

Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation
2009 Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medal Awards Ceremony
41 Cooper Square, The Cooper Union, New York City
Tuesday, September 29, 2009

Last summer, when President-to-be Obama campaigned in Toledo, Ohio, a young mayoral candidate stood in the crowd and mounted an eloquent defense of America's cities and towns. He said he supported the senator because cities needed a friend, not a foe, in the nation's capital. Then he offered the senator a gift. He called it the single most important book ever written about rebuilding cities. Before the guy had a chance to finish his statement – without missing a beat – Senator Obama asked, “Is it Jane Jacobs?”

While some things have changed in a half-century – Jane purchased her Hudson Street townhouse for \$7,000 in 1947; it went on the market for \$3.5 million this summer – others remain exactly as they were. One commentator put it so well: Jane's vision has been vindicated and validated at so many times and in so many places that, by now, one can hardly think of this city – or any city – without thinking about her and like her.

This is certainly the case for my Rockefeller Foundation colleagues and me. In October, 1959 – a half century ago this month – our predecessors approved the second of two grants to support Jane Jacobs' monograph in progress. It was a sometimes frustrating writing project that evolved into that “single most important book ever written about rebuilding cities.”

For Jacobs, publication of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* marked the beginning of an extraordinary career, committed to causes of social justice and civic activism and devoted to realizing the principle that communities affected by public policy ought to have a voice in its creation.

For the Rockefeller Foundation, the collaboration with Jacobs began fifty years of thinking about and working on urban issues. This half century's experience informs our perspective on today's urban challenges: housing and infrastructure, energy and education, the environment and economy. And these challenges only intensify as interconnected and accelerating forces of globalization and urbanization fuel a worldwide demographic revolution – driving the majority of people into cities and metropolitan regions for the first time in history, unleashing new risks and opportunities.

For our part, we help strengthen resilience to these new risks and build capacity to tap into these new opportunities – block by block, innovation by innovation, and city by city. It's coded in our DNA. The Foundation helped establish the field of urban theory and design during the late 1950s. It directed seed money to community-based development organizations during and after the urban crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. It swung open the doors of affordable and supportive housing through the 1980s and 90s. We mobilized New Orleans' comprehensive, unified regional planning effort when Katrina's flood water receded. Today we also shape public policies that will help working families access affordable transit options while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In our hometown, our current work is governed by Jane's conviction that we make our city better by making our senses of connection and community deeper. We promote cultural innovation and creative expression. We help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty with a pioneering cash incentive program. We support development of strategies and services to help neighborhoods

prepare for the consequences of climate change. And we help local leaders harness the power of volunteerism and activism.

All of these programmatic engagements remain deeply rooted in Jane Jacobs' ideas and ideals, as do the Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medals. After Jane's passing in 2007, my colleagues and I decided to honor her continuing impact by recognizing and rewarding two remarkable New Yorkers for their contributions to the "life of" our "great American city." We could not be prouder of Barry Benepe and Omar Freilla in 2007 and Peggy Shepard and Alexie Torres-Fleming in 2008. Nor could we be more pleased to present and pay tribute to Richard Kahan and Damaris Reyes this evening. In their lifetimes of leadership – in their new ideas and activism – we see that while Jane's voice may have fallen silent, her vision lives on.

Jane once wrote that "in order for a society to flourish, there must be a flourishing city at its core." She was precisely right and that recognition guides our investments to help cities flourish around the world. But we also know this: In order for a city to flourish, there must be active and engaged citizens at its core, dreamers and doers who embrace the notion that citizenship is only given meaning by the measure of our actions. We are privileged to gather in a room replete with commendable citizens tonight. I salute all of you. But I'm especially proud to acknowledge the accomplishments of two.

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