

ForumNews

NATIONAL TRUST FOR
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

May/June 2008
Vol. XIV No. 5

May is National
Preservation Month!
Visit
www.preservationnation.org



In Bonaparte, Iowa, creation of the Township Stores by local residents was just the beginning of a downtown revitalization effort. The smallest official Main Street community in the U.S., it earned a Great American Main Street Award in 1996. Photo by Michael & Sherry Meek, Fly-by Photography.

COMMUNITY-OWNED STORES: New Anchors for Older Main Streets

By Stacy Mitchell

Six years ago, Powell, Wyo. (population: 5,373), lost its only department store when Stage, a regional chain, decided to shutter a portion of its outlets. Residents suddenly faced a 50-mile round trip to the big-box stores in Cody or a 200-mile round trip to the mall in Billings, Mont., to buy many basic items.

An even bigger concern for town leaders was the cascade of economic losses the store's closure would likely set in motion. Many feared that, as residents started traveling to Cody or Billings for things they used to buy at Stage, they would purchase other goods there as well, including many of the types of products sold by Powell's remaining Main Street merchants. And so the decline of Powell's traditional downtown would accelerate, echoing what is

happening in cities, towns, and villages across the country.

After trying unsuccessfully to attract one of the big store chains—all of which declined due to the sparse population—Powell residents decided they would have to take matters into their own hands. They established a community corporation, capitalized it by selling shares to hundreds of local families, and opened their own department store called the Powell Mercantile.

The Merc, as the store is known, has not only filled a critical community need, it has also turned a profit for five years running, doubled in size, and injected new life into the downtown. "It has been hugely important to the vitality of our downtown," said Kim Capron, executive director of the Pow-

ell Valley Chamber of Commerce. "The Merc has become an anchor tenant for the whole downtown. It's such a large draw."

The success of the Powell Mercantile has inspired at least half a dozen other towns in Wyoming, Montana, and Nevada—all too small and remote to interest national or regional chains—to open their own department stores. The concept is now spreading to the much more populous Northeast, where local residents are seeking community-focused alternatives to big-box retailers.

COMMUNITY CORPORATIONS DEFINED

Community corporations are similar in many respects to other publicly traded corporations. Shareholders meet periodically to vote on major matters and elect a board of directors. The board, which is typically made up of local civic and business leaders, oversees the enterprise, while a store manager handles day-to-day operations.

But unlike most stock corporations, community-owned stores typically have provisions in their charters and bylaws that prevent out-of-state residents from buying stock and limit how many shares any one person may own. This ensures that the business remains locally and democratically controlled.

This democratic structure makes community corporations fairly similar to cooperatives. Indeed, fledgling community-owned department stores can look to the success of food co-ops for inspiration. These consumer-owned stores, which began to proliferate in the 1960s, now number nearly 300 and have annual sales of about \$1 billion.

Cooperatives and community corporations differ modestly in some respects. By law, the activities of co-ops must be fairly closely tied to meeting the needs of their member-owners, whereas community corporations may have somewhat broader missions.

COMMUNITY-OWNED STORES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Setting up as a community corporation may also make raising sufficient start-up capital a little easier, because a single investor can buy multiple shares.

A TOOL FOR SAVING HISTORIC MAIN STREETS

Essential to preserving our historic downtowns is making sure that these districts remain economically viable. Without healthy businesses to occupy the storefronts, downtowns not only cease to function in their historic role as the center of community life, but the buildings themselves invariably deteriorate as property owners no longer have a steady stream of income to pay for maintenance and restoration.

Staying economically viable is particularly challenging for small villages and town centers. It often requires residents to intervene directly to keep their local businesses going.

Such was the case in Bonaparte, Iowa (population 458), when White's Shopping Center, a major downtown retailer, closed its doors 22 years ago. For more than three decades, White's had sold most of the necessities of life, from groceries and clothing to hardware and appliances.

