



LANDMARKS
ILLINOIS



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ARCH

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THE ARCH

January 2026 / volume 12 / number 1

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Suite 4400
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(312) 922-1742
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Cover: Iconic Route 66 sites are brought to life at the Route 66 Experience at the state fairgrounds in Springfield. Credit: Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway.

All photos by Landmarks Illinois unless otherwise noted.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

TO OUR MEMBERS



This issue of The Arch could be labeled “The Anniversary Issue.” Although Landmarks Illinois marks its 55th year in 2026, that’s not the focus. Two events that shaped our nation are being commemorated in 2026. America 250 recognizes 250 years of our nation’s independence, and the iconic Route 66 celebrates its 100th anniversary. Find information about the anniversary events at il250.org and illinoisroute66.org.

Anniversaries urge us to reflect on the past, celebrate the good and use what we learned to influence the future. The American Bicentennial spurred explosive interest in history, leading to the creation of many local historical societies and archival repositories. Fifty years later, many of these organizations are struggling. This year presents an opportunity to revive interest in history by making it accessible, engaging and relevant.

We can generate more support for preservation by helping communities understand the stories of historic places and the value of reinvesting in our built environment to meet today’s needs. Articles in this issue offer examples and language, including the vital, underdiscussed connection between people’s access to special places and their health and wellbeing.

Landmarks Illinois is investing in connecting more people with preservation and sharing what we learn with our members, donors and advocates. We are implementing our Transformational Plan, adopted by the Board of Directors in June 2025. Find that plan on our website “About Us” page. We have added health and well-being as filters to evaluate which projects we pursue. Landmarks Illinois focuses on four priorities where historic preservation can make a meaningful impact on critical issues facing Illinois communities: Inclusive Preservation, Community and Economic Development, Housing Access and Climate Change Mitigation.

“We believe this focus on community impact will result in the preservation of more places, as well as growing community support, political will and investment in existing buildings.”

An imperative project of our Transformational Plan is an organizational rebranding we are launching this year, which will include an updated communications strategy and a new logo and website. This will help us reach more people, making our work more meaningful and accessible. These changes are an investment in the long-term future of preservation. We anticipate sharing the results with you at the end of this year.

Thank you for making this future-focused work possible through your support for Landmarks Illinois. I invite you to reach out to me with questions, comments or to discuss how to support this work in even greater ways.

Best to you and yours in the new year,

Bonnie McDonald

Bonnie McDonald



ROUTE 66 TURNS 100

HOW ILLINOIS IS MARKING THE MOTHER ROAD'S CENTENNIAL

BY **Kaitlyn McAvoy** DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

With the New Year underway, Illinois is revving up for Route 66's 100th anniversary in 2026. The legendary highway, which stretches from Chicago to Santa Monica, California, has embodied the American spirit since it was established a century ago.

While the "Mother Road" has evolved since its beginnings in 1926, it continues to spark wonder, wanderlust and Americana nostalgia. Illinois — the first state to have its section of the route completely paved — is home to 300 miles of Route 66. The highway has served as an important economic and cultural engine for the communities it travels through, attracting thousands of travelers each year who spend millions of dollars to explore neon signs, motels, diners and other iconic roadside attractions.

Honoring Route 66 history

Preserving Route 66 sites has been an integral part of Landmarks Illinois' work over the past decade. Whether it was listing threatened sites like the Nite Spot Cafe in Litchfield on our Most Endangered

Historic Places in Illinois, highlighting preservation success stories like the Duncan Manor near Towanda through our awards program or collaborating with local partners to save places like the Gemini Giant in Wilmington, Landmarks Illinois has aimed to keep the legacy and stories of Route 66 alive.

Landmarks Illinois is also one of more than 20 nationwide organizations participating in the new Google Arts & Culture Route 66 project — a virtual storytelling hub illuminating places and stories from this important U.S. highway. Visit Landmarks Illinois' page at bit.ly/LIGAC to learn more.

Our partners across the state are also doing commendable work. The Route History Museum in Springfield highlights the Black experience on Route 66, telling



stories of resilience, innovation and segregation along the route. Landmarks Illinois will honor museum co-founders Drs. Gina Lathan and Stacy Grundy this March at the 2026 Preservation Forward celebration. (Turn to page 13 for more information on the event.)

Immersive history & statewide leadership

Also in Springfield, the Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway has brought iconic sites to life through the Route 66 Experience at the state fairgrounds. The free exhibit (featured on our cover) is both educational and inspiring, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the history and lore of the Mother Road.

Landmarks Illinois Regional Advocacy Manager Quinn Adamowski serves as Chair of the Byway, which has been leading efforts to organize Route 66 Centennial events and projects. The Illinois Route 66 Commission was created in 2018, also for the purpose of planning for the centennial. Landmarks Illinois President & CEO Bonnie McDonald is among the commission's 20 members.

