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The Historic Districts Council

Presents Its First Annual

Grassroots Preservation Awards

September 12, 2000

St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery

6:30 PM

**The Historic Districts Council** is pleased to announce its first annual Grassroots Preservation Awards. The Awards go to individuals and organizations that have done exemplary "grassroots" work in preserving New York City buildings and neighborhoods in the past year. The Council will hold an Awards presentation at its Tenth Annual Preservation Party on Tuesday, September 12, 2000 at 6:30 pm in the Parish Hall and Garden of St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, on 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Second Avenue in Manhattan.

The 2000 Grassroots Preservation Awards will be presented to:

1. Historic District Heroes: Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community Preservation Organization. Accepting the award: Ron Melichar, President; Yuien Chin, Executive Director. Presented by HDC Board Member William E. Davis, Jr.

In the last year, perhaps in the last decade, there is only *one group* in New York City that can claim the remarkable achievement of having worked successfully on the designation of two different historic districts in one year. Our first Grassroots Preservation Award recipient, The Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community Preservation Organization, is that group, and the districts it helped to create are the Hamilton Heights Extension (designated in March, 2000) and the Hamilton Heights/Sugar Hill Historic District (designated in June, 2000). A coalition of tenants, homeowners, residents associations, local institutions and businesses, the Hamilton Heights/West Harlem CPO has worked tirelessly since 1996 toward this great achievement. They formed a special Historic District Committee that played a leadership role in working with the Landmarks Preservation Commission on moving the effort forward and garnering support for the districts. They spent countless hours over the past few years working with the community board, meeting with elected officials, organizing meetings, providing research and photographs, and arguing for more expansive boundaries and the inclusion of important cultural landmarks. The group is about to embark upon an official collaboration with HDC, as we have just been awarded a grant from the Preservation League of New York State to work together on a nomination of Sugar Hill to the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Their hard work, success, and continued effort to designate the rest of Sugar Hill is a great example of the kind of grassroots energy we all need to have in order to preserve our neighborhoods. HDC is very pleased to congratulate the members of the Hamilton Heights/West Harlem Community

Preservation Organization on being Historic District Heroes, and would like to present this award to the organization's President, Ron Melichar, and its Executive Director, YOU-EN Chin.

2. Carnegie Hill Crusader: Elizabeth Ashby. Presented by HDC Board Member Franny Eberhart.

Our next Grassroots Preservation Award recipient's preservation advocacy for Carnegie Hill has been the focus of an active civic life that spans two decades and is still going strong. Elizabeth Ashby's spirited involvement with this uniquely charming Manhattan neighborhood began in the early 1980s, when she served as a Vice President of the East 96<sup>th</sup> Street Block Association. Her work organizing a block-watch for the Association was so effective that she began a block-watch training program for the entire community. In 1983 she became the President of the Carnegie Hill Neighbors, and it was her leadership and commitment that revived the organization and transformed it into one of the leading preservation advocacy groups in the City. Many important initiatives were undertaken by the group during her Presidency, such as proposing lower mid-block zoning in Carnegie Hill, and calling for legislation to ban "sliver" buildings. Elizabeth is perhaps best known as the leader of the effort to expand the Carnegie Hill Historic District – an accomplishment that took 12-1/2 years of coordination, research, lobbying, and sheer force of will. Following the success of that effort, Elizabeth also led the community in working to designate the Hardendbergh-Rhineland Historic District, achieved in 1998. Along with five other neighborhood preservationists, in 1997 Elizabeth founded the Historic Neighborhood Enhancement Alliance, with a mission to defend and restore the Upper East Side's historic character, and she serves as co-chair of the Landmarks Committee of Community Board #8 in Manhattan. It is impossible to imagine a Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing on an Upper East Side issue without Elizabeth's pointed yet eloquent – and often witty – testimony. HDC is proud to count this Carnegie Hill Crusader among its most active friends, and is delighted to award a Grassroots Preservation Award to Elizabeth Ashby.

3. The Coalition to Save P.S. 109: Gwen Goodwin, Raymond Plumey, David Corbin, Wilton K. Duckworth. Presented by: HDC Board Member Teri Slater.

