



**Office of the Mayor  
John T. Dickert**

**City of Racine, Wisconsin**

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May 5, 2011

Selection Committee  
Small Cities Sustainability Best Practice Award  
Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative  
177 North State Street, Suite 500  
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Selection Committee:

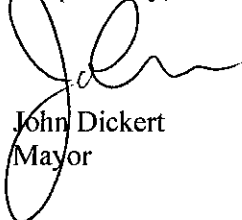
Please accept the attached proposal for consideration of the 2011 WEGE Small Cities Sustainability Award. The City of Racine is committed to the preservation of Great Lakes St. Lawrence water resources and as such desires to incorporate the principles of sustainability into all aspects of how we do business, whether that be in recreational opportunities for our citizens, educational programs for our school children, or in new construction and city redevelopment plans. Economic vitality is necessary for small municipalities to retain and attract young professionals and an active business community, but the way in which we grow must be sensitive to the needs of the environment. The Root River Environmental Education Community Center (REC) is just one example of how we, as a small city, are trying to meet these goals. The impetus to protect something is derived from its perceived value; value is the result of personal interaction and relationships; relationships take time.

The REC is located in the West 6<sup>th</sup> Street Neighborhood of Racine and offers recreational outlets and environmental education to traditionally underserved populations. This particular area of Racine has been dealing with crime, violence and drug-use for many years. Safe Passages, a transitional living facility for young adults on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, has taken full advantage of ready access to the REC. (improving social equity). In the Fall of 2010, over 1000 Racine Unified School District 4<sup>th</sup> grade students visited the REC to learn about water. Students assessed Root River water quality by measuring temperature, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, pH levels and macro invertebrate indexing (education). Finally, in partnership with the Kenosha/Racine Bicycle Club, Kenosha Bicycle Ambassadors, Racine County Workforce Development E3 Youth Employment Program, John XXIII Educational Center and Racine Family YMCA, the REC coordinated the Earn-a-Bike Program for economically disadvantaged high school students. (economic development)

If selected, the City of Racine would use the monetary award for teaching/program supplies for the WATER Program, the water stewardship program for Racine Unified School District elementary school students.

Thank you for considering our proposal. In my absence, please contact Debbi Embry at 262-636-9450 or [Debbi.embry@cityofracine.org](mailto:Debbi.embry@cityofracine.org) with any questions you may have regarding this project.

Respectfully,



John Dickert  
Mayor

## **Wedge Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices Award**

### **Racine Environmental Education Center**

The Root River Environmental Education Community Center (REC), created through a partnership between the City of Racine Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services and the University of Wisconsin-Parkside with support from the Wisconsin Coastal Management Grant program and UW-Extension, celebrated a Grand Opening in May 2008. Located west of downtown Racine, the REC is downstream of many acres of urban parkland on the banks of the Root River. This past year, the REC has worked to address economic vitality, social equity and environmental stewardship through education and recreation on the Root River. In loving and caring for this unique part of Racine, the REC is nurturing a small but growing community of environmentally aware citizens.

#### **Water Education**

In Fall 2010, over 1000 Racine Unified School District 4<sup>th</sup> grade students participated in the REC's WATER Program to learn about water. Students assessed Root River water quality by measuring temperature, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, pH levels and macro invertebrate indexing. Students also participated in activities that demonstrated how their daily activities on the land impact the water quality in the Root River and Lake Michigan. Each student received a booklet with instructions on simple ways to conserve water, use natural cleaning products and be involved with local stewardship efforts. Students are given pre-and posts tests and last year 20% showed improvement in their scores.

#### **Economic Development**

In partnership with the Kenosha Racine Bicycle Club, Kenosha Bicycle Ambassadors, Racine County Workforce Development E3 Youth Employment Program, John XXIII Educational Center and Racine Family YMCA, the REC coordinated the Earn-a-Bike Program for economically disadvantaged high school students. Volunteer bicycle mechanics taught four Racine Unified School District high school students bicycle maintenance and repair. In addition to their paid training, these students learned soft job skills including team work, showing up on time, communicating with a supervisor, and time management. Each student 'earned' a bicycle, lock and helmet after demonstrating the knowledge learned. Repaired bicycles were donated to an ex-offender in a community re-entry program, the Racine Eco-Fair, and the City of Racine youth arts program. These bicycles are being used as work transportation, recreation at the city skate park and bike paths, and a means to fund youth arts.

#### **Social Justice**

The REC is located in the West 6<sup>th</sup> Street Neighborhood of Racine. This particular area of Racine has been dealing with crime, violence and drug-use for many years. Safe Passages, a transitional living facility for young adults on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, has taken full advantage of ready access to the REC.

Last summer, Safe Passages residents came for a group introductory paddle and individual residents came back on their own. This summer, Safe Passages residents will do volunteer work at the REC in exchange for paddling time. Plans are in the works to offer similar opportunities to the Racine Family YMCA Young Fathers program, Women's Resource Center and groups that would greatly benefit from but may not have financial means to access REC programs.