

## ***EXCEPTIONAL ... BY DESIGN***

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**Memo:** Jim Beamguard is a Tribune editorial writer.

Noteworthy examples of community design earn acclaim from a Hillsborough planning agency.

The character and beauty of a community are the result of thousands of independent decisions by developers, officials, architects, planners and local residents themselves.

Their best work produces a building, community project or neighborhood that serves generations and is widely cherished.

The year's top efforts in Hillsborough County were recognized Thursday night at an awards banquet hosted by the City-County Planning Commission. Over the 21 years the awards have been given, the quality of the projects has improved and the pool of applicants has deepened, says planning commission Executive Director Bob Hunter.

Three levels of awards, 23 in all, were given in a number of categories. Here are the highlights:

The building housing D.W. Waters Center, a vocational training school, had grown shabby until the Hillsborough School District and Rowe Architects restored the Tampa Heights landmark to its former majesty. It was built in 1910 as the county's first high school. Nearly 100 years later, it looks better than new and ready for another century of service.

The Lutz community and its Lutz Nature Park Board were lauded for transforming an overgrown, garbage-strewn two-acre parcel on Lutz-Lake Fern Road into the Lutz Nature Park, complete with picnic pavilions and boardwalk. As Lutz residents earlier demonstrated with their construction of a replica train station as a community gathering place, valuable public amenities can be created without government help.

But some remarkable public projects also have been completed. The TECO Line Streetcar System won top honors for the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority, the city of Tampa, and URS Corp. The replicas of historic Tampa

streetcars that operate on a 2.3-mile line are already popular with tourists and are sure to become an identifying icon for Tampa.

HARTline was also recognized for the maintenance barn for the streetcars. The modern industrial structure is made of brick and fits perfectly into the historic district with its old cigar warehouses. It is much more interesting than the parking lot it replaced.

And speaking of parking, Ybor City parking garages have raised the standard for what had traditionally been concrete eyesores. The Fernando Noreiga, Jr. Palm Avenue Parking Garage won praise for the city of Tampa, Hillsborough Community College and Fleischman Garcia Architects. Like the streetcar barn and Centro Ybor Parking Garage, the carefully detailed Palm Avenue garage looks right at home in Ybor City, especially with Palm Avenue traffic flowing right through it.

One of the most revolutionary changes is seen in the area of affordable housing. Disappearing are the square, bleak boxes that once signaled a public housing project. A top award went to the Tampa Housing Authority and Michaels Development Co. for the project Belmont Heights Estates Phase II. By combining government-subsidized housing with market-rate apartments and traditional houses that are available for purchase, housing officials and the developer offer streets on which anyone would be proud to live.

The housing authority also was recognized for the innovative and attractive SoHo Place Apartments in south Tampa.

Unfortunately, not all great ideas become reality. Cooper, Johnson Smith Architects and Newland Communities won top honors for designing a town center for the FishHawk residential development southeast of Brandon. The plan called for a mixed-use village and old-fashioned Main Street on a scale that encouraged walking to shops and school.

This year Hunter presented the Executive Director's Award to Tampa Tribune Editorial Page Editor Edwin A. Roberts, Jr. for many years of editorials and columns advocating sound planning.

"At times, these pieces didn't make him or his staff popular with everyone," Hunter said. "They've spanned issues ranging from rail and other transportation issues to financing the cost of growth and have included topics such as community design, managing growth and school siting."

Here are more winners not mentioned above:

Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority, Federal Transit Administration and BRW/URS Corporation: an Award of Merit for the Tampa Rail Project, a proposed 20-mile commuter rail system with 26 stations. The rail line will connect downtown Tampa to the University of South Florida, south Tampa and the West Shore business district if voters approve a tax to pay for it.

**Hamilton Jones** of Gaspar Properties: an Award of Merit for restoration of the Palace of Florence apartments, built in 1926 on Davis Islands.  
The Hillsborough County Public Works Department, Bayside Engineering and Sprinkle Consulting: an Award of Merit for the county's sidewalk plan that made the safety of schoolchildren a top priority.

The Tampa Heights Community Advisory Committee: an Award of Merit for the Tampa Heights Community Plan, approved by 97 percent of those who voted.  
The Southwest Florida Water Management District's SWIM program and the Hillsborough County Parks & Recreation Department: an Award of Merit for the Davis Tract Restoration Project on Tampa Bay. The county Parks and Recreation Department was also recognized for the outstanding Ed Radice Sports Complex, one of the largest youth sports complexes in the Southeast.  
University of South Florida School of Architecture & Community Design: an Award of Recognition for Ribbon of Green: A Park for USF, at the mouth of the Hillsborough River.

USF School of Architecture & Community Design Urban Design Studio: an Award of Recognition for "Design Investigations for Tampa's Urban Core," plans for improving downtown Tampa.

Terrabrook: an Award of Recognition for the exciting new waterfront community in South Hillsborough called MiraBay.

The city of Temple Terrace Community Development Department and the Hillsborough County Community Improvement Department: an Award of Recognition for inviting housing rehabilitation in Temple Terrace.

Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum and John Hancock Real Estate Investment Group: an Award of Recognition for converting a failed retail mall, Eastlake Square, into a high-tech employment center, Netpark Tampa Bay, where 3,000 people now work.

Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart & Associates and Bales and Weinstein, P.A.: an Award of Recognition for Courthouse Plaza downtown.

The city of Tampa's Public Works and Parks departments and the Florida Department of Transportation: an Award of Recognition for the New Tampa Multi-Use Trail.

Borrell Electric Co., the city of Tampa Parks Department and the Mayor's Beautification Program: an Award of Recognition for Borrell Park.

Hillsborough Community College Honors Institute and Excalibur Signs: an Award of Recognition for the Hillsborough River Manatee Awareness Sign.