

Classic Cinemas Chain Honored With Statewide Preservation Award

Downers Grove, Ill. – The Classic Cinemas chain of movie theatres and its owners, Willis Johnson with his wife Shirley and son Chris were recently recognized with the “Stewardship Award,” presented by Landmarks Illinois as part of the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Awards. This 17th-annual event honors individuals, organizations and projects throughout the state that represent excellence in historic preservation.

“The work of the Johnsons in restoring their historic theatres are a testament to the deep commitment of preservationists across the state,” said Jim Peters, president of Landmarks Illinois.

The Classic Cinemas chain of theatres began in 1976 when Willis and Shirley Johnson purchased the then-deteriorating Tivoli Theatre in Downers Grove (1928). Since that time the Johnsons have been joined by their son Chris in purchasing and restoring six of their theatres located in the suburbs of Chicago and Northern Illinois. Among their theatres are the Lindo in Freeport (1921), the Lake in Oak Park (1936), the Paramount in Kankakee (1931), as well as the York in Elmhurst (1924). The York Theatre is also home to the Theatre Historical Society of America.

Other award winners around the state were:

- **Ancel House, Glencoe**—Restoration
- **Champaign County Courthouse, Urbana**—Reconstruction
- **Clayville Restoration Project, Pleasant Plains**—Advocacy
- **Jay and Mary Matson, Galesburg**—President’s Award for Lifetime Achievement
- **Municipal Center River Wall and Plaza, St. Charles**—Restoration
- **Parkside Apartments, Kenanee**—Adaptive Use
- **Scully Building, Lincoln**—Rehabilitation
- **Sullivan Center, Chicago**—Project of the Year for Restoration

Since 1994, Landmarks Illinois has been assisted by a generous grant from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation to honor those whose work demonstrates a commitment to excellence in historic preservation and inspire others to take action to preserve, protect and promote historic resources throughout Illinois.

The award itself is a small-scale replica of the entrance arch and a portion of the Trading Room from Louis Sullivan's Chicago Stock Exchange building, which was demolished in 1972. The fight to save this important part of Chicago's built environment led to the founding of Landmarks Illinois in 1971. In addition, winners received a \$500 cash award.

The awards ceremony was held on October 29th at The InterContinental Hotel, Chicago. Landmarks Illinois would like to thank the members of this year's awards jury for generously donating their time and expertise: Jean Follett, Historic Preservation Consultant, Hinsdale; Allison Garwood Freedland, AIA, Chicago; Allen Johnson, MacRostie Historic Advisors LLC, Chicago; Michael Lambert, ARRIS Architects + Planners, Plainfield; and Hank Norris, Brinkoetter & Associates Realtors, Decatur.

About Classic Cinemas

Classic Cinemas, based in Downers Grove, Illinois, is a family-owned company operated by Willis, Shirley and Chris Johnson. Established in 1978, Classic Cinemas operates 13 theatres and will soon offer 100 screens in the northern Illinois area. For more information on Classic Cinemas, please visit www.classiccinemas.com.

#

Landmarks Illinois is the state's leading voice for historic preservation. Since its founding in 1971, the 2,500-member statewide organization has saved countless architectural and historic treasures throughout Illinois. Landmarks Illinois' mission today focuses on saving buildings, facilitating preservation, and educating the public through innovative programs and promotion. For more information, visit www.Landmarks.org.