



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

## 2010 Annual Awards Program

### Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

**Deadline for Nominations: March 12, 2010**

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

#### SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Vision Assemblies & Annual Strategic Planning  
Lead to Renaissance of Local Schools and the City's Quality of Life

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: City of Delray Beach

Jurisdiction population(s): 64,250

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2009, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: May Year: 1988

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in San José, California, October 2010. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: David T. Harden

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: City of Delray BEach

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Jurisdiction: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact**

Name of contact: Richard Reade

Title: Sustainability Officer

Jurisdiction: City of Delray Beach

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## **Strategic Leadership and Governance Award**

### **ICMA 2010 Annual Awards Program Program Excellence Awards**

### **Vision Assemblies & Annual Strategic Planning Lead to Renaissance of Local Schools and the City's Quality of Life**

**March 2010**

Today, Delray Beach is a thriving coastal community located in southern Palm Beach County that is known for its incredible downtown, diverse communities, world-class beach and schools of excellence. However, this was not always the case....

For many years, the City of Delray Beach suffered. The quality of life had deteriorated and the downtown area, the City's heart and soul, became a "ghost town." There was clearly a severe lack of leadership within the public sector as well as within the business and residential communities. The City Commission did not have consistency and the City Manager position became a "turnstile" as 9 managers served in this capacity over a 10 year period. Neighborhoods were becoming culturally segregated and the local schools were failing. Development (i.e., residential, commercial and industrial) had dried up and City revenues did not provide for projects to improve our neighborhoods. Something had to change.

It wasn't until the late 1980's that something did change...the community found a way to come together for the betterment of their City and identified a common thread that would enable the City to move forward and improve. It was our schools that affected so much within the community and they were being neglected. As a result of this revelation and through various important steps, the Delray Beach community began to value its schools and committed to improving them to a point that they would be known for their excellence. Repairing our broken schools was determined to be the key to the City's change in culture.

Although the City was often considered volatile and without direction, the community along with the leadership of City of Delray Beach began a historical visioning process, Vision 2000, in May 1988, that would lead the way to changing the City into a vibrant and unique south Florida community known for its great amenities, wonderful neighborhoods and incredible schools. During this new strategic planning/visioning process, the City and the community overcame differences and committed to begin working together to actively participate in a community consensus building effort to develop a general mission and a shared set of goals to determine the City's future. It was during these efforts that the community began to understand that our local educational culture must be improved. The strategic planning process identified the goals and objectives on how assistance could be provided.

In 1988, the Visions Assembly) noted that, although the County School Board implemented a policy of “busing” students from one community to another to assist with the desegregation of area schools (due to legal concerns with the Federal Office for Civil Rights), a racial imbalance was being created within our schools. Evidence that this program was failing could be seen within a very small geographical area where students were divided into thirteen (13) attendance zones and attending nine (9) different elementary schools; five (5) of which were outside of the City’s limits. This imbalance was becoming socially destructive within our neighborhoods and our schools were becoming saddled with the reputation that they were “unsafe”.

Concurrent with this initial leadership process, another monumental event was occurring. Our City, like many other South Florida communities in the late 1980’s, began to face the negative realities associated with “urban sprawl,” which resulted in coastal community schools receiving a disproportionate amount of funding to support renovations/expansions/new construction. Instead of building within our communities, new development was heading toward western Palm Beach County. Further exasperating this situation, existing single family homes within the City were not selling. This affected all aspects of our City, including our schools.

In an effort to confront this important negative trend, a group of committed local developers approached City officials to express their concerns that families looking to purchase new homes were not interested in any locations within Delray Beach. The common concern expressed for this problem was the down trodden conditions of our local public schools.

It was these two important events, the commitment to participate in the Vision 2000 process and meeting with our local developers that firmly placed schools in the community’s proverbial “cross hairs” and on the City’s strategic planning agenda. It was now understood and universally acknowledged that improving Delray Beach schools was the major key in the economic and social well-being of the City.

As a result, the City developed an effective long-term planning strategy to correct these issues and community involvement to effect change within our schools became evident, which included the Vision

2000 process. Our citizenry expressed a need for the City to act immediately and pursue every available avenue to strengthen our schools and enhance their ties back to the residential and businesses communities. The County's School Board, in conjunction with the City, was requested to engage in this crisis situation to develop the full potential of our local schools as an important asset for the City's future growth. Further, the City's police and code enforcement presence and efforts were strengthened through more visible actions and programs within neighborhoods surrounding our schools.

