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City lauded for saving City Hall's past

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The art deco eagles atop Pawtucket City Hall have been restored.

The Providence Journal / Steve Szydowski

PAWTUCKET — The city is being honored for honoring its past.

The Rhode Island State Preservation and Heritage Commission is giving Pawtucket a Project Award for the historically accurate restoration of City Hall that was done after bricks began falling from the building's 143-foot tower.

The award, announced yesterday, will be formally presented when the commission kicks off its 22nd annual Statewide Historic Preservation Conference at Tolman High school on April 14.

“I think it's significant,” Mayor James E. Doyle said. “What we did was we turned a total negative” — a situation in which falling bricks were endangering people entering and leaving the building — “into something very positive.”

In bestowing the award, the State Preservation Commission is not only honoring his administration, Doyle said. It is honoring the city's voters, who, by authorizing \$3 million in bonds for the restoration, showed faith in the project and pride in City Hall.

The Project Award recognizes the outstanding preservation of a historic building. The Preservation Commission is giving out six such awards this year. The other five projects being honored are:

- The Masonic Temple in Providence, which is being converted into a 272-room luxury hotel by SAGE Hospitality Resources of Denver and its investment partner, the Kimberly-Clark Corp.
- The Lonsdale Village Revitalization, seven historic mill houses in Lincoln that were boarded up and empty until the Valley Affordable Housing Corporation carved them into apartments, restoring the exteriors and updating the insides.
- The Touro Synagogue Restoration, a joint effort of Congregation Jeshuat Israel and Touro Synagogue Foundation to update and repair the oldest synagogue in North America.
- The John Waterman Arnold House Restoration, which the Warwick Historical Society undertook after a car crashed into the 18th-century building, causing substantial damage and revealing extensive deterioration.
- The Gordon Avenue Business Incubator, a former factory in South Providence that the South Providence Development Corporation has transformed into a small business starter using the environmentally sensitive construction principles that the Preservation Commission is espousing at its conference this year.

The Preservation Commission is giving out eight other awards. The Town of Barrington is receiving the Stewardship Award for preserving its 120-year-old Town Hall. A nonprofit group, SWAP, for Stop Wasting Abandoned Property, is receiving an Advocacy Award for developing 1,400 units of affordable housing in Upper South Providence.

Karen L. Jessup of the National Trust for Historic Preservation is receiving the Antoinette F. Downing Volunteer Service Award for her efforts on behalf of historic preservation. Charlotte Eschenheimer Johnson is receiving the Frederick C. Williamson Professional Leadership Award for her efforts to save the Newport's Rose Island Lighthouse. Robert Mende, a skilled carpenter, is receiving the Artisanhip Award.

The Providence Preservation Commission is receiving an Advocacy Award for its efforts on behalf of the Masonic Temple. Governor Carcieri and former Gov. Lincoln Almond are receiving the John H. Chafee Public Service Award for paving the way for the building's transformation into a luxury hotel.

Pawtucket's 71-year-old City Hall was restored once before, in 1974, but the job was bungled. The tower was covered with ugly yellow brick and the four concrete eagles on top of the building were removed.

This time, the city undid the damage, restoring the eagles and replacing the brick with materials that matched.

“It’s nice to be recognized,” Public Works director John E. Carney said of the award that the city is receiving for the project: The fact that the award is coming from the Preservation Commission shows that the project was done right.