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Colombian pair win design prize

By Diane Heilenman

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The former mayor of Medellin, Colombia, and his urban projects director were awarded the \$100,000 international Curry Stone Design Prize in a ceremony at the IdeaFestival in Louisville.

Sergio Fajardo, the former mayor, and Alejandro Echeverri were honored for using visionary architecture to clean up the notoriously dangerous slums of the South American city once known as the world capital of cocaine.

Acknowledging the award via a video broadcast from Colombia, before a crowd of nearly 200 in the Kentucky Center's Bomhard Theater Thursday, the two said their transformation of Medellin is "a paradigm for what cities can do today."

Under the four-year program of commissioning new libraries, parks, schools and community centers, the city saw homicides drop 90 percent, tourism and real estate prices soar and class barriers dissolve, they said.

"It's a stunning story," said New York City curator and editor Chee Pearlman, adviser to the Curry Stone Design Prize and head of the jury deliberations, which selected three finalists from 90 nominees.

The other two finalists were architect Anna Heringer of Austria for her "handmade" village schools and homes in rural Bangladesh, using bamboo and straw with modern materials and constructed entirely by local people; and Rob Hopkins, a founder of Transition Network, which has helped more than 200 cities, including Berea, Ky., adopt creative approaches to reducing their carbon footprint.

Each of those two finalists will receive \$10,000.

The Curry Stone prize for breakthrough design solutions with the potential to improve lives and the world is funded by the Curry Stone Foundation of Oregon, formed by architect Clifford Curry, a 1970 University of Kentucky alumnus, and his wife, H. Delight Stone. It is administered by Architecture For Humanity and managed by Curry Stone secretary David Mohny, an architect and professor at UK and former dean of the College of Design.

Luyanda Mpahlwa of Cape Town, South Africa, the 2008 prize winner, was in Louisville Thursday to talk about how the prize had allowed his firm, MMA, to construct 10 innovative sandbag and stucco houses in Cape Town.

The houses are larger than government alternatives and cost less, Mpahlwa said, adding that the effort "gives young designers a new understanding of the role of social responsibility in architecture."

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