

Toronto's Centre for Social Innovation wins national City Innovation Award

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Toronto, Ontario – When dozens of organizations dedicated to social change operate 150 innovative projects under one roof in Toronto, it draws the attention of people from around the world and garners the Canadian Urban Institute's 2009 Universal City Award to be bestowed on the Centre for Social Innovation on June 5 at the Urban Leadership Awards in Toronto.

"When other cities from across Canada and from around the world call up the Centre for Social Innovation and ask "how can we do what you've done?" you know something very special is going on here in Toronto. There is a global movement to try to create shared spaces and The Centre for Social Innovation is considered a pioneer in sharing space. It knows how to bring organizations together, develop a place to incubate social change ideas and create an atmosphere where ideas can come to life," said CUI President and CEO Glen Murray.

About 500 elite members of Canada's who's who of city building will gather in Toronto on June 5 at the Royal York Hotel to honour The Centre for Social Innovation (<http://socialinnovation.ca>) and 17 other groups and individuals (www.canurb.com/awards/ula/leadershipawards2009.php) across the country who are making Canadian cities exciting and dynamic places to live and work.

The Centre for Social Innovation is home to 80 full-time and 60 part-time organizations that are working to make positive changes in the areas of health, justice, the economy, the environment and culture. When the 20,000 square foot, renovated warehouse opened, it solved problems that all non-profit or social enterprises struggled with - including lack of funding that leads to working in substandard facilities that contributes to isolation. The Centre for Social Innovation created affordable office space, with shared boardrooms, small meeting rooms, and common kitchen facilities housed in a bright open architecture. The space allows for public gatherings and hosts up to 100 events a month. In addition the Centre helps individuals or groups with great ideas, but little experience, get their projects off the ground.

"Simply put we break down the silos and create conditions where collaboration is possible," said the Centre's Executive Director Tonya Surman. "We think we have the best office space in the country and when we recently surveyed the tenants, people reported they loved coming to work here and were happier in their jobs now because of the Centre. That's a social change we hadn't planned on but is a great compliment to everything we do."

"To be recognized by the CUI is a feather in our cap. It says, 'Look at us, City and Province, we're doing something that's great and should be valued and shared.' We know this model can be replicated and this award will help us tell people that it can be done and should be done in their places," said Surman, who originally had trouble getting government or corporate partners to support the idea.

The Urban Leadership Awards (ULA) Program honours Canadian individuals, groups and organizations that have made significant contributions to improving the quality of life in Canada's cities and urban regions. The 2009 ULA's have been made possible by the generous support of a variety of corporate sponsors including Gold Sponsors Loblaw Properties Ltd., Scotiabank, TD Bank Financial Group, the Ontario Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure, Environics, the City of Toronto, GE Canada and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). Community Builder Sponsors include Toronto Hydro, Local 27 of the Union of Carpenters and Allied Workers, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Great West Life, London Life and Canada Life Assurance Companies.

The judges for this year's awards included Canadians who have dedicated their lives to public service and who have detailed knowledge of the local stories and triumphs of Canadians in their home communities. Under the chairmanship of the Hon. David Crombie, the committee included; Al Duerr, former Mayor of Calgary; Newfoundland's Dr. Linda Inkpen; Dr. Antonia Maioni, Director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada; John Kim Bell, founder of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation; Ms. Mitzie Hunter, a Vice President at Goodwill Industries; and, Dr. Nola Kate Seymoar, President and CEO, International Centre for Sustainable Cities, based in British Columbia.

The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life in urban areas

across Canada and throughout the world.

For more information or interviews:

Janis Lynch, Manager Urban Leadership Awards, Canadian Urban Institute
p: 416.365.0816, ext 283, c. 416-986-1771 email: jlynch@canurb.com

Tonya Surman, **Executive Director** Centre for Social Innovation
office. 416.979.3939 ext. 2, tonya@socialinnovation.ca

Some facts about The Centre for Social Innovation

- The Centre's Mission is to catalyze, support and inspire social innovation
- Social Innovation is "a new idea that has been put into practice for the public good."
- The Centre is a physical building in downtown Toronto that provides shared office space for groups and businesses with social change agendas.
- The Centre, is a non-profit agency, that manages 20,000 sq ft of shared space for over 80 full-time and 60 part-time tenants – ranging from arts and education to social justice and environmental groups.
- It helps solve the problem of under-resourcing for nonprofit organizations working in substandard facilities and in isolation from each other.
- This unique, simple model has been shared with Vancouver, Edmonton, London, Vaughan, Ottawa and Halifax.
- It includes a community space for convening, sharing and learning amongst nonprofit, for profit and public sectors, e.g. hosts over 10,000 visitors a year for workshops, meetings, and other events
- The Centre has developed new forms of collaborative governance and is building a movement toward 'open cities' to enable more participatory action from citizens in urban development.
- www.socialinnovation.ca