

Park Vandalism Paints an Ugly Picture

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Destination:
SEATTLE

Special NRPA
Congress Preview

Leave It Better: *Painting a New Face*

Chicago restores historic murals throughout city parks.



Project:

The Mural Preservation Effort, Chicago, Ill.

Problem:

Historic murals painted in park field houses throughout the city of Chicago were in disrepair and in need of restoration. Some were flaking away while others were coated in a varnish that had discolored the original art through the years. Many of the murals were coated with a century's worth of grime and one was damaged by graffiti.

Solution:

Julia Bachrach, the park district's historian, chose a total of 58 murals painted

between 1916 and 1941 for restoration, based on their condition and historic importance. Many of the aging murals were painted during socially significant periods of history, including the Progressive Era and the New Deal Era. The chosen murals will undergo a series of processes, including cleaning, varnish removal and canvas repair. During restoration, the murals are subject to minimal retouching with reversible conservation paints. The final step is to seal the murals with a varnish that protects the painted surfaces.

Partnerships and Costs:

The Mural Preservation Effort is the result of collaboration between the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Conservation Center. The effort's total cost is \$376,000, split evenly between the organizations, much of which has been given to the organizations through private, corporate and foundation donations.

Timeline:

The project began in May 2004 with its first phase, which saw the restoration of 35 murals in six parks. The second phase is currently underway to restore the remaining 23 murals in an additional six parks. The project is expected to be completed in early 2007.

Community Impact:

Heather Becker, CEO of the Chicago Conservation Center says that the murals afford the Chicago public something unique. "I think the most important thing for people to realize is the ownership of these pieces by the general public and the city itself," Becker explains. "It's rare to have an opportunity where such glorious works of art are in public spaces."



(top) Murals restored through the effort are historic, dating back to 1916. (bottom) Restoration of Chicago's fieldhouse murals is a labor intensive process.