Four residents decided to take action. They formed a nonprofit corporation, Township Stores Inc., and raised over \$100,000 in capital by selling \$2,000 shares to more than 50 local residents. They used the capital to renovate the five 19th-century

buildings that White's had occupied and launched several new businesses, including a grocery store and a hardware store.

Inspired by Township Stores, the community embarked on a full-scale downtown revitalization program, based on the Main Street Four-Point Approach® developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Today the grocery store is still operating and, thanks to the revitalization effort the Township Stores project sparked, Bonaparte is still firmly on the map.

In Vermont and New Hampshire, several longstanding general stores have likewise been saved by community investment. When the general store and lunchtime gathering spot in Hebron, N.H., closed in 1997, more than half of the village's 400 residents chipped in to collectively buy the 1940s building and lease it to new operators. In the New Hampshire town of Harrisville, the village store, dating from 1838, was purchased in 2000 by the nonprofit Historic Harrisville, Inc., renovated, and leased.

IDEA TAKES OFF IN THE WEST

Community ownership has received more attention in recent years with the opening of more than half a dozen community-owned department stores. While community ownership had previously been used to save existing businesses, these new department stores were all started from scratch to fill particular local needs and provide a strong anchor for downtown shopping.

Among the best known is the Powell Merc, which has been featured in several national news stories. But it was directly inspired by another one. As town leaders were struggling to address the loss of Stage, they learned about an enterprise called Little Muddy Dry Goods 450 miles away in Plentywood, Mont. This small-town department store had been launched by a group of residents who had each put up \$10,000 in capital. A contingent of business and civic leaders from Powell visited Plentywood and became convinced that the same model could work in Powell.

When they returned, they formed a board, incorporated, and filed papers with the state to offer stock in the Powell Mercantile. Shares were priced at \$500, much lower

than in Plentywood, with the hope that a larger number of people would invest.

Residents responded enthusiastically. Within months, the enterprise sold more than 800 shares, generating \$400,000 in capital. About a year later, the Merc opened its doors in the 7,000-square-foot storefront previously occupied by Stage.

The store has been a huge success. It offers customers good service and the convenience of shopping close to home. Prices are relatively low as well, because the store has no debt to service and no investors clamoring

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

ForumNews

RICHARD MOE
President

PETER H. BRINK
Senior Vice President, Programs

KATHERINE ADAMS
Director, Center for Preservation Leadership

ELIZABETH BYRD WOOD
Program Manager, National Trust Forum

KERRI RUBMAN
Editor

RON WOODS
Business Manager

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a private, nonprofit membership organization, champions preservation by providing leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to people working to preserve, improve, and enjoy the places that matter to them. Its Washington, D.C., headquarters staff, six regional offices, and 28 historic sites work with the Trust's 270,000 members and thousands of local community groups in all 50 states. For more information, visit the National Trust's website at www.PreservationNation.org.

Forum News: (ISSN 1534-2948; USPS Publication No. 013-083) is published bimonthly by the Center for Preservation Leadership at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 as a benefit of National Trust Forum membership. Forum members also receive four issues of Forum Journal and six issues of Preservation. Annual dues are \$115. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing office. Postmaster: Send address changes to Forum News, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Copyright 2008 National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States. Printed in the United States. Of the total amount of base annual dues, \$6 is for a subscription to Preservation for one year. Support for the National Trust is provided by membership dues; endowment funds; individual, corporate, and foundation contributions; and grants from state and federal agencies. Forum News is a forum in which to express opinions, encourage debate, and convey information of importance and of general interest to Forum members of the National Trust. Inclusion of material or product references does not constitute an endorsement by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. To obtain permission to reprint any part of this publication please call (202) 588-6053.

NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION



Harrisville General Store, N.H. Photo courtesy of Historic Harrisville, Inc.

CHAMPIONS IN THE OREGON LEGISLATURE

By Mary Oberst

Ask almost any Oregonian why we love our state, and you're likely to be given a three-word answer: Quality of life. Our natural beauty, natural bounty, and creative spirit define who we are as Oregonians, and make Oregon not just a livable place, but a place where we want to live.

