



## William Colburn Honored with Lifetime Achievement Award by Michigan Historic Preservation Network



photo by Alexander Vertikoff

Freer House Executive Director William Colburn received the Michigan Historic Preservation Network's (MHPN) 2016 Lifetime Achievement award at a state-wide awards conference in May. The prestigious honor recognizes those who, through personal effort and involvement in historic preservation, have made a significant contribution to preserving Michigan's heritage.

"I am humbled and honored to be given this award," Colburn said. "I am just one of the many people who worked to lay the groundwork for the revitalization of Midtown, through historic preservation activism."

Colburn began working in historic preservation at age 21 as a buildings surveyor with the Detroit Urban Conservation Project. He joined the Preservation Wayne organization and soon rose to a leadership role as chairman and then founding executive director. During his 20 years with Preservation Wayne (now Preservation Detroit), Colburn transformed the WSU student organization into Detroit's first full-time, citywide, nonprofit preservation organization.

Under Colburn, Preservation Wayne halted the demolition and restored the Mackenzie House, home of WSU's founder and first dean; spearheaded a 30-year effort to preserve and revitalize the E. Ferry Avenue Historic District; and completed the first comprehensive surveys of historic buildings on the WSU campus and surrounding community. This resulted in the inclusion of more than 20 buildings and three historic districts on the National Register of Historic Places. The group also conducted preservation workshops, tours,

and research, and wrote publications. Preservation Wayne was the first organization in Detroit to receive a Preservation Honor award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"The 1970s to 1990s was an era when many older and historic buildings on the WSU campus and surrounding neighborhoods were threatened with demolition and neglect," Colburn said. "The work of Preservation Wayne, together with other key individuals and organizations, helped to shift the WSU and Midtown area from clearance to preservation and restoration."

The Freer House, built in 1892, is ranked as one of the most important historic buildings in Michigan. Under Colburn, *giclee* reproductions were created of several paintings Charles Lang Freer had commissioned for the home; a highly popular series of educational events is held each year in partnership with the DIA; and the Freer House has tripled its membership. The home's gardens are currently being re-designed to better reflect Freer's vision, and a second floor gallery is under renovation.

**For more information:** 313-664-2500

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