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Village of Rockton Receives the Chaddick Institute at DePaul University's Inaugural *River Public Engagement Award*

The Chaddick Institute at DePaul bestowed its *River Public Engagement Award* on the Village of Rockton on September 3, 2025, at Rockton's River Market. "The Village's adept initiatives activating its riverfront add to its historic charm and give residents year-round activities that enhance community life," notes Joseph Schwieterman, Ph.D., a DePaul professor who presented the award to Mayor John Peterson.

"The impressive coordination among municipal staff and local stakeholders is a hallmark of Rockton's success," noted Professor Tijana Tufek-Memisevic, who conducted a fact-finding visit in spring and helped present the award. The DePaul committee cited Rockton's flagship event, Old Settlers Days, a summer festival held in Settlers Park that attracts more than 30,000 visitors to the Rock River shoreline, along with other programs, such as Yeti Fest, which features snow sculptures and winter activities, and the Fairy Festival, a mystical celebration of spring initiated by local wellness practitioners. Responding to changing wildlife migration patterns, Rockton introduced Pelican Fest, a nature-focused event, supported by collaborations with Natural Land Institute and university-led science outreach programs, offering birding hikes and youth education.

Rockton is working to transform a five-acre brownfield site along the river, south of Hawick Street, into a dynamic mixed-use development with commercial space and residential or hotel space. "The plan, while still in its early stages, is an important effort to expand its engagement with the river," notes Tufek-Memisevic. Schwieterman added: "Rockton deserves recognition for its sustained planning and environmental stewardship, despite not having the resources of larger communities."



Right: Professor Schwieterman presents DePaul's River Public Engagement Award to Mayor John Peterson. Left: Mayor Peterson, Joseph Schwieterman, Tijana Tufek-Memisevic, and Jake Costello, Superintendent of Public Works