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## Distinctive Company

### *Downtown News Awards Display Diversity*

**by Evan George, photos by Gary Leonard**

Two unlikely cohorts - one a wild-haired foodie, the other a tight-laced cop with no hair at all - shared top honors at last Tuesday's sixth annual Downtowner's of Distinction awards, hosted by the *Los Angeles Downtown News* and Maguire Properties.

Captain Andy Smith and chef Fred Eric, co-winners for Project of the Year, were among the 13 nominees singled out by the *Downtown News* for significant achievements in Downtown. More than 300 attendees gathered at the Los Angeles Athletic Club last Tuesday to see those those honorees awarded. Leaders from Downtown's 16 different districts voted to present Project of the Year awards to both Eric for his new Fashion District eatery Tiara Café and Captain Smith for his work at Central Division, which oversees Skid Row and the Safer Cities Initiative. The choice of decidedly different co-winners deftly underscored Downtown's commercial and residential awakening. Previous years have seen residential developers take the top award, but with more residents in Downtown than ever - an increase of 4,000 people in 2006 according to a recent report - a growing pool of business owners and service providers were honored. The ceremony brought together a wide variety of city officials, developers, residents and arts leaders - both longtime influential Downtown players and relatively new community members. "Good evening fellow believers," opened Police Chief William Bratton, "believers that one of the greatest cities can have one of the greatest downtowns."

Bratton, who pointed out that his family lives Downtown, was joined by City Councilmen Tom Labonge and Dennis Zine, as well as fellow Downtown resident City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo. District winners included: Savoy (Arts District); Los Angeles Opera (Bunker Hill); LAPD efforts on Skid Row (Central City East); Work on the Los Angeles State Historic Park (Chinatown); Miguel Contreras Learning Complex (City West); Tiara Café (Fashion District); Elleven (South Park); the Galen Center (Figueroa Corridor); Upgrade of City National Plaza (Financial District); Downtown Art Walk (Historic Core); Japanese American National Museum's shows (Little Tokyo); New street retail outlets (Old Bank District); and California Endowment's new headquarters (Union Station).

Real Distinctions Accompanied by his two small children in leopard-print jackets and his pink haired wife, Eric told the Downtown News he never imagined he'd share a stage with a police captain. "Not unless I was arrested," he added. Eric received the Project of the Year award from Bill Flaherty, senior vice president of co-host Maguire Properties, who echoed a sentiment made by developer Tom Gilmore earlier in the night: He praised the restaurateur's risk-taking and pioneering of a new neighborhood. The Tiara Café, which sits in the heart of the Fashion District, has become an outpost for hip, healthy and fashion-friendly comfort food in a neighborhood that used to be known by outsiders for little besides cheap fabric.

"What started as a little kernel, a little restaurant that hopefully will bring lots of joy and happiness to the community, will also be able to develop into something that's not only commerce-oriented but will be able to give back in other ways," Eric said. His acceptance spoke to the unlikely connection between Eric's splashy pastel-decorated restaurant and Central Division police officers' crackdown on street-sleeping and crime. A Downtown that welcomes pedestrians, residents and customers for entrepreneurs like Eric, he and others said, comes hand-in-hand with crime-fighting efforts. Chief Bratton came to the podium to present the shared award to Captain Smith. "I'm honored and humbled," Smith said. "I know that many of you have spent many years, in some cases even decades, working on transforming Downtown."

"I will accept this award on behalf of my 400 police officers - on behalf of your 400 police officers," Smith said.

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