

## **RNA May 3 General Meeting Highlights Community Improvements**

Making sure the interests and concerns of the community are heard and acted upon helped bring the Ravinia Neighbors Association into existence, and the group's leadership role was reflected once again at its May 3 General Meeting in the historic Ravinia train station before an audience of some 80 area residents. Invited to address issues that will affect the quality of life in Ravinia were several speakers who have been working with the RNA on a number of projects.

Before they spoke, RNA President Don Miller recognized Ravinia School PTO members Carol Carl and Stacey Overby for their efforts on behalf of the school's Heraldic Banner program. This joint student-parent Initiative, which the RNA and several area businesses helped sponsor, involved students throughout the school designing colorful banners using the theme "What Ravinia Is About" for display in the business district along Roger Williams Avenue.

Miller thanked Pasta Fresca owner Amelia Funari for providing a table full of complimentary refreshments for the RNA meeting, and Ravinia businessman Paul Rubenstein alerted the audience to a program of poetry readings and musical events being planned for Jens Jensen Park this summer.

Rebecca Grill, Natural Areas Coordinator for the Park District of Highland Park, spoke about the vegetation and landscape native to the area. Her slide presentation included references to the white pine and birch trees that grew near the lakefront when a colder climate prevailed in the area. She urged members of the audience to participate in a project to plant seedlings and perform other environmentally friendly chores at Rosewood Park on May 20.

Nick Pullia, Director of Communications for the Ravinia Festival, discussed the upcoming season at Ravinia Park, the opening of the ticket office May 20, and the festival's free annual Birthday Concert scheduled for August 15. He also gave out a pair of free tickets to the park from a drawing he conducted.

Paul Silverman, Co-Chairman of the Friends of Jens Jensen Park, discussed the renovation of the park in partnership with the Park District that will begin with a ground-breaking ceremony June 25. He said the project had strong support from the RNA and area residents, that a matching federal grant had been secured, and that the plan would fit well with the streetscape planned for the Roger Williams Avenue business district. Noting that Jens Jensen once lived in Ravinia, he said the park restoration would encourage area residents to look for remnants of other work by Jensen, who completed more than 40 landscape installations in the neighborhood.

Michael Blue, Director of Community Development for Highland Park, discussed the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) process that the City Council had approved for the district last July and made a slide presentation outlining the background of the project. He said the plan started as a neighborhood effort to enhance the appearance of the business district, and went on to describe the community-based funding mechanism that would help pay for the streetscape improvements aimed at achieving the desired goal. He noted that other taxing districts, such as the schools, had approved the proposed plan, and that it would not adversely affect their operations. He said the improvements would cost around \$1.5 million in an area where the assessed value base was just over \$6.5 million.

The final speaker was Mari Barnes, a Ravinia business owner and Moraine Township Supervisor, who said residents can influence the future of the district by patronizing merchants they feel are useful to the community. She then talked about the functions of township government, which has been in operation some 150 years. She said her staff is most frequently called upon to help citizens clear away red tape to secure benefits to which they may be entitled through various government programs and to provide even more basic needs through a food pantry and clothing drives. She also discussed the township's role in expanding transportation options for the growing number of seniors and disabled persons who may need to visit medical facilities outside the immediate area.