

Award: Special Recognition Award
Recipient: Jose Castillo-Pilcol
Presenters: Michael Cox

Good evening. My name is Michael Cox and I'm on the Health Care Consumers Board of Directors and a volunteer with the 5th & Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign.

Tonight, it is my pleasure to be able to present the Special Recognition Award to Jose Castillo-Pilcol for his outstanding work with the 5th & Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign.

Jose joined the Campaign in the late summer of 2012 when he came to the U of I for his Master's in Landscape Architecture. He is part of the Action Research Illinois Program, and through that Program, has helped the 5th & Hill Campaign with a lot of different projects.

Although Action Research Illinois asked Jose to work with our Campaign, Jose was soon going above and beyond the call of duty in his work with the Campaign. His respect and affection for the residents and his dedication to the Campaign led him to give much more of his time, knowledge and energy to our effort than his assignment called for.

Jose really worked hard to think about what special skills, knowledge and resources he had that he could share with the Campaign to help the residents advance their goals. In the two years that Jose has been with the Campaign, he has provided us with tremendous technical expertise that has helped the residents and the Campaign become much more sophisticated in addressing issues relating to flooding in the neighborhood, redevelopment of the Ameren site and other properties, understanding the complicated process called zoning, as well as giving the Campaign a better understanding of planning as it relates to the City of Champaign.

At the end of last year, when the City was on the verge of approving a massive apartment development that would include four huge buildings on University Avenue and Park Streets – the proposed Latitude Development – Jose helped us understand how the City's Plan Commission worked and how the proposed development could affect the neighborhood. The neighborhood rose up in opposition to the proposed development, saying that the two huge buildings that would be on Park Street would change the single-family character of the neighborhood.

Because of the concerns and challenges by the residents, the City and the developer held several public meetings and the community learned about the proposed development. Ultimately, the developer withdrew that application.

But, recently, the developer of the Latitude project, Chase Sorrick, asked to meet with residents leaders to see if he could revise his project in a way that would address residents' concerns. I am pleased to say that the developer has listened to the residents and now has submitted a new proposal that only involves two buildings on University Avenue and none on Park Street. We couldn't have done it without Jose's help and guidance.

Besides this kind of technical help, Jose also led another major project that is very special for the residents and that should become a treasure for our community. Jose has led a project to do oral history interviews with residents and former residents. From these interviews he has compiled a book that is about the history and character of this very special neighborhood, as told by the residents. This is something that the residents will treasure and it is a tremendous gift to them and our community. It's not finished yet, but when it is, we'll make a big deal about it and you'll have a chance to buy your own copy!

Jose is graduating, and since we don't have the money to hire him to keep him around, and quite frankly even tho' he is my favorite Canadian, we never could figure out the whole Canadian dollars vs US dollars thing, he will move on to another community where we know he will do excellent work. He will be missed here.

Jose, we are so grateful for the work you have done for and with the 5th & Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign. You have elevated the Campaign and taught us all a lot, and given us the gift of the people's history of the neighborhood.

For all of this and more, I am pleased to present you with the Special Recognition Award. Congratulations!