

checker pieces. In the afternoon there was reportedly a banjo player at one of the spaces too.

Most visitors were able to stop by over the lunch hour or at the end of the day. Ron Bednar, former APA-PA SE board member, putted a hole and visited some other spaces on the way. My son played on the grass with the golf balls and windmill. Other people came by from DVRPC and local architects' offices. A friend with her husband and son came to eat lunch and talk.

By the end of the day, as the shops were starting to close, four willing volunteers, Adam Krom, Justin Dula, Bridget Keegan, and Nicole Hostetter, enjoyed a quick look at the space and started disassembling it.

Spending a day along Jeweler's Row provided a window into a close knit, charming business community. We watched as the businesses opened for the day. Much like a village would look opening for the day, a delivery person going up and down the street with coffee and brown bags of breakfast; business owners lingering out front of their stores talking with their colleagues and business partners, as they have for generations.

Throughout the day business bustled along the sidewalk. One store had a constant group of jewelers, buyers, gemologists, and others standing out front talking shop. They were too engrossed in their conversation and the business of the day to putt too many holes of golf, but I offered to bring them a bench next year. One jeweler offered a volunteer Turkish coffee, which he offers to all his neighbors around 2:00 in the afternoon.

What is amazing about the event is that a space as small as a parking space can soften the urban environment by giving a bench for tired legs to rest, or a piece of art for thought, or a green patch for a child to play "off leash." And, one pocket park per block or two does not actually take much space, but it can have a tremendous impact on the quality of life and shopping experience in Center City. ♦

*Irving Hand Award results in*

# PROFESSIONAL SKILL BUILDING

*by Susan H. Cipperly, AICP* 2007 Irving Hand Professional Development Award Recipient

**One thing I have been aware of during my career as a planner is that unless a comprehensive plan is created with the active involvement of community representatives and government officials, it is most likely to be relegated to a shelf or corner of a Web site and not really consulted or used very much.**

**I HAVE ALSO NOTED** the general lack of training in planning schools with regard to eliciting the input of the community for whom the plan is being created. Newly-minted planners have been taught the history of planning, trends, zoning techniques, etc., but very few have been schooled in public relations, meeting dynamics and facilitation techniques that really are crucial to being effective in the field of planning.

When I had the opportunity to apply for the Irving Hand Professional Development Award, I decided to get some training in facilitation techniques that I thought would be valuable for the private sector work I was employed in at that time. It seemed like a good way to move the planning process along, saving time, energy and money for the municipality, as well as allowing the consultant firm to provide a competitive time-frame. This was particularly true in Pennsylvania, where multi-municipal plans are now allowed and encouraged. I have watched both single and multi-municipal plans get so bogged down in the logistics of meetings and inefficient decision-making that they become multi-year projects that everyone involved is very tired of by the

time they are finished. Then no one wants to think about the plan ever again.

After looking for facilitator training and finding most offerings were very business-related, I noticed an offering by the National Charrette Institute (NCI) that was listed on the APA Web site. It was being held at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During the first week of August, 2008, I attended the 3-day training session and came away with a lot of information, contacts, and some ideas that I could utilize as Town Planner for Emmitsburg, Maryland (plus 21 CM credits!). Emmitsburg is a historic town of 2,900 population just south of the PA border, where I have worked since February 2008. I felt very fortunate when NCI asked whether Emmitsburg could be used as one of the group projects for the charrette training.

I had been working on sign regulations and had been asked by the Mayor to consider a plan for maintaining and revitalizing the historic Main Street streetscape, so I offered that topic as an idea for a work group. The idea was not to solve the issues and create a plan as much as it was to understand how the charrette process would/could be utilized for a variety of projects, but I was very happy to have the opportunity to pick the minds of other attendees.

The group of people that attended the session consisted of government and consultant planners, interested citizens, architects, lawyers, and designers. In addition to people from the United States, there were folks from Paris, Belgium, South America, Mexico, and Germany. Many had international planning and design experience. The projects ranged from a street redevelopment in Watts, Los

Angeles, two medium-sized projects in Connecticut, to Main Street, Emmitsburg, MD.

Each of the three days involved training modules by the NCI staff alternating with applying the techniques to our group projects, followed by sessions where the pros and cons of our strategies were discussed by the entire group. I came away with an understanding of what is involved in pre-planning a charrette, what the elements are, and what kind of outcomes there can be.

I should note that there is a difference between learning about the charrette process and learning about meeting facilitation. The charrette (French for the carts that picked up student work at the deadline for a project) is a project-oriented method of getting input, making decisions, and providing results in a very focused, organized, efficient, and effective way within a 3-7 day process. Facilitation is different in that it is more oriented to interpersonal and group dynamics and helping to move a meeting or a short- or long-term process along without getting bogged down. At a recent rural development workshop I attended, I heard success stories that involved the use of each type of approach, depending on the needs of the communities. One of the good aspects of the NCI workshop was the number of contacts I was able to make for future reference – including a company that provides facilitation training.

Overall, the NCI training at Harvard GSD was a very worthwhile experience and I do thank the Pennsylvania Planning Association and the Delta Development Group for providing me with the opportunity. I am sure that I will use what I learned as I continue my work in the field of planning. ♦