

Rockefeller Foundation *news advisory*

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Rockefeller Foundation Announces 2008 Jane Jacobs Medalists

New York, NY, Embargoed until 11:00 AM E.S.T. May 5, 2008 –The Rockefeller Foundation announced today the two recipients of the 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal.

Peggy Shepard will be given the 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership, and Alexie Torres-Fleming will be given the 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism. Along with the Medal, Shepard and Torres-Fleming will each receive \$100,000. The Medals will be awarded to Shepard and Torres-Fleming at a ceremony on September 8th at the Morgan Library and Museum.

The Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medal was created in 2007 in honor of the author and activist who died in April 2006 at the age of 89. The Rockefeller Foundation's relationship to Jane Jacobs dates back to the 1950s, when the Foundation launched an Urban Design Studies program that helped foster the emergence of the new discipline of urban design and theory. As part of this initiative, one of the Foundation's first grants was to the then-obscure writer from Greenwich Village, for the research and writing of a book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Almost fifty years later, Jane Jacobs' book is still one of the most celebrated and important volumes on urban planning.

"Yesterday, May 5th, was Jane Jacobs' birthday. Today we are celebrating two individuals who follow the Jacobsean principle of upholding the needs of living communities in the urban, built environment," said Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation. "And as we approach Mother's Day, I'm reminded that Robert Moses dismissed Jane Jacobs and her fellow protesters of the Lower Manhattan Expressway as 'nobody but a bunch of mothers.' With Peggy Shepard and Alexie Torres-Fleming we have two more mothers and extraordinary citizens who, like Jane, are bold activists who have successfully taken their principles to the streets."

Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership

Peggy Shepard, 61, is the executive director and co-founder of West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT). WE ACT has been a leader in the effort to publicize and combat the historic practice of locating environmentally harmful facilities in working-class communities of color.

When Shepard co-founded WE ACT in 1988, in a classic Jane Jacobs strategy, she organized her neighborhood, the residents of Harlem, to demand a commitment from the City to repair the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, a site that had been emitting noxious pollutants. WE ACT won a \$1.1 Million settlement of its lawsuit against the City, as well as a monitoring role with the Natural Resources Defense Council in the enforcement of the city-state consent agreement on a plan to fix the North River plant. Under Shepard's direction, WE ACT also led a program to map and document the rate of air pollutants and

asthma in Harlem and used this research to push the MTA to adopt system-wide diesel retrofit technology and the early use of cleaner fuels to achieve what is, according to the MTA, the cleanest fleet in the nation.

Peggy Shepard has been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement for more than twenty years. Her pioneering work has been recognized as a model for communities around the country. From January 2001 to 2003, Ms. Shepard served as the first female chair of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; she currently serves as the co-chair of the Northeast Environmental Justice Network.

Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medal for New Ideas and Activism

Alexie Torres-Fleming, 43, is the founder of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ) in the South Bronx. In addition, she is the co-founder of the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance, a coalition of local groups that is “confronting the legacy of Robert Moses” by campaigning to replace the Sheridan Expressway with affordable housing and green spaces. She is also a founding member of the Bronx River Alliance, a group that played crucial role in the creation of the Hunts Point Riverside Park and in the effort to clean-up and make accessible the Bronx River, a natural resource that had become an industrial dumping ground.

Torres-Fleming’s work exemplifies Jacobsean principles--generating creative use of the urban environment and providing neighborhood leadership to solve common problems. Her leadership in her community dates back to 1992, when she helped lead a march to protest the drug-dealing and violence plaguing the South Bronx neighborhood where she grew up. The drug dealers retaliated by burning down her parish church, a building that she and the protestors had been using as their headquarters. This attack, far from discouraging Torres-Fleming, emboldened her to become even more involved in her old neighborhood. She moved back to the South Bronx from Manhattan and founded YMPJ, a faith-based, community development organization that aims to empower local youth. Using education and community development, YMPJ has helped a generation of Bronx children discover that through advocacy, community organizing, journalism, environmentalism, and the arts, they can play an active role in shaping and improving their neighborhood. This fall, the group will open “Concrete Plant Park” on the site of an abandoned concrete plant on the Bronx River.

Alexie lives in the South Bronx with her husband and two children, a few blocks from the housing project where she grew up. Alexie remembers watching the burning of the Bronx from her bedroom window as a young girl. Thanks in part to her work, Alexie’s neighbors now have a view of a healthier and greener neighborhood.

The Rockefeller Foundation 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal Jury

The selection of the Jane Jacobs Medalists and allocation of the prize money was decided by the members of the Jane Jacobs Medal Selection Jury. The Jury is co-chaired by George Campbell Jr., president of The Cooper Union, and Agnes Gund, president emerita of the Museum of Modern Art, and includes Rockefeller Foundation trustee David Rockefeller, Jr. The complete list of jurors follows:

Bill Aguado
Executive Director, Bronx Council on the Arts

Sayu Bhojwani
Philanthropic Consultant to the Carnegie Corporation and

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former Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs for NYC

George Campbell, Jr. (Co-Chair)
President, The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

W. Paul Farmer
Executive Director and CEO, American Planning Association

Tom Finkelpearl
Executive Director, Queens Museum of Art

Paul Goldberger
Architecture Critic, *The New Yorker*
Joseph Urban Professor of Design, The New School, New York

Agnes Gund (Co-Chair)
President Emerita, The Museum of Modern Art

Christopher Kui
Executive Director, Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE)

David Rockefeller, Jr.
Director and former Chair, Rockefeller & Co., Inc.
Trustee of The Museum of Modern Art & The Rockefeller Foundation

Marilyn J. Taylor
Partner-in-Charge of Urban Design and Planning, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Alberto Vourvoulias-Bush
Executive Editor of *El Diario/La Prensa*

Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York

The 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal is administered by the Municipal Art Society (MAS).

In 2007, the Rockefeller Foundation and the MAS partnered to mount an exhibit and program series entitled "Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York." This year, through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the MAS will continue to explore New York City through a Jacobsean lens in a series of walking tours in the spring and fall. The spring tours will include:

Saturday, May 17, 11:00 a.m.: Cities Are For People: Midtown with Matt Postal

Sunday, May 25, 2:00 p.m.: Brooklyn Heights: America's First Suburb with Francis Morrone

Sunday, June 1, 2:00 p.m.: Unslumming, Urban Renewal, Gentrification: The Fates of the Lower East Side with Francis Morrone

Sunday, June 8, 11:00 a.m.: Lincoln Center Revisited with Matt Postal

Sunday, June 29, 2:00 p.m.: Forest Hills: Garden City in the City with Francis Morrone

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In addition, the MAS will organize public symposia in the fall that will explore pressing issues, such as the integration of large-scale developments that are being proposed for the city today.

The Municipal Art Society of New York is a private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to promote a more livable city. Since 1893, the MAS has worked to enrich the culture, neighborhoods and physical design of New York City. It advocates for excellence in urban design and planning, contemporary architecture, historic preservation and public art. Visit www.mas.org for more information on tours and programs.

The Rockefeller Foundation was established in 1913 by John D. Rockefeller, Sr., to "promote the well-being" of humanity by addressing the root causes of serious problems. The Foundation supports work around the world to expand opportunities for poor or vulnerable people and to help ensure that globalization's benefits are more widely shared. With assets of nearly \$4 billion, it is one of the few institutions to conduct such work both within the United States and internationally. Visit www.rockfound.org for more information.

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