-based program at an awards reception at the Smart Growth Summit, a program of the Center for Planning Excellence. The Emerging Great Place award winner will receive a \$500 award.

The 2011 Great Places in Louisiana program is sponsored by AARP Foundation, Acadian On Call, Caesars Foundation, Care Innovations and Entergy.

A news release from AARP states this about the historic Bastrop High School project:

An old, abandoned high school might not seem like the perfect place for a new community center and affordable housing for seniors. But, that’s exactly what the determined citizens of Bastrop imagined when they looked at the blighted and vacant Bastrop High School in 2004. Seven years later, the citizens of this economically depressed town have nearly completed the revitalized Bastrop Historic High Apartments with 68 new apartment units, 14 of which are accessible for the disabled.

The apartments are available to people 55 or older of all income levels, and are within walking distance of medical offices, shops, banks, and restaurants. The once dilapidated school gym has been transformed into a large community space to host events free of charge and engage all of Bastrop’s residents.

Whether one looks at the sustainable materials used in building the apartments or the affordability and walkability of the new housing, it’s easy to see why Bastrop High School is one great place.

Judges' remarks:

Transforms a blighted, historical property into a vibrant senior housing community located in downtown Bastrop;

Provides housing options and supportive services for older adults who have been lifelong residents of the community;

Offers an opportunity for older adults to downsize in a walkable environment that is still connected to the community they love.

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