In early 1999, long-time East Harlem resident and activist Gwen Goodwin witnessed a preservation crisis in progress – but fortunately for her community she did not stand idly by. As the School Construction Authority proceeded to illegally dismantle P.S. 109, a beautiful 19<sup>th</sup> century building designed by the notable school architect C.B.J. Snyder, Gwen founded The Coalition to Save P.S. 109, and launched an aggressive effort to halt demolition. She was joined by several local kindred spirits: Raymond Plumey, an architect and city planner with his own firm, and the celebrated author of the adaptive reuse of P.S. 72, now the Julia de Burgos Latino Cultural Center; David Corbin, investor and self-taught land use and preservation legal expert; and Wilton Duckworth, preservation architect and activist. Together, the four successfully petitioned government officials and agencies to stop the demolition and garnered citywide support for their efforts. Noting that the building is eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, the group appealed to the State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation for assistance. Their nomination form secured State Register listing for P.S. 109 – National listing will follow this fall. Recently, the Coalition joined forces with the East Harlem Coalition to Improve Our Public Schools. As efforts continue to prevent further damage to the building by neglect, the two groups are working to secure the full repair, restoration and reopening of P.S. 109 as an educational facility to serve the youth of East Harlem. To HDC, this is a model preservation effort – its meaning goes beyond saving a

significant and beautiful building, it is also about serving an entire community. We are pleased to present this Grassroots Preservation Award to The Coalition to Save P.S. 109, and we congratulate Gwen Goodwin, Raymond Plumey, David Corbin, Wilton K. Duckworth on their valiant efforts.

4. Save the Coogan! Coalition: John Jurayj, Kate Wood, Laurence Frommer. Presented by HDC Board Member Jack Taylor.

“As a Historic Districts Council Board member who is a bit longer in the tooth than the New York City Landmarks Law, I have felt for some time that the historic preservation movement desperately needs an injection of youthful adrenaline. In the three Grassroots Preservation Award winners we are now privileged to honor, we have found that ideal combination of youth, enthusiasm, advocacy, and land-use and landmarking know-how to whom to pass the mantle when the rest of us succumb to burn-out or worse. Over the past year, John Jurayj, Kate Wood, and Laurence Frommer galvanized the whole movement by forming the Save the Coogan! Coalition, rallying public and political support in an effort to stave off demolition of the wonderful 1876 Coogan Building, an eclectic arcaded Romanesque Revival structure on Manhattan’s Avenue of the Americas and West 26<sup>th</sup> Street that was an early forerunner of skyscraper-type construction in New York City. Although the strenuous efforts of this youthful trio ultimately failed – and, sadly, the Coogan is no more, -- their relentless campaigning gave much-needed stimulus to spotlighting similar crises or potential crises in Midtown South, where there are fierce development pressures on many other buildings worthy of preservation. So, John Jurayj, please step forward. John grew up in Evanston, Illinois, and received a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1990 from Washington University in St. Louis. He currently lives and works as an artist in Williamsburg – Williamsburg, Brooklyn, that is. But his historic-preservation involvement is citywide. Congratulations, John. Next of the trio is Kate Wood. Kate discovered historic preservation when she was 17 – and that was only nine years ago (if I may indirectly divulge a lady’s age). She is now finishing her Master’s degree in Historic Preservation and Urban Planning at Columbia University. The Coogan Building became her focus after she participated in a class study of historic resources in Midtown South, a study that will be published in a report Kate plans to complete this autumn. Congratulations, Kate. The third of the triumvirate is Laurence Frommer. Laurence is a student in the Hunter College Graduate Urban Planning Program. Last year he was the Tucker Ashworth Fellow at the Municipal Art Society, working on a comprehensive study of the impact of new signage technologies – an issue that the Department of City Planning is right now grappling with. He has worked with various city agencies on streetscape enhancement and on public-space and public-art issues. Congratulations, Laurence.”

5. Modernist Warrior: Michael Gotkin. Award accepted by Michael Gotkin. Presented by HDC Board Member Laura Hansen.

Michael Gotkin, a Landscape Architect and City Planner, has been a steadfast advocate for architectural preservation in New York City. For the past few years he has brought attention to the plight of the City’s outstanding, but sometimes overlooked, collection of postwar buildings, interiors and landscapes. As a dedicated member of the Municipal Art Society’s Modern Architecture Committee, Michael helped to develop the master list of New York City’s significant modern structures, securing landmark status for important postwar buildings like the Ford Foundation, CBS Corporate Headquarters, and Manufacturers Hanover Bank. Michael is also determined to expand the definition of modern landmarks by promoting and defending

