

Historical Society leader honored for service to village

By Colleen Michele Jones

Andy Lyons has been visiting Irvington since he was a kid. His family used to make regular trips from their Long Island home to see Lyons' aunt and uncle who lived in the quaint riverfront village.

"But it's funny, I never imagined myself living here," he said with a light laugh.

These days, Lyons is not only an Irvington resident but has become an integral part of the community since arriving in 1997 to take on the job of transforming the old Lord & Burnham factory into the thriving waterfront strip now known as the Bridge Street complex.

For his vision on this commercial project — which has arguably been one of the driving forces of the local economy over the past decade or so — as well as his many other commitments to the village, Lyons was recently presented with the esteemed Adele Warnock Good Citizenship Award.

The distinction is bestowed annually upon a resident who has made outstanding contributions toward bettering the welfare of the village and its citizens. Warnock herself was a civic leader in Irvington, having served as a trustee, school board president, and in various community organizations. Past recipients have included the late Peter Oley, village historian and Irvington High School track coach, and Jim Brennen, active in the village's fire department, police department, and ambulance corps.

News of the award came as a pleasant surprise to Lyons, known around town for his unassuming, affable nature.

"There are so many deserving people in this village," said Lyons, 60, adding, "I'm tremendously honored."

Mayor Jon Siegel, who presented the award to Lyons at a ceremony in village hall

June 7, said, "When you look at what Andy Lyons has accomplished as ARB [architectural review board] chair, head of the historical society, a leading force in the [village's] Quadricentennial celebration, and important contributor to many other village projects, there is no doubt he is deserving of the Adele Warnock award."

Lyons grew up in Bayshore, in Suffolk County, but ended up in the Midwest for college at St. Louis (Mo.) University, where he earned a degree in business and finance.

"And I ended up staying 30 years," Lyons said laughing.

It was in the Chicago area that he met his wife, Charlotte, with whom he has three daughters: Erin, 31; Maggie, 29; and Mo, 22.

Living in a historic St. Louis neighborhood that grew up out of the 1904 World's Fair, Lyons became involved with historic renovation and preservation, or "adaptive reuse — they don't use that term anymore," said Lyons, who worked in the field through the 1990s.

Eventually, he was courted to come to Irvington to oversee reconstruction of the Bridge Street property, where his brother Mike and cousin Bill Thompson were partners. (Mike Lyons has since ended his association with Bridge Street).

By 1997, Eileen Fisher and a few other early tenants had already signed on to set up shop in the lofty interiors of the former industrial buildings. But Bridge Street's owners had bigger plans, and they brought Andy Lyons on to "help realize a vision."

"I saw right away the potential to take an old factory building and to convert it to loft and office space and renovate it and



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Andy Lyons holds the plaque he received on June 7.

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make it desirable. It was challenging work, but I got to see the fruits of my labor," said Lyons, who was a partner with Bridge Street Properties until 2007.

Indeed, the complex has flourished, expanding to more than 50 tenants currently, stimulating further development in the village. The owners have also been in discussion with Irvington officials for several years to build more commercial and create residential units on the waterfront site currently used as the company's parking lot.

Three years ago, Lyons parted ways with Bridge Street in order to pursue other ventures. The current chair of the Village architectural review board, he has also been extremely involved with the Irvington Historical Society, where he has served as president since 2007.

Lyons, who has always been a big history buff, said he was a bit nervous to take on the leadership role.

"Truth be told, I was a bit intimidated to follow in the footsteps of Peter [Oley] and Betsy [Wilson]," Lyons said, referring to the organization's two most recent presidents.

For her part, Wilson said that Lyons "royally filled" her shoes.

"He filled them, resoled them, put on tassels and taps, and has been walking in them so successfully ever since," added Wilson, herself a recipient of the Adele Warnock award in 2002.

Doug, Betsy Wilson's husband and a trustee with the historical society, added that Lyons had injected new life into the historical society "with new ideas and new energy and an idea to bring it [local history] to a greater population."

Under Lyons, the group has initiated a number of innovative youth programs and community outreach events.

Though not a native of the village, Doug Wilson said Lyons "immediately sensed the richness of the history of this village and its uniqueness."

Lyons said he enjoys his role with the historical society and working with what he calls "a wonderful group of people." One of his greatest contributions to the historical society has no doubt been his volunteer role as construction manager during the extensive renovation of the McVickar House, work he did pro bono until it was completed in 2005. The historic residential home at 131 Main Street now serves as the historical society's headquarters.

Doug Wilson, who helped guide the project, said, "Without him [Lyons], the McVickar House wouldn't be what it is today."

Wilson added, "I don't think that everyone in the village has any idea of the scope of the contributions he's made to the village."

For one, Lyons chaired the village's 2009 celebration of the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage up the river that would bear his name. The celebration encompassed several events, culminating with last September's "Lights on Irvington" spectacular.

Lyons helped dig up research about the village's Tricentennial commemoration of Hudson's historic journey, which served as inspiration for the more recent festivities, as well as helping to organize the grand illumination of village hall.

Lyons, who decades ago played near Halsey Pond on visits to his relatives in Westchester, says he counts himself fortunate to now be living in Irvington — and that he's here to stay.

No doubt, more than a few friends and neighbors will be glad to hear that.