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## History unblurred

*Park murals freed from the ravages of time and patch jobs*

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A view of the Pulaski Park mural.  
Photo by Timothy Inklebarger

The process is slow and tedious, but the multiple layers of varnish on the 1920s mural at Pulaski Park are gradually being chipped away, revealing faces where there were once smudges and blurs.

Last Thursday, residents of Noble Square, Mayor Richard M. Daley, and a small army of city officials and business leaders gathered at the park's field house at 1419 W. Blackhawk to announce plans to complete the restoration of the mural, "Allegorical Scene," along with 57 others in city parks, by 2007. The projected cost for the entire project is \$376,000;

the restoration of the Pulaski mural is expected to cost \$50,000 and take three more months to complete.

Standing before the mural, which adorns a field house archway, Chicago Park District Superintendent Tim Mitchell called it "a reflection of the history of Pulaski Park as well as the time period it was created." Designed by artist Jas Oligert, it was painted by Gilbert Hardic and his students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Hasty varnish jobs performed over the years to preserve the piece, however, have dulled its reflection.

Although the subject of the Pulaski mural is somewhat vague, the park murals collectively tell stories of American and Illinois history, cultural unity, workers' and women's rights, and social justice, according to Heather Becker, the head of the Chicago Conservation Center.

Elsewhere in the city, several murals had been severely damaged by water, vandals, and structural decay, containing hundreds of areas where pigment was about to separate and fall from the wall.

"These works were in jeopardy of being lost," Becker said.

According to Becker, the project was partly inspired by a conservation effort started in the mid-1990s to restore more than 400 murals in the Chicago Public Schools. Following the completion of that project, the Conservation Center began working on some of the most threatened park murals—which then spiraled into an effort to restore murals in 11 field houses across the city.

Praising the business community for providing matching funds for the mural project, Daley predicted the murals would help foster a new generation's appreciation for Chicago's public buildings and institutions.

Sponsors of the project included LaSalle Bank, the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, and philanthropist Marshall Field, to name a few.

Michele Abraham-Detering, 55, an illustrator who attended the event, said she brought her grandson, Justice Hudson, 4, because "I want him to know how to draw and appreciate art. My grandmother did it with me. She took me places and taught me everything when I was little."