To help maintain our unique quality of life, Oregon government has a long history of funding great art, culture, and heritage. But in the late 1990s and early years of this decade, that tradition of public investment in art, culture, and heritage was nearly lost.

The worst economic downturn since the Great Depression cut government revenue by almost 25 percent. Art and culture came to be seen by many as a frill, not a necessity. Organizations—both public and nonprofit—began to compete with each other for an ever-shrinking pool of funds available for culture. Many came away empty-handed. However, as Oregon worked its way out of the recession in the conventional way by attracting new business, supporting expansion of existing business, and creating public works projects to create jobs, Governor Ted Kulongoski made three unconventional decisions:

- (1) He made art, culture, and preservation a major part of his economic development and job growth strategy;
- (2) He created the position of Governor's Policy Advisor on Arts, Culture, and Preservation; and
- (3) He proposed one of the largest investments in culture in Oregon history in his 2007–2009 budget.

The governor presented his budget to the legislature in January 2007. The challenge was to persuade a majority of Oregon legislators that art, culture, and preservation are not frills, but critical to Oregon's economy and quality of life.

A small group from the executive and legislative branches—including Senator Betsy Johnson, whose district includes striking examples of how arts, culture, and preservation can turn recession-wracked towns into vibrant communities—and leaders of major arts agencies hatched a crazy plan: Instead of arts agencies and organizations each trying to grab a share of cultural dollars, why not work together as a task force and combine all of the cultural reinvestment initiatives into a single package? That package was given the name CHAMP, short for Culture, History, Arts, Movies, and Preservation.

CHAMP became a winning brand for a winning legislative strategy that had never been attempted before.

The strategy worked like this:

First, the CHAMP task force met weekly. (My particular interest was letter P—funding for an Oregon Main Street program—but my job, like everyone else on the task force, was to assist the entire coalition.)

Second, we created a two-part message:

- (1) The CHAMP constituent parts tie together. For example, renewed funding for the Oregon Historical Society's archives was central to the Oregon Main Street program's need for photographs of original buildings, which was central to the Oregon Film and Video Office's need for authentic movie sites.
- (2) The CHAMP constituents support education (children do better in school when they're exposed to arts and culture) and economic development (a vibrant cultural life attracts entrepreneurs, tourists, and new businesses).

Third, we identified CHAMP champions among the legislators. Almost every legisla-



Mary Oberst, with supporters from the state senate, speaks up for improved funding for art, culture, and preservation at the CHAMP DAY rally. Photo by Jim Leisy © 2007.

tor liked at least one part of our funding proposal, and therefore most were willing to listen to us explain the other parts—and how the parts tied together and boosted Oregon's economy overall. At the same time, we visited editorial boards throughout the state and wrote opinion pieces for some newspapers.

Fourth, we created CHAMP DAY at the legislature with "I'm a CHAMP Champion" stickers, exhibits from arts and preservation groups, visits to legislators' offices, a rally on the Capitol steps with speakers and music, and a multi-media show prepared by the Oregon Film and Video Office at the historic Elsinore Theater at the end of the day. CHAMP Day attracted hundreds of citizens and significant media attention.

What was the result of all this hard work? Significant increases in funding for the Oregon Arts Commission, the Oregon Cultural Trust, the Oregon Historical Society, Oregon Public Broadcasting, and the Oregon Film and Video Office, along with the creation of the Oregon Main Street program.

The reinvestment package totaled almost \$10 million—and proved the power of working together to strengthen culture and our quality of life. ■

Mary Oberst is the First Lady of Oregon and represents Oregon on the National Trust's Board of Advisors.

STATE + LOCAL NEWS

ILLINOIS

“Got Mesker?” That’s the theme of a project of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA, the SHPO) to locate buildings with sheet-metal facades or ornamental elements produced by the Mesker Brothers Iron Works of St. Louis, Mo., and the George L. Mesker & Company of Evansville, Ind., in the late 1800s to early 1900s. IHPA staff first got interested in these buildings after noticing them in towns across Illinois.

