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Historical Society, Rod Wilson win State History Awards

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ROCHESTER — The Historical Society of Michigan recognized the Rochester Avon Historical Society and its president, Rod Wilson, with 2011 State History Awards last month.

Officials said it's the highest recognition presented by the state's official historical society.

The Rochester-Avon Historical Society received the 2011 Local Society award in recognition of the group's "many successful efforts in restoration, historic building preservation, oral history, walking tours and regular public meetings."

"To be honored as the outstanding local society this year by the Historical Society of Michigan is just unbelievable. It's a great honor. A lot of people work very hard doing the things we do, so it makes this a special award," said Wilson.

The Rochester-Avon Historical Society was founded in 1969 to "help preserve, collect and interpret the history of the greater Rochester area for present and future generations." The group holds monthly meetings with guest speakers, a variety of downtown historical waking tours, and monthly lunchtime talks with longtime residents, among other projects.

The Historical Society of Michigan also recognized Wilson with the Distinguished Volunteer Service award.

Wilson didn't know he had been nominated until he received the call letting him know he had won.

"To be honored in that manner for something you love doing is just very, very special and very humbling," he said.

Wilson said he wouldn't have been able to do all the things that he's done, and the society has done, without his wife, Susan, who is a seventh-generation Rochester-area resident.

"Her family settled out at Avon and Adams in 1837, and my ancestors were on the other side of Oakland University, out by Opdyke and University — one came in 1822 and the other came in 1835 — so we have pretty deep roots here," he said.

"I'm very proud of him for the work he does," Susan Wilson said.

Throughout his 15 years with the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, Wilson has spearheaded numerous restoration and education efforts in the greater Rochester community. He was honored for his leadership in various preservation activities, including the restoration of Rochester's World War II Honor Roll, the effort to

preserve the 1845 Lysander Woodward House, the repainting of the 1880 Griggs Brothers/Rochester Elevator Co. grain elevator, and the restoration and re-hanging of the 1938 Marvin Beerbohm Works Progress Administration mural in the Rochester Community Schools administration building. Wilson was also acknowledged for creating the Downtown Rochester Historic Walking Tour, participating in a multi-agency task force to develop interpretive signs for historic sites along the Paint Creek Trail, and establishing a research committee within the Rochester-Avon Historical Society to compile documentation on local buildings and sites.

Rochester-Avon Historical Society Research Committee Chair Deborah Larsen said that, thanks to Wilson, the committee's efforts succeeded in having the Griggs Brothers Elevator placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and work is under way on other potential National Register nominations.

She said it's been a pleasure to work with Wilson over the years.

"He is a terrific leader for the society because he's able to assess everybody's talent and what they can contribute to the group, and put them to work on things that they do well and make all the pieces fit together," she said. "He's the perfect person to have running the Rochester Avon Historical Society, and we're just thrilled that he received this state recognition, which I think is long overdue."

Wilson also works with the Sons of the American Revolution and the Michigan Historic Preservation Network.

For more information, visit www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org.

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