



For Immediate Release

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St. Cecilia Cathedral Latest *Spirit of Midtown* Award Winner **- Midtown Landmark "A Church for the Ages"**

OMAHA, Neb., January 6, 2009 – Destination Midtown will honor St. Cecilia Cathedral as the first Spirit of Midtown award winner of 2009 on Sunday, Jan. 11; a recognition of the Cathedral's vital and unwavering commitment to Midtown Omaha -- starting before it was even "Midtown Omaha."

"Over the years, the area now designated as Midtown has grown up around Saint Cecilia Cathedral," said Fr. Michael Gutsell, the Cathedral's pastor.

The award presentation will occur at 11 a.m. during the parish breakfast in the cafeteria (located below the parish center, 39th and Webster Streets). Breakfast includes a full buffet and costs \$6 for adults, \$3 for children and \$25 for families. The parish breakfast is hosted by and the proceeds will benefit the St. Cecilia Activity Booster Club.

Begun in 1905 and consecrated in 1959, the Cathedral, near 40th and Burt Streets was originally located outside of city limits, a "controversial but bold decision for the Bishop of that time," said Fr. Gutsell. History, he added, has proven the wisdom of the Bishop's decision.

"The Cathedral, by definition, attracted families and gave shape and form to not only the neighborhood, but also the surrounding area neighborhoods," said Fr. Gutsell. "The commitment to education in grade school and high school over the years was a pivotal decision which generated family, neighborhood and community spirit."

Today, the Cathedral parish consists of approximately 850 households, and an elementary school of 320 Kindergarten through grade eight children, with families living both within designated parish boundaries which includes the greater portion of the Destination Midtown study area, as well as people from across the larger metropolitan area. As the church of the bishop's chair, the cathedral is the location of all the major feasts involving the Archbishop – ordinations of deacons and priests, commissioning of lay ministers and special occasions within the Archdiocese. It is also an every day, busy parish.

"This is a blessing for our Cathedral and for Midtown," said Fr. Gutsell. "There is also an opportunity and challenge in being located in a specific place, with such variety and diversity of all those who come to join us. The heart of Cathedral is open to all who walk through the doors."

One highlight takes place later this month, when thousands upon thousands will walk through the Cathedral's doors to enjoy a brilliant, ever-blossoming Cathedral tradition, the Cathedral Flower Festival. Beginning with a preview patron party on Friday evening, Jan. 23, the festival will run all day Saturday, Jan. 24 and Sunday, Jan. 25 after Masses. Sponsored by The Cathedral Arts Project, a separately incorporated nonprofit arts organization began and continued under the leadership of Brother William Woeger, the three day event typically attracts ten-thousand to twelve-thousand people. The theme for this year's event is "Quilts and Flowers." Dozens of quilts, primarily made by Nebraska quilters, will be displayed with the flower arrangements.

"The secret to the success of the Flower Festival is the unique match of flowers and various other art forms according to themes which give the opportunity for florist and artist to be creative in the unique setting that is 'The Cathedral,'" said Fr. Gutsell.

It has become a tradition for the Omaha landmark's long, rich heritage.

"When the building committee for Saint Cecilia Cathedral met in 1903, the record shows their commitment to build a church for the ages. While this seems to be a bit on the boastful side, the building that now stands as Saint Cecilia Cathedral embodies all of that hope," said Fr. Gutgsell. "While the neighborhood has changed its demographic face, the presence and spirit of the Cathedral continues to give the neighborhood a distinctive quality that reaches across the entire metro area."

Underscoring its concrete commitment to Midtown, the Cathedral recently undertook two major renovation and construction projects. It debuted its new \$950,000 parish hospitality center in October; a project which transformed 6,000 sq. ft. of the old Cathedral High School, recently renamed The Monsignor Ernest Graham Building, into a large dining/gathering space, a conference room, and a kitchen. Saint Cecilia Grade School (which has operated for 101 continuous years) also received a major make-over last summer, a \$350,000 renovation. The school opened the 2008 - 2009 school year with a new, larger library/media center, renovated administrative offices, a new reception area and principal's office. Reaction to the new spaces on campus has been enthusiastic.

"These projects stirred a new sense of pride and they are an opportunity to think about the future and all the ways we meet and greet people on our ten-acre campus," said Beth Klug, Saint Cecilia's Development Director. "These new spaces are an indicator of the Cathedral's commitment to this part of town."

"It's that type of commitment that makes St. Cecilia Cathedral a natural choice for the Spirit of Midtown award," said Jamie Grayson-Berglund, executive director of Destination Midtown. "We can't help but celebrate the Cathedral's past, appreciate all it offers in the present and look forward to its continued evolution in the future."

If you have questions about the St. Cecilia parish breakfast contact Beth Klug at (402) 551-2313.

The Spirit of Midtown award recognizes establishments or individuals that embody the spirit of Midtown through investment and active involvement in the community making Midtown Omaha a great place to live, work, shop and play. To nominate a Midtown business, institution or individual for a Spirit of Midtown Award, contact Destination Midtown at info@destinationmidtown.org or (402) 233-7142.

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Destination Midtown is a unique partnership linking neighborhood associations, businesses, public and private institutions, Omaha city government and the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. The mission is to create a premier urban environment where people want to live, work, shop and play. The vision is to establish a nationally-known, vibrant and distinct urban environment that promotes economic development activities, advances neighborhood goals and forges unique partnerships. Destination Midtown is bordered by Cuming Street on the north, Center Street on the south, 24th Street on the east and Saddle Creek Road on the west.

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