According to the companies’ records, these components were installed on more than 50,000 buildings in all 50 states. Darius Bryjka, project designer, is leading the study, including speaking to local historical societies and other groups, individual owners, and the media. A website—www.gotmesker.com—provides a guide to spotting a Mesker building, an assortment of photos, and the ever-expanding database, which now lists about 3,000 buildings still standing, including more than 600 in Illinois. According to Bryjka, “These buildings strike a familiar note with a lot of people because there were so many of them. People are interested in knowing more about them. They’re also interested in repair technologies and replacement parts. We hope this can spur some company within the building industry to offer these again.” The IHPA will also pursue a statewide or nationwide thematic National Register listing.



A “Mesker” storefront in Taylorville, Ill. Photo courtesy of Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

KANSAS

When the Kansas legislature reexamined the state’s historic rehabilitation tax credit last spring, it added some fund-raising help for State or National Register-listed nonprofit buildings, history museums, and historic sites. A qualifying organization accepted as a Partnership Historic Site can then apply for the Partnership Historic Sites Tax Credits.

A set amount of tax credits, from a total pot of \$200,000 per fiscal year, will be given to each selected organization to help it solicit donations for specific projects outlined in its application. These may include restoration, preservation, site operations, or the establishment of an endowment. Donors who give at least \$1,000 during the specified contribution period may then receive a tax credit equal to 50 percent (up to \$2,500 per donor per year). The new state rehab tax credit law also allows a 30 percent transferable credit to nonprofits, retaining the 25 percent credit for others. For more information go to www.kshs.org/resource/buildings.htm.

NEBRASKA

Historic preservation activities generate almost \$170 million per year in Nebraska. Those include rehabilitation of historic buildings, Main Street program activities, heritage tourism, and operation of museums and historic sites. Preservation also supports 3,689 jobs in the state and enhances property valuations in historic districts. These are some of the findings of the state’s first-ever analysis of the economic impact of historic preservation—one of the most thorough state analyses conducted to date using a state-of-the-art economic model developed by Rutgers University for the National Center for Preservation Technology and Training.

The study was commissioned by the Nebraska State Historical Society (SHPO) and conducted by the Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University and the University of Nebraska Bureau of Business



Cover of *Preservation at Work for the Nebraska Economy, 2007*.

Research. *Preservation at Work for the Nebraska Economy* can be downloaded from www.nebraskahistory.org. To request a print copy, contact Bob Puschendorf, deputy SHPO, (402) 471-4769, bpuschendorf@nebraskahistory.org.

STATEWIDE/LOCAL PARTNERS

A total of \$3 million was awarded to 25 Statewide and Local Partner organizations in the first round of the \$5 million Partners in the Field grant program. This new matching grant program is designed to expand preservation field services nationwide. It is funded by a gift to the National Trust from the Robert W. Wilson Charitable Trust.

The recipients, who received awards ranging from \$60,000 to \$150,000, will use the funds to expand the scope of their on-the-ground field services and assistance to property owners, developers, local officials, and others needing information and tools to protect and enhance their communities. View the complete list of awards at www.preservationnation.org/resources/find-funding/grants/partners-in-the-field.html. A second grant round will begin in fall 2008. For more information call or e-mail Rachel_Russell@nthp.org, (202) 588-6186. ■

NEWSMAKERS

KRISTA SCHREINER GEBBIA is now executive director of Preservation Texas. She joined the organization as interim director after serving as architectural historian/project manager for EHT Traceries, Inc., in Washington, D.C.

After nearly a decade as president and CEO of Landmarks Illinois, **DAVID BAHLMAN** will retire in July. He led the organization through many successful preservation efforts, including the campaign to acquire Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, the fight to save Old Cook County Hospital, and the push to designate Chicago's Historic Michigan Boulevard District.

