

News

Park District, Chicago Conservation Center Restore Murals

Mural Unveiling Celebration Planned June 29

Release Date: 05/10/06



The Chicago Park District is working with The Chicago Conservation Center to restore murals in field houses across the city in a collaborative project known as the Mural Preservation Effort.

"These murals are a reflection of the history of each park as well as the history of the time period in which the murals were created," said Timothy J. Mitchell, the general superintendent of the Chicago Park District. "By preserving these murals, we are preserving a piece of history for future generations to enjoy."

The public is invited to attend a celebration of this project Thursday, June 29th, at the Pulaski Park Field House, 1419 W. Blackhawk St, at 6pm. Official representatives from the City of Chicago, the Chicago Park District and The Chicago Conservation Center are scheduled to make presentations and unveil the work in progress on Pulaski Park's significant mural, Allegorical Scene.

The Chicago Conservation Center worked with Julia Bachrach, the Chicago Park District's historian, to identify murals painted between 1916 and 1941 that were in need of restoration. The 58 murals that were chosen were based on their need for conservation and their historical significance to both Chicago history and national history.

The murals targeted for preservation were painted during both the Progressive Era and the New Deal Era, artistic periods that embraced the ideals of social justice including the consequence of industrialism for workers, issues of urban housing, child labor, and women's rights. The preservation of these murals ensures the continued recognition of these programs and the ideals that nourished them.

The \$376,000 Mural Preservation Effort kicked off in May 2004 and is currently in its second phase. The project is jointly funded by the park district and The Chicago Conservation Center. The Conservation Center raised its share, \$188,000, through a combination of private, corporate and foundation support.

"The support we have received for this project has been tremendous, coming from all areas including private donors, LaSalle Bank, The Terra Foundation for American Art, the Alphawood Foundation and the Driehaus Foundation among many others," said Megan Ann Jones, Vice President of Client Services for The Chicago Conservation Center.

"We live in a city with more public murals than any other in America because Chicago was at the forefront in supporting mural arts in the early part of the 20th Century," she said. "With the support we have received for this effort, it is clear we continue to lead the way in ensuring their preservation for future generations."

The first phase, which was completed in November 2005, restored 35 murals in the following six parks:

- Calumet Park, 9801 S. Avenue G, 4 Progressive-Era Murals, The Illinois Heritage Series
- Eugene Field Park, 5100 N. Ridgeway Ave, 2 WPA Era murals
- Fuller Park, 331 W. 45th St., 8 Progressive-Era Murals, French Explorer Series
- Independence Park, 3945 N. Springfield Ave., 1 WPA Mural, Spirit of 1776
- Jefferson Memorial Park, 4822 N. Long Ave., 2 WPA Era murals, Historical Portrait Series
- Sherman Park, 1301 W. 52nd St., 18 Progressive-Era Murals, The New World Series

The second phase of the mural restoration project began in January 2006 to restore the remaining 23 murals at the following six parks:

- Hamilton Park, 513 W. 72nd St., 14 Progressive-Era Murals, American Heritage Series
- Jefferson Park, 4822 N. Long Ave, 2 WPA Era murals, Historical Portrait Series
- Palmer Park, 201 E. 111th St., 4 WPA Murals, American Scenes
- Pulaski Park, 1419 W. Blackhawk St., 1 Progressive-Era Mural, Allegorical Scene
- Rutherford Sayre Park, 6871 W. Belden Ave., 1 WPA Mural, Portrait of Samuel Rutherford
- Warren Park, 6601 N. Western Ave., 1 WPA Mural, Native-American Village

The second phase is expected to be completed in early 2007.

Each mural conservation project begins with surface cleaning to remove decades of environmental particulates, followed by thinning or removal of darkened and discolored varnish layers. Where necessary, surface abrasions or deformations are addressed, tears or holes in the canvas are rewoven and patched, loose canvas is reset and stabilized, frames are repaired and lettering is regilded. Minimal retouching is undertaken only where necessary using reversible conservation paints. A final varnish film is often applied to protect paint surfaces, enhance tones and saturate dark areas. The conservation of each mural is documented in a complete report accompanied by photographs taken before, during, and after conservation treatment.

Publication Date: 05/10/06