

Groundbreaking at Gage Home in Fayetteville

The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation announced the establishment of the Ruth Putter Welcome Center addition to the Matilda Joslyn Gage Home on August 26. The announcement came at the groundbreaking for Phase 2 of the comprehensive restoration and rehabilitation of the historic Gage Home at 210 East Genesee Street in Fayetteville. A former member of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation Board of Trustees, Ms. Putter is a well-known area photographer who has been active in social justice causes. The event was held on Women's Equality Day, which commemorates the 89th anniversary of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution that gave women the vote in 1920.

Loretta Zolkowski and Alan Byrne, co-chairs of the Gage Home Restoration Campaign, also announced the kick-off of the \$500,000 Exhibits and Program portion of the campaign with the award of a \$50,000 allocation from Heritage NY: Underground Railroad for two interpretive kiosks which will be ready for the opening of the restored Gage Home in 2010. The Exhibits and Program campaign has also received \$25,000 in private donations, and the capital campaign is within \$100,000 of reaching the \$1 million goal for the restoration of the Gage Home.

Surveying is taking place this week at the Gage Home, according to contractor Marc Leonardis of Leo Construction & Development, Inc. of Skaneateles and construction will begin within the week. Mr. Leonardis will be at the Gage Home from 10:00-12:00 on Monday, August 31, to meet with any local businesses who would like to stop by and share information with him about their products and services. Refreshments will be served. Mr. Leonardis has made a commitment to work with local businesses for products and services whenever possible.

Architects for the restoration project are Crawford & Stearns, Architects and Preservation Planners of Syracuse. The Gage Home restoration will be guided by principles of sustainable stewardship to restore and rehabilitate the Gage Home in both an environmentally friendly and historically appropriate manner. The Foundation is committed to the careful selection and use of healthful, environmentally responsible materials and products.

The groundbreaking is a major milestone in the effort to save the stately Greek Revival home and transform it into a museum and center of learning and dialogue. The project began with the formation of the Gage Foundation in 2001 and purchase of the building in 2002.

Speakers at the groundbreaking included: Karen McMahon, representing the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation Board of Trustees; Fayetteville mayor Mark Olson; Chris Capella Peters, Historic Sites Restoration Coordinator at the NY State Historic Preservation Office; Lynn B. "Spike" Herzig, past president of the National Tour Association and consultant with The Herzig Group Inc.; and Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner, Executive Director of the Gage Foundation, along with Ms. Zolkowski, Mr. Byrne and Ms. Putter.

Gage Foundation Ambassador Mimi Kennedy, currently starring in the critically-acclaimed film "In the Loop", sent a message to attendees at the groundbreaking reminding them of the importance of the Gage Home, where Gage conducted her work for social justice for 44 years. Ms. Kennedy will be premiering her one-woman show on Matilda Joslyn Gage on October 10, 2009 at the Auburn Public Theater.

A lifelong resident of Central New York, Gage is primarily known as a leader of the National Woman Suffrage Association along with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She ran the organization from her Fayetteville home as Chair of the Executive Committee for twenty years.

Gage was also the mother-in-law of Wizard of Oz author L. Frank Baum, who spent a great deal of time in her home. A set of photos he took of the house in 1887 is guiding the current restoration.

The Gage Home today is part of the National Park Service's "Votes for Women" trail and New York State's Women's Heritage Trail. It is included in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom and the New York State Underground Railroad Heritage Trail. It is the only house in the United States where L. Frank Baum lived that is open to the public and is listed on the Freethought Trail for Gage's support of religious freedom.

The completed Gage Home Museum will offer a program of education and dialogue on the basic issues of peace, justice and freedom that Gage championed. Each of the major rooms will be dedicated to exploring the current manifestation of the issues significance in Gage's life: women's rights, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) influence on early feminists, slavery and the Underground Railroad, religious freedom, and Gage's influence on the Oz stories.

For more information about the home and the work of the Gage Foundation, visit www.MatildaJoslynGage.org.

###