Historic Seattle has hired **KATHLEEN BROOKER** as executive director. She had been president and CEO of Historic Denver, Inc.

Peerless Rockville Historic Preservation, Ltd., in Maryland, has tapped its former development director, **MARY VAN BALGOOY**, to become executive director. She takes over from Eileen McGuckian who retired after 26 years with the organization. Under her leadership, it grew from an all-volunteer organization to an award-winning one with four professional staff.

DENISE ALEXANDER, former program officer for the National Trust's Southwest Office, is now with Galveston Historical Foundation as director of heritage programs.

MARY ALLMAN-KOERNIG is the new executive director of Colorado Preservation, Inc. Most recently executive director of Kids in Need of Dentistry in Denver, she had been executive director and SHPO of the Kansas State Historical Society and, before that, director of the Littleton Historical Museum in Colorado and of The Siouxland Heritage Museums in South Dakota.



Mary Allman-Koernig

Chicago preservationist **BRADFORD WHITE** joins Habitat Co. as senior vice-president of acquisitions and development, after working as a vice-president at Related Midwest LLC. He served as president of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois in the 1990s.

E. CHRIS HARP has been hired as the executive director of the Dry Stone Conservancy, Inc., a national organization dedicated to reviving and promoting the craft of dry-laid stone masonry and preserving dry stone structures. He has more than 12 years experience in the nonprofit cultural sector.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

WORTH KNOWING

A new Preservation Law publication—*Best Practices for Preservation Organizations Involved in Easement and Land Stewardship*—discusses how to be more effective in governance and protection activities. It introduces the Land Trust Standards and Practices, developed by the Land Trust Alliance, and explains how preservation organizations can apply these standards as benchmarks for their stewardship responsibilities. 60 pages; downloadable PDF format only; \$22.50 for Forum and Main Street members (\$30 retail); order no. 2P66. Order from www.preservationbooks.org, (202) 588-6296.

Planning your summer travel? Take a look at the National Trust's Dozen Distinctive Destinations. Each year since 2000, the Trust has selected 12 vacation destinations across the United States that offer an authentic visitor experience by combining dynamic downtowns, cultural diversity, attractive architecture, cultural landscapes, and a strong commitment to historic preservation and revitalization. This year's destinations are Aiken, S.C.; Apalachicola, Fla.; Columbus, Miss.; Crested Butte, Colo.; Fort Davis, Tex.; Friday Harbor, Wash.; Portland, Ore.; Portsmouth, N.H.; Red Wing, Minn.; Ste. Genevieve, Mo.; San Juan Bautista, Calif.; Wilmington, N.C. To date, there are 108 Distinctive Destinations located in 42 states throughout the country. Learn more about them at www2.preservationnation.org/dozen_distinctive_destinations/2008.

The Land Trust Alliance has created a new *Conservation Options* brochure to explain to landowners the different conservation methods available to them, including easements and land donation. The attractive full-color brochure features compelling photographs and testimonials from others who have protected their properties. \$12.50 for a bundle of 25 (\$10 for Land Trust Alliance members) plus s&h. For more information go to www.lta.org/publications/conservation_options_brochure.html.

Got 100 places to see before you die? This website can help. Go to www.world-heritage-tour.org to get stunning 360 degree views of more than 200 World Heritage Sites or other culturally significant places. Eighty in the Middle East and East Africa have just been added. The website is a project of WHTour.org, a nonprofit organization documenting the UNESCO World Heritage List in panoramies (360 degree imaging), with support from the J.M. Kaplan Fund.

The National Main Street Center reports that from 1980 through the end of 2007, more than 2,150 communities have participated in the Main Street program. They've undertaken 199,519 building rehabilitation projects, and experienced a net gain of 82,909 businesses and 370,514 jobs. Total reinvestment in business-district revitalization in these communities has risen to \$44.9 billion—an increase of \$3.3 billion over last year! Learn more at www.mainstreet.org under Solution Center, Economic Statistics. ■

COMMUNITY-OWNED STORES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2



Powell Mercantile, Wyo. Photo courtesy of the New Rules Project, Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

for a high rate of return. Also key has been the know-how of an experienced inventory buyer who previously worked as a regional manager for the Stage chain.

