

Catasauqua Celebrates Its Distinctiveness

A decade ago, Catasauqua faced the challenges of a struggling downtown, a vacant brownfield site and few prospects for new development.

That's when borough officials decided they would lead the way for downtown rebirth. The borough bought the former Iron Works site and mapped out plans for a new Municipal Building complex that would serve as the anchor for the Waterfront Redevelopment Project.

Today, the \$11.2 million police, fire and borough building is the centerpiece of a downtown where developers are now proposing an ambitious office, retail and residential development.

For that vision, the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) named Catasauqua its 2017 Community of Distinction, and Monday the LVPC gave the borough a way to share its honor with people entering the borough.

During a community event at the Municipal Building complex, LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley unveiled steel signs emblazoned with the "Community of Distinction" title and logo, to be placed along borough roads.

"Catasauqua didn't just sit around and hope that developers would come in to rejuvenate their downtown. They showed a lot of vision and took a leadership role," Bradley said before the ceremony. "We are honored to present them with these signs celebrating their commitment to planning excellence."

For the past four years during its annual awards gala, the LVPC has named one Community of Distinction for its commitment to sound planning that makes the region a better place.

The sign unveiling came during a community event that included food, live entertainment and a display of historical exhibits from the Iron Works site.

State Rep. Jeanne McNeill appeared to present the borough with a Legislative Citation recognizing the award. Ceremony speakers included McNeill, Catasauqua Mayor Barbara Schlegel, Lehigh County Executive Phil Armstrong, and LVPC board members Liesel Dreisbach and Steven Glickman.

"As a former resident of Catasauqua and a former teacher in the Catasauqua School District, I'm so impressed with the community spirit here," Armstrong said. "When you do something, you do it right. It's a symbol of living here."

After a nearly decade-long effort to get the Iron Works project off the ground, the borough has reason to celebrate a little, said Borough Manager Steve Travers, who credited Borough Council and former longtime Borough Manager Gene Goldfeder for shepherding the masterplan.

“The lead they took enabled people and developers to see the vision of what could be done,” Travers said before the ceremony. “It served as the kick-starter. We’re hoping this will draw more people and more investment to our community.”

Borough officials said four signs will likely be placed at entrances into the borough, including along Race and Lehigh streets. Future sign presentations will be made September 12 to 2014 Community of Distinction Bethlehem, September 19 to 2016 winner South Whitehall Township and October 4 to 2015 winner Bushkill Township.

This year’s 5th Annual Lehigh Valley Gala + Awards is scheduled for October 10 at DeSales University Center. More than two dozen communities have been nominated for awards.

More information is available by contacting LVPC Managing Editor Matt Assad at 610-264-4544, or massad@lvpc.org.