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## **Rockefeller Foundation Honors Courageous Urban Activism with 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal**

**New York, NY, Sept. 8, 2008** –Tonight the Rockefeller Foundation will award the 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal to Peggy Shepard, executive director and co-founder of West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT), and Alexie Torres-Fleming, founder of Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (YMPJ) in the South Bronx, at a ceremony at the Morgan Library and Museum in Manhattan. The featured speaker will be Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Robert A. Caro, who won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Nonfiction Book of the Year for *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*.

Peggy Shepard will receive the 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal for Lifetime Leadership and Alexie Torres-Fleming, for New Ideas and Activism, along with an award of \$100,000 each.

The Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medal was created in 2007 to honor the author and activist who died in April 2006 at the age of 89. The Rockefeller Foundation's relationship with Jane Jacobs dates back to the 1950s, when the Foundation launched an Urban Design Studies program that helped foster the emergence of the new discipline of urban design and theory. As part of this initiative, one of the Foundation's first grants was to the then-obscure writer from Greenwich Village, for the research and writing of a book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Almost fifty years later, Jane Jacobs' book remains one of the most esteemed volumes on urban planning.

"The Rockefeller Foundation Jane Jacobs Medal recognizes two New Yorkers for their extraordinary contributions to the city's dynamism and diversity," said Judith Rodin, President of the Rockefeller Foundation. "Peggy Shepard and Alexie Torres-Fleming embody the very best of Jane Jacobs' legacy. They affirm her—and the Rockefeller Foundation's—enduring commitment to strengthen our community's social fabric through active, civic engagement."

Peggy Shepard, 61, has been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement for more than twenty years. When she co-founded WE ACT in 1988, in a classic Jane Jacobs strategy, she organized fellow Harlem residents to push New York City to repair the North River Sewage Treatment Plant, a site that had been emitting smelly, noxious pollutants. WE ACT won a \$1.1 million settlement of its lawsuit against the city, as well as a monitoring role with the Natural Resources Defense Council in the enforcement of the city-state consent agreement on a plan to fix the North River plant. Under Shepard's direction, WE ACT also led a program to map and document the rate of air pollutants and asthma in Harlem and used this research to successfully convince the MTA to revisit its proposal to place polluting bus depots in the neighborhood.

Shepard's pioneering work has been a model for communities around the country. Serving from January 2001 to 2003, Shepard was the first female chair of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; she is now co-chair of the Northeast Environmental Justice Network.

Raised in a South Bronx housing project, Alexie Torres-Fleming, 43, has also demonstrated Jacobsean principles by standing up to threats to community wellbeing. In 1992, while living in Manhattan, she helped spearhead a march protesting the drug-dealing and violence plaguing her former South Bronx neighborhood. The drug dealers retaliated by setting fire to her parish church, the building she and the protestors had been using as their headquarters. She promptly moved back to the South Bronx and founded YMPJ, a faith-based, community development organization that aims to empower local young people. Using education and community development, YMPJ has helped a generation of Bronx youth discover that through advocacy, community organizing, journalism, environmentalism, and the arts, they can play an active role in shaping and improving their neighborhood.

Torres-Fleming is also the co-founder of the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance, a coalition of local groups she explains is “confronting the legacy of Robert Moses” by campaigning to replace the Sheridan Expressway with affordable housing and green spaces. In addition, she is a founding member of the Bronx River Alliance, a group that played crucial role in the creation of the Hunts Point Riverside Park and in the effort to clean-up and make accessible the Bronx River, a natural resource that had become an industrial dumping ground.

The selection of the Jane Jacobs Medalists and allocation of the prize money was determined by the Jane Jacobs Medal Selection Jury, co-chaired by George Campbell Jr., president of The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, and Agnes Gund, president emerita of the Museum of Modern Art. The Jury also includes Rockefeller Foundation trustee David Rockefeller, Jr.

The 2008 Jane Jacobs Medal is administered by the Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS). In 2007, the Rockefeller Foundation and the MAS partnered to mount an exhibit and program series entitled “Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York.” This year, through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, the MAS continues to explore New York City through a Jacobsean lens in a series of walking tours and public symposia that explore pressing issues, such as the integration of large-scale developments that are being proposed for the city today.

The MAS, founded in 1893, is a private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to promote a more livable city. It advocates excellence in urban design and planning, contemporary architecture, historic preservation, and public art. Visit [www.mas.org](http://www.mas.org) for information on tours and programs.

The Rockefeller Foundation was established in 1913 by John D. Rockefeller Sr. With assets of more than \$4 billion, the Foundation attempts to harness the creative forces of globalization by supporting breakthrough solutions to 21st century challenges. This helps ensure that the tools and technologies that have significantly improved the human condition in many locations over the past half-century are accessible to more people, more fully, in more places—and that poor and vulnerable people are equipped to seize them.

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