The Merc has been profitable since it opened in 2002. In 2006 the store had profits of \$32,000 on \$634,000 in sales. Rather than pay dividends, shareholders have opted to reinvest their earnings. In 2007 the Merc bought the building next door, more than doubling the size of the store.

By bringing more people downtown more often, the Merc has boosted sales at other downtown businesses. It's also given the community a new sense of pride and self-determination. Many residents refer to the Merc simply as "our store."

"Because the community owns it, they really support it," explained Capron. The Merc, in turn, goes out of its way to support the community, she noted. "They take the lead and always participate in downtown events. They are more than just a retailer. They see it as their mission to be there for the community."

Sharon Earhart, one of the founders of the Merc, believes the store has done more for Powell than a chain could have. "I'm so glad that when we asked the big stores to come open up in our town, they said, 'Are you kidding? Get a life.' So we did! And a much better one," she said.

The store's success has inspired several other community-owned department stores in the Rocky Mountain West. Residents of the

Wyoming towns of Worland and Torrington have established their own stores: Washakie Wear, which opened in 2003, and Our Clothing Store, started in 2005. When J.C. Penney pulled out of remote Ely, Nev., residents capitalized their own store with nearly \$500,000 in stock shares, priced at \$500 apiece. The Garnet Mercantile opened in 2004 in the same 1910 building, whose facade now sports the Art Deco look of the town's heyday. In Livingston, Mont., the Livingston Mercantile, owned by 250 local shareholders, celebrated its first year in business in December 2007.

All these stores now serve as major downtown anchors, keeping residents shopping locally. The stores have joined together to form a buying cooperative to reduce costs by buying some goods in bulk.

EAST COAST CATCHING ON

In isolated Western towns, community-owned stores have provided an antidote to a sudden dearth of staple goods within a reasonable distance. In the East, community-owned stores are catching on less out of dire necessity and more as a sought-after alternative to big boxes.

In 2006 a grassroots group in Saranac Lake, N.Y., managed to rally residents and head off construction of a Wal-Mart superstore. But they knew that it would be a short-lived victory unless they found a way to fill a local need for more affordable shopping options. As long as this gap remained, Wal-Mart would eventually return and be welcomed by the community.

The group launched the Saranac Lake Community Store to provide low-cost clothing, shoes, linens, craft items, and baby goods. Shares went on sale to the public in July 2007, and by January 2008 the venture had attained nearly 50 percent of its goal of \$500,000 in start-up capital.

Residents of Greenfield, Mass., have also been working to establish a community-owned store. The initiative was prompted in part by the closure of Ames, a regional chain of discount department stores, which left a gap in the availability of low-priced goods. Unlike isolated towns in the West, Greenfield has four Wal-Mart stores within about 20 miles. Several years ago, residents

voted against Wal-Mart's application to open in town. Mercantile advocates hope that, by launching a low-priced alternative, they can prevent further incursion by chains and maintain the vitality of Greenfield's downtown and homegrown businesses.

With the support of grants from the USDA Rural Business Enterprise program and the Greenfield Redevelopment Authority, and help from the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, a steering committee spent three years laying the groundwork for the enterprise. They prepared a detailed business plan, incorporated, and formed a board of directors made up of bankers, attorneys, civic leaders, and other community members.

In 2007 they began selling shares in the Greenfield Mercantile, hoping to raise \$600,000. The planned store may make use of a 19th-century brick building downtown recently vacated by a furniture store.

