

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 25, 2007

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**Restoration and Relocation of Historic Animal Court
Begins with Move from Former ABLA Site**
*“Living Sculptures” Represent Community Celebration of Past,
Vision of Future*

CHICAGO – Historians, art preservationists, community leaders and CHA residents today celebrated the saving of one of Chicago’s oldest and most beloved public art treasures – the Animal Court Sculptures by famed WPA artist, Edgar Miller. Miller’s installation of seven ‘living sculptures’ in 1938 under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) of the New Deal as art pieces that were incorporated into a children’s playground. They signaled the hope embodied for the families who would live in the first public housing development in Chicago, the Jane Addams Homes.

While generations of children enjoyed an artful and wonderful place to play, over the years, the Animal Court Sculptures, like the development they graced fell into disrepair. They were nearly forgotten in the plans for the demolition and transformation of ABLA Homes. However, as the redevelopment of the Roosevelt Square site progressed, concern about the fate of the sculptures began to emerge from many quarters. This concern culminated in a plan to restore the sculptures and use them as the foundation for the newly created community being built on and around the former CHA development.

The developer of Roosevelt Square, Related Midwest, The Roosevelt Square Community Partners, the Chicago Park District, the Chicago Housing Authority, former ABLA residents and The Chicago Conservation Center are working together to raise the estimated \$110,000 in donations required to restore the statues. The CHA has agreed to give the sculptures to the Chicago Park District for their placement in a new \$3.5 million public park that the developer is building at Taylor and Lytle upon the completed restoration. Today’s event marks the first step in restoration and the formal kickoff of the funding campaign, with an announcement that the Polk Brothers Foundation and the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation have made initial grants to ensure the movement of the statues off the demolition/construction site to the Conservation of Sculpture and Objects studios of Andrzej Dajnowski, one of the nation’s most well-respected large works restorers, where they will be cleaned and repaired.

Welcoming the assembled group, Thomas Weeks, President of Related Midwest, master developer of Roosevelt Square, spoke of the symbolic importance of the Miller statues. “In creating the new Roosevelt Square community, we are building on the best of the legacy of the past. We are delighted to help preserve these marvelous sculptures which once again symbolize our hope for the future of the residents, the neighborhood, and the city.”

The CHA’s Director of Development, Carl Byrd emphasized the importance of partnerships such as the one that makes this restoration possible. “The reintegration of CHA housing into the broader neighborhood and the reintegration of the residents who lease from CHA into the broader city is possible only with the many partners throughout the city who work closely with the CHA. This partnership to save these sculptures is no different, and is symbolic of the entire CHA redevelopment efforts that respect the history and heritage, while preserving and preparing for the future. These wonderful statues remind us that we are one neighborhood, one city, where we are judged not by how we pay our rent, but how well we build and maintain community,” Byrd said.

Speaking to the artistic value and importance of the preservation was Heather Becker, CEO of The Chicago Conservation Center, the nation's preeminent conservation firm, known best in Chicago for its restoration of all of the 325 murals in the Chicago Public Schools and the publication of Art for the People, the book that documented the process.

"Chicago has the distinction of being the nation's largest repository of public art – from our Chicago Park District Field houses to our schools and post offices. But even amid all this wonderful art, these Edgar Miller statues are treasures – some of the few, if not only, WPA sculptures to survive the century. That the CHA, the Park District, private developers, community residents and foundations could come together to save them is a testament to the greatness of our city. I can only say thank you," Becker said.

"We are thrilled to celebrate the restoration of the Animal Court," said Chicago Park District Chief of Staff Mark Thomas. "These sculptures are symbols of this community's rich history and will ultimately become wonderful assets to a new park."

While the words of various officials and conservators were important, the most stirring comments came from Deverra Beverly, who has long-served as president of the ABLA Local Advisory Council. "From the time I was a young woman, these statues have been a part of my life. Knowing that these sculptures will remain a part of my future – and our community's future, helps us know that promises made will be promises kept and that we are moving forward on the right path for the future."

When the Jane Addams Homes were completed in 1938, they were one of the most progressive public housing developments in history – offering job placement assistance, child care and other public services its largely immigrant population. The new Roosevelt Square community will comprise 2,441 rental and for-sale homes, of which approximately one-third will be set aside for public housing residents, one-third for those who qualify to purchase affordable housing and one-third for market-rate homeowners. In addition to the housing, the City of Chicago has already completed the new Fosco Park Community Center, and will begin work for new fire and police facilities in the coming months. A new shopping center anchored by Jewel/Osco opened in 2002 to serve the growing residential community.

For more information on the restoration efforts of the Animal Court sculptures, please visit the Chicago Conservation Center online at www.chicagoconservation.com. For more information on the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transformation, please visit www.thecha.org. For more information about Roosevelt Square, please visit www.rooseveltsquare.com.

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Note For Editors: Photos of the event are available at the following websites.

Photo #1: <http://www.mkcpr.com/filebin/animalcourtsculpture.jpg>

Suggested Caption: "A fundraising campaign to raise the necessary \$110,000 is now underway to save the 'Animal Court Sculptures', a pivotal aspect of the ABLA Homes since 1938 that is being restored thanks to a coming together of Roosevelt Square developer Related Midwest, the Chicago Housing Authority, The Chicago Conservation Center, Chicago Park District, Roosevelt Square Community Partners and current and former ABLA residents."

Photo #2: <http://www.mkcpr.com/filebin/animalcourtweeks4.25.07.jpg>

Suggested Caption: Thomas Weeks, President of Roosevelt Square developer Related Midwest, discusses the importance of the 'Animal Court Sculptures' at a press conference held April 25th launching a fundraising campaign to restore the public art that has graced the CHA's ABLA Homes for nearly seven decades. The campaign to save the sculptures is a coming together of Related Midwest, the CHA, The Chicago Conservation Center, Chicago Park District, Roosevelt Square Community Partners and current and former ABLA residents."

Photos are courtesy of the Chicago Housing Authority