

Kansas Chapter of the American Planning Association  
2008 Ad Astra Award Recipient  
Dean Palos

It is my pleasure and honor to introduce this year's recipient of the Ad Astra Award. Mr. Dean Palos, FAICP, Director of Planning of the Johnson County Department of Planning, Development, and Codes is this year's recipient. I first met Dean back in the 1980's when I was the Planning Director in Lenexa, Kansas. In those days we didn't have any gray hair and we were just beginning to learn how to use computers. Before I tell you about Dean and some of the reasons why he was selected, I want to discuss some aspects of Dean's life.

Dean was born and raised in Quincy, Illinois where his father, a Greek immigrant, owned and operated a downtown restaurant where all the family members worked. Dean obtained a BA in Sociology and a Masters in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Iowa. After moving to Lawrence, he obtained a Masters of Architecture in Urban Design at KU.

Dean has over 35 years of planning experience. He began his planning career in 1969 as a Planning Intern in Quincy, Illinois, then a Teaching Assistant for "Urban Politics" at the University of Iowa. His first full-time planning job was as Junior Planner in the Wichita-Sedgwick County Metropolitan Area Planning Department in 1973. After spending 1½ years as a Junior Planner in Wichita, Dean began working as Senior Associate with the Ochsner Hare & Hare consulting firm in Kansas City, Missouri. After 5 years in the private sector, Dean worked at the Lawrence-Douglas County Planning Department for 8 years. In 1988 Dean began working for the Johnson County Department of Planning, Codes, and Development. After spending 14 years as Principal Planner for Johnson County, Dean was promoted to the Director of Planning for Johnson County in 2004, after serving as interim director for nearly two years.

Beginning in 1983 Dean began a parallel career in teaching in the University of Kansas Urban Planning Program. Dean was hired to teach a course titled "Downtown Planning", after his critical involvement in the City of Lawrence planning debate over a proposal to build a "cornfield mall" that would compete with the downtown retail district. Students benefited from Dean's working

knowledge of the planning profession giving them insight into the planning profession from his experiences of solving planning challenges. Dean's love and dedication to planning education cannot be overstated. When most of us went home after a long day in the office, Dean jumped in his car and drove to Lawrence to spend his evening with students eager to learn from his experiences. Dean's energy and enthusiasm for planning were passed on to his students. Dean instilled in his students a passion for the planning profession. Evidently Dean doesn't sleep much, because beginning in 2001 he began serving as a guest lecturer at UMKC in "Urban and Regional Planning for Urban Administrators".

Dean was admitted to the American Institute of Planners (AIP) in 1976 and a Charter Member of AICP. Served as APA Kansas Chapter Vice-President and Vice President of the APA Kansas City Metro Section. He also served on the AICP National Student Projects Awards Committee, including one year as its Chairman. He has presented three times at APA national conferences as well as occasionally been quoted and once featured with other planning directors in *Planning* magazine. *This year Dean was elected to the College of Fellows of AICP in 2008.*

Recipient of Distinguished Service Award from the K-10 Association, a local public/private sector development organization and recipient of three National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Awards for role in intergovernmental planning projects.

I want to return Dean's impact on the communities where he has practiced his skills as a professional planner. When we drive down Massachusetts Street in Downtown Lawrence we all recognize the vibrancy and success of the downtown district. Back in the 1980's, Lawrence was under the assault of a developer to build a new shopping mall on the edge of town. Dean managed the preparation of the *Downtown Comprehensive Plan* that sought to maintain the preeminence of downtown. Dean vigorously opposed the first application received by the city for the new suburban mall in 1981. Dean was successful in convincing the Lawrence City Commission to vote down the application and preserve Downtown Lawrence as the principal shopping district by focusing on pedestrian-friendly shopping within the historic structures of downtown. Dean demonstrated his skills in providing insightful and visionary planning analysis, not to mention his

oratory skills in convincing the City Commission to support his opposition to the construction of a suburban mall.

When Dean left Lawrence for Johnson County in 1988, he was joining a planning staff dealing with a range of issues associated with one of the fastest growing counties in the state, if not the nation. Johnson County is recognized as a vital economic engine for the State of Kansas and a premier location for families and businesses seeking a suburban area near Kansas City. During his 20-year tenure (6 as Planning Director) in Johnson County, Dean has successfully overseen the preservation of the rural, unincorporated areas of the county, while at the same promoting the managed growth of suburban cities through a cooperative and productive inter-governmental planning effort. Dean has demonstrated his internal management skills to create a forward-thinking planning staff seeking to balance the pressures of suburban growth with the need for protecting of rural and natural resources.

Two final examples of Dean's planning leadership is the work Dean did on the former 9,000 acre Sunflower Ammunition plant near Desoto, Kansas. Johnson County assisted in the transfer of the ownership of the decommissioned plant to a private developer in 2005. Dean was the primary author of a mixed-use plan called "Community in the Park" calling for a sustainable, comprehensive development plan. Dean was also instrumental in establishing a commuter bus route between Johnson County and the City of Lawrence for students and workers (over 900 daily ridership).

When we look at the personal and professional life of Dean Palos, it is hard to imagine anyone more deserving of this year's award than he is. It my privilege to present the Ad Astra Award to Dean Palos on behalf of the Kansas Chapter of the American Planning Association and to express our gratitude for a long and distinguished career devoted the advancement of the planning profession and making a lasting and positive impact on the young people he has taught, the communities he has served, and the profession he has proudly and emphatically represented throughout Kansas.