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Richard H. Driehaus commits \$1 million to Landmarks Illinois Money seeds Illinois County Courthouses grant initiative

Chicago, Ill. (March 7, 2009)—Philanthropist Richard H. Driehaus today announced a four-year, \$1 million commitment to Landmarks Illinois, the state’s leading voice for historic preservation, to establish a grant program that assists communities throughout Illinois in restoring their historic county courthouses.

The surprise announcement came at Landmarks Illinois’ annual Legendary Landmarks Gala, in which Mr. Driehaus was among four individuals being honored by the organization for their contributions to the state’s cultural legacy.

“Richard Driehaus is a long-time leader in the local historic preservation movement,” said Jim Peters, President of Landmarks Illinois. “We are honored to accept his gift and partnership with Landmarks Illinois to help preserve many of our state’s greatest works of public architecture—the County Courthouse.”

The Richard H. Driehaus Community Initiative Grants will be managed by Landmarks Illinois through its statewide Preservation Heritage Fund Program and administered as “challenge grants” that would go to local volunteer groups or public campaigns aimed at preserving their county courthouses.

The grants would go to the restoration of critical features of the courthouse, such as clocks, bell towers, cupolas, and ornament, as well as to support cutting-edge—and energy-

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efficient—exterior lighting technologies. A principal program goal is that by helping to showcase these public buildings through improvements and dramatic lighting, this also will help to revitalize the surrounding town squares.

“These challenge grants not only focus on the architectural aspects of a community’s courthouse, but will act as a catalyst to energize other financial public and private support at a time when our economy demands working partnerships,” Peters said.

Applications will be accepted from one of the 31 communities with a county courthouse already on the National Register of Historic Places or the 25 courthouses deemed eligible for inclusion. (These account for more than half of Illinois 102 counties.)

(The text of Mr. Driehaus’ announcement follows.)

Comments of Richard H. Driehaus, in accepting Legendary Landmark Award from Landmarks Illinois, Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Ill., March 7, 2009

Novelist William Faulkner once characterized the American courthouse as the “repository and guardian of [a county’s] aspirations and hopes.” In Illinois, county courthouses are truly the physical and emotional centers of scores of communities. Usually they are the most architecturally dramatic and beautiful building in town. Their domes, turrets, clock towers, and classical details make them the local “Temples of our Democracy.”

Over the past decade, Landmarks Illinois has provided over \$500,000 in matching grants to nonprofit preservation groups and communities across the state, including grants to several County Courthouses. Yet the number of these highly visible public buildings that still need assistance is larger than the available funds can cover.

This leads me to an announcement that I would like to make tonight. I am planning to further my commitment to Landmark Illinois’ ongoing statewide preservation efforts by providing a \$1 million gift that will help spur the restoration of historic County Courthouses throughout Illinois.

This commitment over a four-year period will not only help to revitalize the exteriors of these courthouses but, I believe, also will serve as a catalyst to energize community redevelopment efforts during these challenging economic times. And whatever work occurs will be highlighted by new energy-efficient exterior lighting that will dramatize the courthouse’s visual importance to its community.

These grants also will help stimulate a much larger—and longer-term—effort aimed at restoring county courthouse buildings throughout Illinois. I believe this demonstration

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project will make people focus more on the inherent worth of these highly visible public buildings, as well as the town squares they occupy and the commercial structures that surround them. I also hope they will make people think about the opportunities for adaptive use, energy efficiency, and other ways to leverage private—and public—sources of funding to help make their communities more attractive, safe, and viable.

Like Landmarks Illinois, I believe that seed money can be the “tipping point” for an idea or a project—and that small grants can help bring out the best in community thinking, planning, design, and financial support. The award programs that we help sponsor at the Chicago Bungalow Association, the Chicago Neighborhood Development Group, and at Landmarks Illinois are a way to provide “after the fact” recognition for work that has been well done.

We hope that this new Community Initiative Grant program will provide an equal amount of inspiration—and possible solutions—for others attempting to restore the great County Courthouses of Illinois.

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Landmarks Illinois is the state's leading voice for historic preservation. Since its founding in 1971, the 2,500-member statewide organization has gone on to save countless architectural and historic treasures throughout Illinois. Landmarks Illinois' mission today focuses on saving buildings, facilitating preservation, and educating the public through innovative programs and promotion. For more information, visit www.Landmarks.org.

Landmarks Illinois operates and manages legendary architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House located in Plano, Illinois. The house is open to visitors weekly, Tuesday – Sunday, April through November, and is one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's 29 nation-wide sites. For more information visit www.FarnsworthHouse.org.