

## **Doors Open Toronto wins national City Soul Award**

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**Toronto, Ontario** – When Jane French and Karen Black launched Doors Open Toronto in May 2000 as a one-time-only millennial celebration of Toronto architecture, they never imagined their efforts would create a North American-wide phenomenon. Now, in less than a decade, their efforts are being recognized nationally when they pick up the Canadian Urban Institute's 2009 City Soul Award at the Urban Leadership Awards on June 5<sup>th</sup>.

"When these two women launched Doors Open, for the Cultural Services Department of the City of Toronto, they created a spark that allowed Canadians across this country to get re-ignited about their cities. They rekindled a kind of soulfulness and passion that we all have for the buildings in our neighbourhoods and their history. While this started in Toronto, there wasn't a person on our national awards jury that didn't have a story about their own city's Doors Open program in their own communities," said CUI President and CEO Glen Murray.

"Not only did the Toronto experiment lead quickly to 40 communities in Ontario starting a Doors Open program, it attracted the attention of New York. When the Big Apple was creating its first Doors Open program the staff there called on Toronto to mentor them," said Murray.

About 500 elite members of Canada's who's who of city building will gather in Toronto on June 5 to honour Doors Open Toronto (<http://www.toronto.ca/doorsopen>) as well as 17 other groups and individuals ([www.canurb.com/awards/ula/leadershipawards2009.php](http://www.canurb.com/awards/ula/leadershipawards2009.php)) across the country who are making Canadian cities exciting and dynamic places to live and work.

Doors Open Toronto launched in 2000 with the concept to open buildings to which the public do not normally have access, in a bid to celebrate architecture, history and cultural diversity. In that first year, 96 buildings were open and 71,000 people toured through them. In 2009, 175 buildings are on the May 23-24 roster and attendance are expected to exceed 250,000 visitors. The buildings have ranged from places of worship to national historic sites, bank halls to distilleries, and places with a 'cool' factor like an abandoned subway station and a restored bowling alley.

"Increasingly we're urban people and we want to get to know our cities better," said Jane French, Doors Open Toronto Project Manager. "Initially we anticipated that the target audience would include older people who have lived here all their lives, those who know the city well and want to tour buildings they perhaps once worked in or even helped build; the 'architourist' crowd. But early on we realized that Doors Open Toronto appeals to new Canadians and multi-generational groups who understand that when doors open, stories spill out, strangers talk to strangers, and an urban adventure, built from bricks but based on narrative, is underway."

"It's really a very simple idea," added Karen Black, Manager, Museums and Heritage Services for Toronto. "Yet its appeal is universal. At a time when thinking about museums is being re-defined, Doors Open Toronto turns the real city into a wide-open, free museum one weekend every year. Local and tourist, young and old, multi-lingual and culturally diverse, the audience for Doors Open Toronto reflects the face of this changing urban centre. This event has become a catalyst for both celebration and advocacy for the built city."

**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.

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## Some facts about Doors Open Toronto

- Based on "Doors Open Days", an architectural celebration in Europe. City of Toronto staff Jane French and Karen Black went to Scotland in 1999 to experience the event and develop a North America model
- It was launched in Toronto in 2000, with strategic partnerships between the City of Toronto and corporate and community partners.
- The event is two days every year and celebrates architecture, heritage and diversity providing free public access to a range of buildings across the city.
- Participating buildings must be located throughout the city and represent the cultural diversity of Toronto.
- The number of buildings has grown from 96 to over 150 and attendance has grown from 71,000 visits in 2000 to over 240,000 in 2008, in total over 1 million visitors since 2000.
- Doors Open Toronto supported the creation of "Open House New York" in 2003. The New York City founding Director, Scott Lauer, commended Toronto for its role in bringing Doors Open to North America
- A Kids' Guide to Doors Open Toronto was introduced four years ago; 20,000 copies are distributed annually on the event weekend.