unheralded postwar building types such as playgrounds, vest-pocket parks, corporate plazas, public housing projects, performing arts complexes, shopping centers and works of public art. He has led or helped to strategize a number of notable, and usually controversial, preservation battles, including: The Children's Zoo, Bolivar Plaza, and Adventure Playgrounds – all in Central Park; the mosaic-tile benches at Grant's Tomb; the Edgar Kaufmann conference rooms designed by Alvar Aalto; the Isamu Noguchi designed lobby of the Tishman building at 666 Fifth Avenue; Edward Durell Stone's Huntington Hartford building; and, most recently, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and the Time-Life Building lobby and plaza. In addition to his design, planning and preservation work, Michael founded the League of Urban Landscape Architects, a landscape advocacy organization, and has organized exhibitions for the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. HDC is constantly impressed by the quality of the reports Michael creates to document, promote, and advocate for threatened postwar masterpieces. We are all very fortunate to have such a devoted warrior for the preservation of Modern Movement architecture among us, to remind us of its importance and to galvanize us to work to protect it. We happily award Michael Gotkin a Grassroots Preservation Award.

6. Friend from the Fourth Estate: Jim O'Grady. Presented by HDC Adviser Linda C. Jones.

Jim O'Grady writes for the City Section of the New York Times, primarily covering Queens and Staten Island. His "City Lore," "New York On-line," and "Neighborhood Reports" columns have highlighted many preservation battles, and his pieces about neighborhood controversies from bus routes to shopping centers are legion. Many of his articles emphasize the significance and importance of preservation to our communities, and he has covered both the preservation tragedies that we suffer (such as the fire at Mt. Loretto), and the triumphs that we enjoy (like the State and National Register listing of Douglaston Hill). Jim and his wife, Diana Yates (who writes for the Staten Island Advance), are former residents of Spanish Camp on Staten Island. He is Dorothy Day scholar, the author of a young-adult biography of Day, and an ardent advocate for the preservation and interpretation of Dorothy Day's former home at Spanish Camp. He is now the President of The Dorothy Day Historic Site and is working with a number of Staten Island and citywide preservation advocates on a plan that will hopefully preserve the cottages and make them accessible to the public. As a writer, he has explored a number of important preservation topics on the pages of the "paper of record," the New York Times. These include: the threatened terra cotta murals at Seaview Hospital; EDC's plan to build senior housing in a historic district; malls that threaten Elmhurst Queens; the National Lighthouse Center & Museum; the work of Preserve & Protect; missing architectural detail and the importance of historic designation; and the struggle of the Snug Harbor East neighborhood to create a historic district. Jim very much contributes to the public dialogue about historic preservation through his thoughtful writing, and he pays attention to our issues. For this reason, HDC thinks of him as a very good Friend from the Fourth Estate. We are happy to present him with a Grassroots Preservation Award.

7. Friend in High Places: New York City Councilman Jerome X. O'Donovan. Presented by HDC Board Member David Goldfarb.

Jerome X. O'Donovan is a member of the City Council of New York representing the 49th Council District located on the North Shore of Staten Island. He was elected to the City Council in 1981. Since 1986, Council Member O'Donovan has served as the Chair of the Council's Economic Development Committee, and is an active member of the Council's Land Use and Finance Committees. Jay became a convert to historic preservation when he took a lead in

helping the St. George Civic Association obtain the first residential historic district on Staten Island. He was a tireless advocate, carrying the community's wishes to the Landmarks Preservation Commission and its Chair Laurie Beckelman, to the City Planning Commission and to the City Council. Since then, he has spread the word about the many virtues and benefits of historic preservation, and has provided significant support for communities such as Stapleton and Snug Harbor East in their quests for historic district designation. Councilman O'Donovan has also been an advocate for individual landmarks. To prevent its destruction by developers, he advocated the landmarking of 79 Howard Avenue in Grymes Hill, which was recently heard by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. And most recently, this past year he supported the community's efforts to designate the 120th Precinct Building. Jay has also been a major advocate for hillside preservation and down-zoning on the North Shore. On numerous occasions, he has moved quickly and aggressively to stop developers who have violated the Hillside Zoning regulations. Among the many bills that he has sponsored was legislation to curtail the sale of graffiti materials. This is a City Councilman who has listened to his constituents and has made an enormous effort to learn about and become active in preservation. HDC likes nothing more than to recognize, congratulate, and most of all, thank, public officials who take on our causes, support our work, and show leadership regarding preservation issues to their peers. It is a great pleasure to honor Councilman O'Donovan, this year's Friend in High Places, with a Grassroots Preservation Award.

As this is the last award, I suggest that Hal close the program with a few concluding remarks.