

March 14, 2004

LaGasse Medal Committee

Dear Committee members:

I am writing a letter of support for Renata von Tscharner and her work with the Charles River Conservancy. I have been impressed with her remarkable work because she has effectively linked parkland stewardship with promotion of active recreation along the Charles River. The Conservancy's goal of making the parklands more "attractive and active" is crucial for me as a public health professional. It has long been established that well maintained parks are perceived as safer and thus used more for walking, running, in line skating, and bicycling. The Conservancy is also working on that aspect by having hundreds of volunteers clearing brush to make the pathways easier to use and increase visibility, and their research and planning for pathways improvements further helps. One way in which Renata's vision and initiative has been unique has been by spearheading the creation of a skatepark. In this facility young athletes will showcase their high energy and high skill sport, and an equal benefit will come from others who will go and watch them because they will walk, bicycle or in line skate to get there. By bringing people to a park that has a potential safety problem (being under ramps), the increased number of visitors will make it safer, giving more people confidence to use the river parklands as their four-season gymnasium.

In the short life of the Conservancy, Renata von Tscharner has already succeeded in expanding the notion of parkland stewardship by bringing in teens and their energy. In the other projects of the Conservancy, from service learning, book publishing, bridge lighting and research on swimming, I see a vision that encompasses many approaches. The result of her efforts are clearly contributing to promotion of active living, a key ingredient in our efforts to control the growing epidemic of obesity, and a better quality of life for all in our region. Because of this, she has my enthusiastic support.

Yours sincerely,

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