



Perris Press Release

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Perris Planning Award a Tribute to Brad Eckhardt

The City of Perris has won a 2011 award from the American Planning Association for its efforts to restore and bring back to life the art deco Perris Theatre on historic D Street.

Planning Manager Clara Miramontes led a contingent of City planners and Development Service employees in accepting the award May 19 at the Riverside Art Museum.

The occasion also included a tribute to former Planning Manager Brad Eckhardt, who was killed in a motorcycle accident in July 2010. Eckhardt began planning the restoration of the theatre and Miramontes has spear-headed continuing efforts since his death. A scholarship fund was established in Eckhardt's name and the first recipient was announced at the award ceremony.

"The Perris Theater is one of the City's historic resources dating back to the 1930s," Miramontes said. "The restoration and re-use of the Perris Theater is another strong indicator that the City remains committed to preserving our historic resources, honoring our cultural heritage and revitalizing our neighborhoods."

Eckhardt's family—widow Edna, daughters Vanessa and Jessica and son R.J.—attended the ceremony in Riverside. Roland Escalona, a graduate student at Cal Poly Pomona, was the first recipient of the Bradley R. Eckhardt Memorial Scholarship, which honors his "outstanding dedication and achievement in the planning profession."

Vanessa Eckhardt, who attends Palomar College in San Marcos, said the family is proud of Brad Eckhardt's legacy.

"He's helping others through this scholarship," she said.

Perris City Clerk Judy Haughney read a tribute to Eckhardt.

"It is a distinct honor for me to be here this evening and to accept this award on behalf of the Eckhardt family," she said. "After Brad's death last year the City of Perris was trying to find a fitting tribute to Brad that embodied who he truly was. The idea of a memorial scholarship was born and the City established the Brad Eckhardt Memorial Scholarship Fund with contributions forwarded to the Inland Empire Chapter of the American Planning Association Student Scholarship Award." Haughney said Eckhardt was "a friend, a mentor, and an inspiration to all that knew him."

"Next to Brad's family, whom he adored, Brad's passion was Planning," Haughney said. "With Brad's unique talents and abilities the City of Perris has truly been brought to the next level. We felt that there was no better way to honor Brad's life and the things that meant so much to him than to establish this fund so that young people, just starting out, would have the ability to continue the legacy of Brad's dreams and passions."

APA awards are nothing new to Perris.

Last year, Perris planners took home awards for developing the Commercial Façade Improvement Program to remake D Street, restoring the Bank of Perris and Train Depot and continuing excellence in developing a sustainable community.

Work on the Perris Theatre began with the restoration of the exterior last year. Once an open-air theatre, the City hired contractors who painted the 1930s building and repaired its outside façade. Work on the interior continues, even while a committee of City officials and residents begin discussions about the best way to exploit the renovated theatre.

Some ideas include using the venue as a comedy club, small concert hall or for holding film festivals. City officials earned major kudos for using the theatre for the Chamber of Commerce installation dinner and Centennial Fashion show earlier this year.

City Councilman Al Landers, who also serves on the committee to find new uses for the theatre, said Perris is fortunate to have historically significant buildings.

"We in Perris have what other cities wish they did—real historic places that people can touch, feel and experience," Landers said. "I am proud to be a member of the team that is helping make a difference by bringing our historical buildings back to life. I commend the service of Brad Eckhardt, all our planners and our entire City staff for making this award possible."

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Joanne Evans, a member of the committee exploring future options for the Perris Theatre, visited similar venues in Pomona and Upland. She believes the Perris Theatre, when completely renovated, will become a jewel for the City.

"It's got all the potential in the world," Evans said. "I am so pleased that our City planners have been recognized for their efforts in saving this historic landmark. They have worked very, very hard to preserve this historical piece of property. They are doing an awesome job and do not receive enough praise for their hard work."



Perris Housing Manager Sabrina Chavez visits with the family of former Planning Manager Brad Eckhardt—widow, Edna; son, R.J.; daughter, Vanessa and daughter, Jessica—during the American Planning Association awards ceremony in Riverside last week.



Perris officials accept the Landmark Award for renovations at the Perris Theatre.



Perris City Clerk Judy Haughney accepted the Bradley R. Eckhardt Memorial Scholarship Plaque along with Brad's family.



Vanessa Eckhardt, Edna Eckhardt and Perris City Clerk Judy Haughney at the American Planning Association Awards ceremony.