

Streetscape contest set in Ravinia

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Ravinia neighbors of Ravinia businesses are encouraging store and property owners to spruce up store fronts with an “Improving the Streetscape” contest.

The contest is one in a series of efforts highlighting the “arts and crafts movement” roots of Ravinia and the association with famous resident Jens Jensen, an internationally known landscape architect who influenced the design of the area when he was alive.

“We've had feedback (about the contest),” said David Hanus, president of Ravinia Neighbors Association. “It's been good.”

“In the first week, we got seven who said they would participate,” said Don Miller, vice-president of the association.

Business and land owners have been invited to improve facades along Roger Williams Avenue and nearby streets. The closing date of the competition is Oct. 30 with an awards ceremony planned later for presentation of certificates.

“People who live here love this community and want to see its best features preserved and enhanced,” said Hanus. “Ravinia needs help, a kick-start, to revitalize it.”

“The neighborhood cares and we'd like to see improvement,” said Miller.

Jens Jensen

The association especially seeks to highlight its historic ties to Jens Jensen.

“His character was something to be looked-up to,” said Hanus.

Jensen set a standard for the look of some of the buildings in the area, such as the school and train station, in addition to some of the home landscapes and public parks.

“Jens Jensen stood for a woody, rustic look,” said Hanus.

The Association's efforts are intended to preserve some of those influences and to encourage new ones.

“We have color pictures of every store front,” said Miller.

Judges, of which he is one, will select a winner. He said awning improvements, painting, tuckpointing, and sign repairs are some of the elements which may help improve appearance.

The Ravinia Business Association highlights the entire business district with its own special programs. For example, planters have been placed throughout the business district as floral accents.

“Now the city has put in seasonal plantings so we can have a consistent look throughout the district,” said Mary Ritzlin of George Ritzlin Antique Maps and Prints.

During the year-end holiday season, Ravinia businesses use white lights in store windows to create a uniform, but festive, appearance. In the summer and fall growing season, they sponsor the Ravinia Farmer’s Market which sells fresh fruits and vegetables on Wednesdays.

Ritzlin said the market has frozen beef, flowers, and a soapmaker this year for added interest and variety.

“And, there’s been musical entertainment this summer,” she said.

In June, the Ravinia Business Association and city sponsored “A Celebration of Highland Park’s Sister Cities,” a gathering to sample the food, song, and culture of Ferrara, Italy and Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.

The streetscape improvement effort also is only one of many activities by the Ravinia Neighbors Association. Hanus said members were active with the city to identify storm sewers to keep them debris free. The group worked to improve electrical power reliability and met with public works officials to identify problem flood areas. A cellular telephone tower placement in Ravinia was stopped. Members have worked with Walgreen’s Drug Store and city officials to adjust the light standards at the store’s parking lot.

Miller said the association maintains a booth at the Wednesday Ravinia Farmer’s Market to sign-up new members from the approximately 2,600 families in the area. They also survey residents about needed improvements.

Hanus said, “We’re basically preserving and protecting what’s here.”

“What I tell people is that we’re pests,” said Miller.

From: [HP News](#)