

Franklin Mead wins Beacon Award
By Jacqueline G. Freeman
Beacon Hill Times

The Beacon Hill Civic Association has awarded the 14th annual Beacon Award to Frank Mead, Beacon Street, in recognition of decades of significant contributions to the neighborhood through community service.

To hear Mead describe his service over the years, it is “normal and average things,” but his humble portrayal does not justly characterize the scope of his contributions. From helping to write the architectural guidelines for the Beacon Hill Historic District in the 1970s to co-founding Beacon Hill Seminars and Beacon Hill Village, Mead’s gentle hand can be seen in the very preservation of the buildings on the Hill and the quality of life of those choosing to live here.

“Over the years he has had a hand in creating and sustaining so many aspects of life on Beacon Hill, both intellectual and architectural, right across the board,” said Tad Stahl, chair of the Beacon Award nominating committee. “He never sought any real recognition. That is the sort of person he is,” said Stahl.

Mead, who moved to the Hill with his first wife to pursue a Masters in Architecture from Harvard University, remembers getting involved when his daughter began school at Beacon Hill Nursery. “We were around, and there were things that needed to be done and we did them,” said Mead. And a lifetime of service began.

Mead stressed that a compilation of many small things can make a real difference. He remembers painting some furniture for BHNS when they had just acquired their current Joy Street building. “It was not only a lot of fun, but an opportunity for my family to do things together as well,” he said.

“Some of my best friends and mentors came out of those relationships,” said Mead. “None of these things are done alone.”

Mead said his mentors encouraged him to be active. “It is helpful to have people see potential in you.”

As an architect, things like chairing the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission and writing the current guidelines were a “natural outgrowth of my professional skills.”

His role in co-founding Beacon Hill Seminars and Beacon Hill Village was also a natural progression, as he tells it. “My wife had just died and I was very sensitive to how vulnerable we all were,” he said. While the Village took more time to establish, Seminars was up and running quickly.

“It is such a successful mission and such a great group of people,” said Mead.

From Stahl’s perspective, Mead doesn’t give himself enough credit. “From his point of view, these things just needed doing,” said Stahl. “He is very modest. It wasn’t just ‘helping out,’ it was leading,” said Stahl. “Creating new institutions that would not exist if it were not for his involvement.”

Stahl and others on the committee also speak highly of who Mead is as a person. “He is simple, direct, comprehensible, ethical, upstanding. If you want to think of all the wonderful things a person could be, those are the characteristics he has,” said Stahl. “He takes citizenship very seriously, as a responsibility, not just a privilege.”

Over the years, Mead has served as director of the Cambridge Street Community Development Corporation and the Friends of the Public Garden and Boston Common. He was the president of the Beacon Hill Civic Association in the early 1980s. Outside the Hill he was president of the Harvard Club of Boston and director of the Alumni Association for Harvard. He also worked with the Swedish American Chamber of Commerce, the Swedish American Council in New England and the Swedish Council of America.

“These things are all fun,” said Mead.

The award was announced last night at the Beacon Hill Civic Association’s Annual Meeting, but Mead was given the award last week at a Founders Reception.

“I am really humbled by the award and obviously thrilled,” said Mead.