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DOWNTOWN ORLANDO DEVELOPMENTS

Creative Village and Lake Eola plan win Golden Brick awards

By Laura Kinsler

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Lake Eola Park, known for its signature fountain, draws about three million people annually and is a hallmark for events, a weekly farmers market on Sundays and its renowned flock of swans. (Handout)

A sweeping master plan to upgrade Orlando's Lake Eola Park for the first time in 30 years with spacious plazas and shaded additions to the Walt Disney Amphitheater took home the Award for Excellence Tuesday at the Downtown Orlando Partnership's 2021 Golden Brick Awards.

The master plan, designed by [**GAI Consultants**](#), reimagines nearly every pocket of the park and is meant to modernize it for a growing city. In addition to the amphitheater expansion, the plan creates larger playgrounds with a splash pad, more parallel parking and upgrades meant to improve the ecology of the lake.

Thomas C. Chatmon, Jr. was named Downtowner of the Year. Chatmon has served as executive director of the Downtown Development Board and Community Redevelopment Agency since 2007.



Thomas C. Chatmon, Jr., longtime executive director of the Downtown Development Board, was named Downtowner of the Year for 2021. (Handout)

He has played an integral role in achieving some of downtown Orlando's premier developments, including Church Street Plaza, Citi Tower, Creative Village, Amway Center, the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, Chase Plaza, 55 West, SunRail, and more.

Chatmon said none of it could have been accomplished with his staff. "I'm honored to be here," he said. "I mean, I'm truly honored. But I have to tell you, a lot of things that I get credit for — that I get to take credit for, I take a little bit of credit, okay, sometimes a lot of

credit — and I'm very proud of is actually the manifestation of the work of dozens of people, and sometimes hundreds of people."

Chatmon took a brief medical leave in 2021 but is now back at work.

Chatmon noted that the DOP may give the same award to people who were more important or deserving. "But what you never will do, you will never convey this award to a person who is more genuinely, most sincerely and deeply appreciative," he said. "It is from the deepest recesses of my heart that I say to you all ... thank you for simply recognizing Thomas Chatmon."

Meanwhile, a pair of projects in Creative Village took home Golden Bricks of their own. EA Sports, completed in 2021 by [Ustler Development](#), was named the Commercial Development of the year.

The 176,000-square-foot building is now home to the creative teams that produce some of the world's most popular video games. The five-story building is adorned by a vibrant mural from artist Don Rimx and bears a giant video screen where pedestrians will be able to watch gaming tournaments from the outdoor plaza.

The new EA Sports studio is the largest corporate relocation in the past several decades in downtown Orlando. When fully occupied, it will bring 1,000 employees to Creative Village.



The Electronic Arts building at the Creative Village in downtown Orlando, on Friday, February 25, 2022, features a mural by Don Rimx. (High-dynamic-range composite image by Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/ Orlando Sentinel) (Orlando Sentinel)

Ustler Development also built the 6,000-square-foot space in the ground floor of The Julian apartments that is now home to [The Monroe](#), winner of the Golden Brick for Hospitality. The Orlando-based [Good Salt Restaurant Group](#), led by Owners Jason and Sue Chin spent more than six months developing the concept and building out the space with a mid-century-inspired design highlighted by murals and warm wood tones.

Head check Josh Oakley [created an eclectic menu](#) highlighted by his specialty, fried chicken, along with favorites such as pastrami corndogs and peach salad.

Those attending the annual awards ceremony Tuesday at [Steinmetz Hall](#) in the Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts got a first-person look at the winner of the Golden Brick for Innovation + Technology. The 1,650-seat theater, which opened in January, was designed to be “one of the world’s most acoustically perfect spaces.” So far it has hosted a range of performers for fans of all ages and tastes, including Oscar-winner Jennifer Hudson, acclaimed cellist Yo-Yo Ma, Beatles tribute band “Pepperland” and a kid’s favorite Peppa Pig’s Adventure.



The rooftop pool at Inverlad's Yard at Ivanhoe offers spectacular views of Lake Ivanhoe and downtown Orlando. (Handout)

The Yard at Ivanhoe was honored as the year’s best residential development. [Real Estate Inverland Development](#) President Chance Gordy began assembling properties along N Orange Avenue and Virginia Drive in 2015 and delivered the last of the 591 dwelling units in 2021. The much-anticipated retail anchor, a 13,000-square-foot food hall opened earlier this year.

Now Inverlad is prepping for a second phase across the street that will add another 265 residential units, along with a public park and newly re-built

Hideaway bar. Baker Barrios was the architect and designed the building with red brick, steel panels and soaring windows meant to evoke the industrial rail yard theme inspired by the adjacent train tracks.

While plans for a permanent corporate home for the Orlando Magic remain on hold, the basketball team moved its offices from Maitland to downtown Orlando in 2021. The Magic [leased a floor in downtown's CNL Building II](#) next to City Hall and renovated the 23,000-square-foot space to house more than 200 employees. The project earned the team a Golden Brick for New Office Design.

The final award for a real estate project went to [HKS Architects](#), who redesigned and renovated their Orlando office at Landmark Center Two overlooking Lake Eola. The Downtown Partnership also recognizes special events and downtown programming, including:

- ARTS - FusionFest
- COMMUNITY - OUC Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program
- DIVERSITY - Come Out with Pride
- PUBLIC WORKS - DDB Special Events Grant Program
- SPORTS + SPECIAL EVENTS - Immerse
- SUSTAINABILITY + RESILIENCY - Paws in the Park

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