



City of Slidell

Dept. of Cultural & Public Affairs • Press Release for Immediate Release

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And the winner is....the City of Slidell.

Slidell takes home the Gold Award at National League of Cities Expo.

The City of Slidell took home the first place Gold Award for Municipal Excellence at the 86th annual National League of Cities' Congress of Cities & Exposition in San Antonio, Texas, for its program titled "Strengthening the Community and the Economy through the Arts."

Slidell holds the distinct honor of being the only Louisiana city ever to have received the prestigious award in its 20 year history, and is the only 2009 recipient being recognized for arts programming. Joining Slidell in the Gold Award Winning circle are Savannah, Ga., Long Beach, Ca., and New York City. Silver Award Winners include Estes Park., Colo., Burnsville, Minn., St. Louis, Mo., and Seattle, Wa.

The awards ceremony was held Friday, November 13, during the NLC's expo, which was attended by an estimated 3,500 government officials from 49 states and the District of Columbia.

The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC serves as a resource and advocate for 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 218 million Americans. The organization's Awards for Municipal Excellence recognize city programs demonstrating community determination, individual commitment, outstanding collaboration and creativity toward improving the quality of life in local communities. The awards have been given since 1989 and are divided into four population categories: cities with populations under 50,000; 50,001 - 150,000; 150,001 - 500,000; and over 500,000. Each category has two winners: Gold and Silver.

"These eight Awards for Municipal Excellence cities have improved the quality of life for their citizens by developing creative solutions to pressing local problems," said Donald J. Borut, NLC executive director. "I congratulate them for establishing model programs that can serve as positive examples for other cities."

According to Ann Kelly, NLC's Senior Member Relations Representative of the Center for Public Affairs & Member Relations, judges were impressed by Slidell's community engagement and widespread benefits of the cultural events, and that the city builds upon assets to maximize the overall impact of the program. Kelly stated that the city's submission was "easily among the very best presented."

"It doesn't get any better than this," said Slidell Mayor Ben O. Morris. "To be in the same company as the other three gold award winners is just amazing. I'm very proud of our Cultural Affairs Department, which spearheads our event programming, and I commend all of the city employees who have worked in conjunction with these events. They all help make Slidell a truly great community."

When Morris took office in 2002, the city already offered exhibits in its Slidell Cultural Center, a Brown Bag Concert Series, arts-in-education programming and annual Arts Evening and Christmas Under the Stars festivals. In 2003, the mayor initiated a spring and fall Bayou Jam Concert Series, and in 2004, he added the annual outdoor symphony concert featuring the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra to the city's cultural calendar. His vision for revitalizing the heart of the city resulted in the addition of Olde Towne Alive concerts and block parties in 2008.

Because nearly all of the events offer free admission, in 2004, then-Media Specialist Kim Bergeron developed the city's Cultural Season Sponsorship program, public-private partnerships which secured adequate funding for the events. In its inaugural year, the program raised \$9,000. Sponsorships have steadily increased every year, with the current season's funding and grants totaling \$74,000.

"We're so blessed to be in a community that embraces the arts with such enthusiasm," said Bergeron, who now serves as the Cultural & Public Affairs Director. She is joined by Media Specialist Alex Carollo and Administrative Secretary Susan Schmidt in the production of the city's many events, plus the city's new Main Street Manager, Catherine Olivier, whose efforts have grown the Olde Towne Alive block parties.

"Slidell offers over 40 cultural events every year, all of which enhance our quality of life, increase tourism and help us attract new businesses," said Mayor Morris. "The intrinsic and economic impact are undeniable. We're incredibly grateful for all of our Cultural Season sponsors whose contributions have made these offerings possible."

In addition to receiving the award, Slidell was one of 33 cities invited to participate in the City Showcase at the conference, where the city displayed its award-winning cultural program.

Each year, the Awards for Municipal Excellence are given jointly by NLC and CH2M HILL, one of the country's largest engineering, construction and consulting firms.

"For the past 20 years, CH2M HILL has proudly partnered with the National League of Cities to honor CH2M HILL Founder Jim Howland, and to recognize outstanding municipal projects. We congratulate the 2009 winners; you continue a long legacy of strengthening communities through social, economic and environmental leadership," said Lee McIntire, CH2M HILL president and CEO.

Gold winners receive awards of \$2,000 and silver winners receive \$1,000. The awards are donated to community non-profit organizations of the city's choice. Additional information regarding the Awards program can be found at www.nlc.org

The award winners were selected by a panel of judges: Karen Anderson, former president, National League of Cities; Del D. Borgsdorf, Executive Vice President, Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce; Robin Cooper, Director of Member Services, Kentucky League of Cities; Jim Dailey, former mayor, Little Rock, Ark.; Cynthia McCollum, former president, National League of Cities; Saul Ramirez Jr., Executive Director, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials; Jeffrey Soule, Director of Outreach and International Programs, American Planning Association; Dee Vanderhoef, former councilmember, Iowa City, Iowa; and Jennifer S. Vey, Fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution.



Photo: Mayor Kathleen M. Novak, Northglenn, CO, President of NLC; Slidell Mayor Ben O. Morris; Slidell Cultural & Public Affairs Director Kim Bergeron; Slidell Media Specialist Alex Carollo; Slidell City Councilman Landon Cusimano; and Lee McIntire, President and CEO of CH2M HILL, at the National League of Cities' Awards for Municipal Excellence presentation on Friday, November 13, San Antonio, Tx.