Starting a community-owned store is no easy task. It requires months of dedicated work from volunteers and a significant financial investment from many local families. It's certainly harder to do than simply succumbing to more big-box sprawl. But, as the founders and owners of these stores attest, they yield dividends that go far beyond shopping options and stock earnings. They bring people together around a common enterprise. They fill vacant storefronts, both directly and indirectly, that would otherwise multiply on Main Streets. They contribute to a more robust local economy and a greater sense of community self-reliance. ■

Stacy Mitchell is a senior researcher with the New Rules Project, a program of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. Her book, *Big-Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses*, was recently named one of the top ten business books of the year by the American Library Association's Booklist.

For further information, see *How to Launch a Community-Owned Store* at www.bigboxtoolkit.com/images/pdf/community_store_howto.pdf. To learn more about the New Rules Project's efforts to support local businesses, and to sign up for its e-mail *Hometown Advantage Bulletin*, go to www.newrules.org/retail.



"The mentally energizing sessions provided great ideas that will easily transfer to the work I do with my own museum. I'll have more resources at my disposal now through this connection with the National Trust."

Shirl Spicer, 2007 Diversity Scholar

The Diversity Scholarship Program provides financial assistance to community leaders from diverse backgrounds to attend the National Preservation Conference, to be held next in Tulsa, Okla., October 21-25, 2008.

For application information go to www.preservationnation.org/resources/find-funding/scholarships/diversity

or contact scholarships@nthp.org

Applications must be postmarked by May 31.

NEWSMAKERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

The Architectural Resources Group in San Francisco welcomes **CHARLES EDWIN CHASE** as director of planning and associate principal. He had been executive director of San Francisco Architectural Heritage.

Preservation architect **ROGER LANG**, 64, died in March. The New York Landmarks Conservancy's director of community programs and services for 16 years, he often served as the Conservancy's spokesman and was instrumental in its efforts to save buildings on the south side of Ellis Island. He was also a popular adjunct professor and visiting lecturer at several universities.

SAIDEE WATSON NEWELL, National Trust Advisor for Louisiana, died in March at 70. A long-time preservationist, her leadership roles included serving as chair of the Association for the Preservation of Historic Natchitoches, president of the Louisiana Preservation Alliance, and co-chair of the Cane River National Heritage Area Commission. Among the many honors she received was the Mayor's "Natchitoches Treasure" award for her contributions to that city.

NANCY BANNICK, journalist, philanthropist, and preservation activist in Hawaii, died in February at 81. As editor of the travel publication *Sunset* magazine for more than 20 years, she embraced Hawaii's distinctive places and led fights to preserve Honolulu's Chinatown, the Waikiki War Memorial Natatorium, and other sites. She was a charter member of the Historic Hawai'i Foundation and key supporter of Hawaii Public Radio and the Honolulu Symphony. ■

CALENDAR

May 1-3

Texas Historic Preservation Conference, Corpus Christi. Contact (512) 463-6255, www.thc.state.tx.us.

May 2-4

North Dakota Preservation Conference, Dunseith. Contact www.prairieplaces.org/contact.cfm.

May 7-10

Vernacular Architecture Forum, Fresno, Calif. Contact (559) 621-8520, www.vernaculararchitectureforum.org/fresno.html.

May 8

Preservation Trust of Vermont Annual Conference, Brandon. Contact www.ptvermont.org.

May 8-10

Michigan Historic Preservation Network Conference, Dearborn. Contact (517) 371-8080, www.mhpn.org.

May 14-16

Preserve Wyoming 2008: Main Street

and Beyond, Cheyenne. Contact <http://wyoshpo.state.wy.us/index.asp>.

May 15

Florida Statewide Preservation Conference, Pensacola. Contact www.floridatrust.org.

May 28-31

US/ICOMOS International Symposium, Washington, D.C. Contact www.icomos.org/usicomos.

May 29-30

Maryland Preservation & Revitalization Conference, Hagerstown. Contact (410) 685-2886, www.preservationmaryland.org/html/conference.html.

May 29-31

Tennessee Statewide Preservation Conference, Cookeville. Contact (615) 963-1255, www.tennesseepreservation-trust.org.