The key component of this strategic planning process was the creation of a new community plan, "***Sharing for Excellence in Schools***," that served as frame work for new school infrastructure improvements that would enable the City's public schools to become a desirable place for our children to attend. It also presented a comprehensive plan that identified long term needs for Delray Beach's schools. The plan further concluded that in order to achieve an economic, social and livable community that attracts families with children, public schools needed to be balanced. The "white flight" needed to be stopped, overcrowded conditions needed immediate attention and the facilities and programs required upgrading to be at least equal to those that were being offered within western developing areas of the County.

In an effort to address these issues and save our City, this new plan facilitated and led to a twenty (20 ) year partnership between the City, the County School District, our local schools, parents and students. This resulted in improved funding for the renovation/expansion/construction of neighborhood schools, the abandonment of "busing" students and an overall renaissance of our schools that has led to a change in our reputation to one that provides Excellence.

The City further committed to strengthening and improving our schools by including them as a "Top Priority" within additional Visioning (Vision 2005 -May 1994 and Vision 2010 – May 2001) and annual Strategic Planning efforts. In addition, the City has elevated the importance of our schools by hiring a full-time Education Coordinator and creating a permanent Education Advisory Board (since 1990) that was charged with overseeing the implementation of the ***Sharing for Excellence in Schools*** plan and now

focuses on recommending school policy direction to the City Commission, strengthening business partnerships, promoting academic excellence and securing funding (i.e., contributions, grants, etc.).

Over the years since the development of this important community plan, the City has invested well over \$10 million (Staff costs and expenses not included) into the improvement of our local schools. Some of major improvements include:

- \$ 737,347 – Elementary - Land acquisition, road improvements, signage & new bus entrance road
- \$ 649,898 – Elementary – Road, sidewalk, signalization & ball field upgrades & landscaping
- \$ 825,003 – High School – Land acquisition, field maintenance & lighting improvements
- \$5,235,872 – High School – Land acquisition to ensure relocation, project design fees
- \$1,845,005 – Elementary – Land acquisition, new park, entrance, bike path & utility improvements

Since the identification that our schools are incredibly important to our overall community in 1988, there have been so many other important achievements and successes that have led to the rebirth of our schools and have directly impacted the vitality of our residential and business communities. The City's recent efforts to improve Atlantic Community High School (ACHS) further exemplifies the long standing, twenty (20) year commitment to our schools as provided in the City's strategic planning/visioning process. In fact, during the most recent long range visioning process, Vision 2010, and consistently within its strategic plans, the City called for the development of a new High School facility within the center of the City. This would replace the seriously deteriorating structure that was located in the northeastern portion of the City. This project finally came together and the City committed more than \$5 million to this project (See Above). Since moving to a new facility, ACHS has begun to experience incredible results: higher graduation rates, increased business community support and received local and national recognition/awards. In fact, ACHS has been ranked by Newsweek as one of the 100 Best High Schools in the United States for the past three years (52<sup>nd</sup> in 2009).

Another recent success story that can be directly traced to the City's strategic planning process can be found when Atlantic Community High School approached the City to provide staff expertise and/or build community support for implementation of three (3) Career Academies (i.e., Construction, Criminal Justice and Fire Service), which integrates a rigorous and relevant academic curriculum in career and

technical education programs. Each of these programs provides our students with the requisite technical knowledge and skills to be competitive in the respective workforce. These programs have become extremely popular with our High School students and have proven to be successful - since opening this new facility, 94% of the original 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (683 students) that have participated in one of the school's Academies have graduated. Some of the Academies that the City supports include:

The Construction Career Academy recently completed the development of a single-family home called "Eagle Nest." This project was designed/built by students on a lot donated by the City with construction funding from the Community Redevelopment Agency (\$150,000 zero percent loan). The home was sold to a first time homebuyer and the Academy netted \$37,000 to assist in making the program more self-sufficient. A second lot is being donated and a new home will begin construction in 2010-2011.

The Criminal Justice Academy, which has been in existence since 2001, has had approximately 1,000 students participate and the City has since hired 3 former students (1 Community Service Officer and 2 Communications Dispatchers). Annually, the City commits almost \$100,000 in general funds and grants (almost \$900,000 over a 9 year period) to fund a Full-Time Police Officer to run the program as well as supplies (i.e., books) and uniforms. This program is the only one that our Police Department is aware of that provides this type of expertise, which results in the attendees being trained at level comparable to programs offered at local Community Colleges.

The Fire Service Academy, which opened last fall, had 23 students complete the program in 2009. This program is taught by a member of the City's Fire-Rescue Staff and students receive a wide-range of training that includes information on pre-hospital care for medical emergencies, Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) and adult and infant Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).

Throughout this 20 year strategic leadership and governance process, the City and our community has recognized the value of our local schools within our overall community tapestry. Throughout this process numerous innovative programs/projects have been developed and implemented that led to a monumental reversal in our community's culture - From Failure to Success and Excellence!