

The Jacobs Fellowship Program: First Fellow announced, will work in New Orleans

Before her death, Center for the Living City founders met with Jane Jacobs to discuss what issues they all agreed would be logical focuses for the further exploration, and application, of ideas Jacobs had uncovered as critical to the success of cities. They agreed that creating a number of fellowships for individuals to pursue applications of a variety of city-building processes would be an effective way of communicating issues of critical import in maintaining or regaining the strength of a city.

Jacobs attached one stipulation: that the fellowships should focus on what can work in a city and how, rather than what we already know does not work. Ever-practical, Jacobs was always loathe to recite a tale of urban woes, always seeing any urban circumstance as an opportunity to create ‘new work’ to address it. For Jacobs, understanding cities meant understanding the economies around which they were initially organized. With any urban issue, Jacobs applied similar thinking: the way to turn a negative into a positive was to proactively add new positives, not impose negative restrictions.

To that end, and with the driving influence of pioneering community development guru Ron Shiffman, the first Jacobs Fellow has been selected by the Center for the Living City at Purchase College. Benjamin Gauslin, a graduate of Virginia Tech’s College of Architecture and Urban Studies, will work in New Orleans on building and site inspections, developing preliminary designs and budgets for housing and commercial revitalization projects and the development of a pattern book for housing rehabilitation in the New Orleans East neighborhoods. This Fellowship will allow Mr. Gauslin to devote one full year working with ACORN Housing Corporation on affordable housing and neighborhood development efforts in low-income neighborhoods.

Mr. Gauslin was selected from a pool of highly qualified applicants from throughout the United States who are dedicating their lives to the field of public interest architecture and the service of low-income communities. Mr. Gauslin’s experience and demonstrated commitment to affordable housing design, including numerous awards for his work, were distinguishing factors in his selection. “When we looked closely at the applicant’s qualifications,” said selection committee member Ronald Shiffman, “Ben’s past commitment, strong design portfolio and his common-sense, holistic approach to community building made him a standout among applicants. The fact that he was already in New Orleans and had been volunteering was impressive.” Moreover, according to Stephen Goldsmith, the Center for the Living City’s acting director and a member of the selection committee, “Ben understands the unique challenges facing New Orleans residents. Creating affordable housing is only one piece of the complex rebuilding process facing the people of New Orleans, and Ben’s application expressed his understanding articulately and passionately.”

Established by the Center for the Living City at Purchase College, this inaugural Jacobs Fellowship is a collaboration with ACORN Housing Corporation, Deutsche Bank, Pratt Center for Community Development, Pratt Institute School of Architecture, and The Center for Architecture Foundation in New York City. The fellowship is the first in an ongoing Jacobs Fellowship Program of the Center. Fellowships will be created for individuals to engage in city-building processes of critical import in maintaining or regaining the strength of cities. Fellowships will occur across disciplines and will address the complex, interconnected problems facing cities throughout the world. This inaugural fellowship is funded through a generous grant from Deutsche Bank.

Established in 2005 in collaboration with Jane Jacobs, the Center for the Living City at Purchase College develops symposia, exhibitions, training programs, fellowships, internships, workshops and publications that approach city building issues using thoughtful, collaborative, participatory and transdisciplinary processes. The Center most recently created an exhibition with students from Purchase College titled, "Learning from Disaster: New Orleans after Katrina" held at the Museum of the City of New York.