May 29-June 1

Society for Industrial Archeology Annual Conference, San Jose, Calif. Contact www.knightsia.org/sia2008.

June 1-5

International Making Cities Livable Conference, Santa Fe, N.Mex. Contact www.livablecities.org/46ConfSantaFe.htm.

June 4-6

Oklahoma Statewide Preservation Conference, Ponca City. Contact www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpocalendar.htm.

June 19-22

Association for Gravestone Studies Conference, Amherst, Mass. Contact www.gravestonestudies.org/conferences.htm.

July 10-13

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Forum, New Orleans. Contact (706) 42-4731, www.uga.edu/sed/psa/programs/napc/join.htm.

July 16-19

League of Historic American Theatres Conference & Theatre Tour, Atlanta. Contact (410) 659-9533, www.lhat.org/conference_theatre.asp.

OUT THERE

AMBASSADOR HOTEL SAGA ENDS: LA CONSERVANCY MOVES ON

When is it time to end a long preservation battle? The Los Angeles Conservancy recently had to make that tough decision concerning the Ambassador Hotel.

The Ambassador (1921–1989) was once the hotel of choice for celebrities and dignitaries, home of the Cocoanut Grove nightclub where the “Rat Pack” and future stars performed and six Academy Awards ceremonies were held, and site of the history-changing assassination of Robert F. Kennedy.

When the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) purchased the vacant complex in 2001 with plans to demolish all buildings to make way for three schools, the Los Angeles Conservancy took action. After its proposals to save the main building for classrooms or other uses were rejected, the group sued to prevent the demolition, citing the hotel’s importance to the development of Los Angeles and its entertainment industry.

The Conservancy’s petition was denied, but in August 2005 it agreed to drop its appeal in exchange for a \$4.9 million payment by LAUSD to help conserve other historic school buildings within the district. The school district further promised it would

incorporate the Cocoanut Grove nightclub, the Paul Williams–designed coffee shop, and historic elements from the RFK assassination site (the pantry) into its new facilities.

But LAUSD reneged on that promise. Last spring the district submitted a modified plan that called for demolishing the nightclub and coffee shop, and leaving disassembled pieces of the pantry in storage. The Los Angeles Conservancy filed another lawsuit as its only recourse to hold the district accountable. The lawsuit was settled in January, allowing demolition to proceed the following month.

In the Los Angeles Conservancy News, January/February 2008, executive director Linda Dishman explains the decision:

Why...did we settle the lawsuit before going to trial? First and foremost, although we had succeeded in holding LAUSD accountable for its actions, we faced the harsh realization that the true preservation of the site’s remaining historic resources had become impossible. The Cocoanut Grove and coffee shop had been stripped of their historic fabric, and the RFK assassination site was now a “Humpty Dumpty” of broken pieces in storage containers. As we main-

tained throughout the long fight to save the hotel, fake history does not belong in a place of learning; our kids deserve better.

Timing was also a factor...[W]e wanted to avoid any further delays in school construction, particularly given the lack of authentic preservation that would ultimately result...

Finally, we saw the silver lining of opportunity to use this difficult situation to promote meaningful preservation elsewhere in the district, if not on the Ambassador site. In settlement of the original 2004 lawsuit, LAUSD contributed \$4.9 million toward a new Historic Schools Investment Fund. This permanent endowment will provide grants to fund the repair, restoration, and conservation of historic schools throughout the district. In this latest settlement, LAUSD will provide an additional \$4 million to this fund, which will award its first grants in 2008.

With the Ambassador Hotel, LAUSD had a singular opportunity to provide an exceptional and unique educational environment, in which kids could literally touch history as they learned it. We will always regret that LAUSD declined this opportunity. Yet we take solace in the fact that there is now a permanent funding source for real preservation elsewhere in the district, so that children throughout Los Angeles can have the chance to learn in, and be inspired by, authentically historic settings. ■

**NATIONAL
TRUST
FOR
HISTORIC
PRESERVATION**

1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Periodicals
Postage Paid
Washington, DC