

Above Average Joes

LA Downtown News

July 26, 2004

by Kathryn Maese

While business and political leaders pushing mega projects like the Staples Center expansion and the new Walt Disney Concert Hall are adding to the Downtown renaissance, our readers think that the Average Joes deserve just as many kudos for making a difference in smaller but equally important ways.

Borrowing a page from the "Average Joe" reality show, which seeks to pair a regular guy with a beautiful woman, we asked readers: "What Average Joe Deserves to Be Honored for His or Her Work in Downtown?"

We chose a sample of the dozens of entries submitted, which include everyone from a volunteer town crier to a community leader to Central Division police officers. To those who labor in the shadows for the benefit of Downtown, the readers salute you.

Hear Ye, Hear Ye

Local resident and community activist Don Garza received several votes for his work as the official Downtown town crier. Garza assumed the role last year, and sports colonial-style costume befitting the designation. As part of his services, he touts the activities of the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council, and can sometimes be seen informing tourists about Downtown's sights. Garza, whose infectious enthusiasm has won him a following, takes the role very seriously and has networked with several national and international town crier associations.

Above Average Ambassadors

The Purple Patrol, as they are known Downtown, are always a favorite among readers, who lauded the Downtown Center Business Improvement District ambassadors for their work directing lost locals and tourists with kiosks set up throughout the area. They also help the homeless with services and act as Downtown's greeters. Clad in purple polo shirts, khaki shorts and straw hats, the always-polite team has earned the thanks of our readers.

A Standing Ovation

A few years ago, Steve Needleman bought the historic Orpheum Theatre, which had been abandoned and neglected. After infusing millions of dollars into its renovation, the Broadway movie palace has been brought back as a venue for live shows, concerts,

awards functions and community events. Needleman also built loft-style apartments above the structure, and is helping to bring Broadway back to life, one step at a time.

Blooming in the Arts District

Joel Bloom, owner of the Downtown institution Bloom's General Store, garnered kudos from readers for his work on behalf of artists and residents. Bloom is regarded as the unofficial mayor of the Arts District, and has been a strong voice on the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council. He also has a hand in nearly every major issue affecting the district, from a plan to locate Parker Center in the area to filming grievances.

Bravo to Blue

The men and women assigned to Downtown's challenging Central Division beat work a thankless job. They deal with drugs, prostitution and murders. Several readers offered praise for the police officers, who are helping to improve the quality of life on the streets one day at a time.