2026 events across Illinois

An official Route 66 Centennial Kick-off event will be held on April 30 in Joliet at the Old Joliet Prison. Another event will

take place on November 11 at the Route 66 Motorheads Bar, Grill & Museum in Springfield. Visit Route66centennial.org for information on events throughout 2026.

National recognition

Finally, we hope to celebrate another long-awaited milestone on the road to preserving Route 66. This year, U.S. Rep. Darin LaHood (R-IL) reintroduced legislation to designate Route 66 as a National Historic Trail. The bill has received significant support from preservation and tourism organizations, including Landmarks Illinois, since 2017. At the time of publication, the bill had not yet passed. 🇺🇸

Clockwise from far left: The Route 66 Experience at the State Fairgrounds in Springfield gives visitors an immersive experience of famous roadside attractions along the route in Illinois. Credit: Illinois Route 66 Scenic Byway.

The Route 66 Museum in Springfield is dedicated to highlighting the Black experience of the Mother Road.

The Gemini Giant was saved thanks to the work of the City of Wilmington, the Joliet Area Historical Museum and other local advocates.



SEE YOU THERE!

Join us and other Route 66 enthusiasts at this year's Route 66 Centennial celebrations!

Illinois Route 66 Kick-Off Event

April 30

Old Joliet Prison

More information at: jolietmuseum.org

Epic Centennial Celebration

November 11

Motorheads Bar, Grill & Museum

More information at: illinoisroute66.org/il66centennial

For information about events in Illinois and other states, visit route66centennial.org



BISHOP HILL COLONY CHURCH Bishop Hill

Planning for the restoration of the 2024 Most Endangered site, Bishop Hill Colony Church, is underway. The Illinois Capital Development Board, responsible for the upkeep of state properties, issued an RFP in 2024 for an architectural rehabilitation plan of the Colony Church and four other structures at the State Historic Site. JLK Architects was selected to lead the project and is currently working through the design phase. Repairs to the Bishop Hill buildings are expected to cost more than \$17 million. The state has completed initial stabilization work at Colony Church, and all other repairs are expected to begin in late 2026.

Credit Bishop Hill Heritage Association



ROGER BROWN HOME AND STUDIO Chicago

The Roger Brown Home and Studio at 1926 N. Halsted St. was the home and workplace of Roger Brown, an artist and leader of the Chicago Imagist movement. Along with his partner, architect George Veronda, Brown renovated the house to make it his ideal studio space. He lived there from 1974 until 1995, during much of his mature career. In September, after learning that the building had been put up for sale by the owner, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and was being marketed as a potential teardown, Landmarks Illinois rushed to urge the Commission on Chicago Landmarks to designate it a Chicago Landmark. The commission voted unanimously in favor of preliminary landmark designation at its October meeting, and the building is currently moving through the landmarking process.



REFORMATION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH Chicago

In November, nonprofit organization Onyx360 secured ownership of the former Reformation Evangelical Lutheran Church property in Roseland, which it intends to adaptively reuse as a health and wellness center. The church was designed by famed Pullman architect Solon S. Beman in the late 1880s and once housed President Barack Obama's South Side office when he worked as a community organizer. When the City of Chicago issued a demolition order for the vacant church and school buildings in October 2024, Landmarks Illinois stepped in. At our request, Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. provided an emergency pro bono assessment, finding that the church building posed no imminent safety risk. At building court hearings, Landmarks Illinois has joined community advocates and Preservation Chicago to urge against demolition. We also provided a \$10,000 grant to Onyx360 through our Timuel D. Black Jr. Fund for Chicago's South Side to assist with property stabilization.



1886 LINCOLN SCHOOL East St. Louis

A coalition of local advocates in East St. Louis successfully secured the 1886 Lincoln School property, a 2024 Most Endangered site. In early 2025, coalition members partnered with the Southern Illinois University Architecture program to engage students in creating plans and renderings exploring potential new uses for the historic structure. Concurrently, Illinois State Sen. Chris Belt championed a \$300,000 appropriation in the state budget to support the building's rehabilitation. In November, the City of East St. Louis finalized an agreement to transfer rights to the East St. Louis Historical Society, ensuring stewardship of the site as revitalization efforts move forward.

Credit Jerome King



● **FORDON BARN** Oak Brook

The Fordon Barn, built c. 1930 and located in Saddle Brook Park, stands as a lasting reminder of an era when Oak Brook was the polo capital of the United States. The property owner, the Oak Brook Park District, was considering demolition after determining it no longer needed the barn as storage. After placing the Fordon Barn on our 2025 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois list in May, Landmarks Illinois facilitated a pro bono structural assessment by TYLin in June. The assessment showed that the barn needed some repairs but was structurally sound overall. The Oak Brook Park District is currently exploring options for reusing and/or relocating the barn. Landmarks Illinois also awarded the park district a \$5,000 grant through the Preservation Heritage Fund to support stabilization and roof repairs.

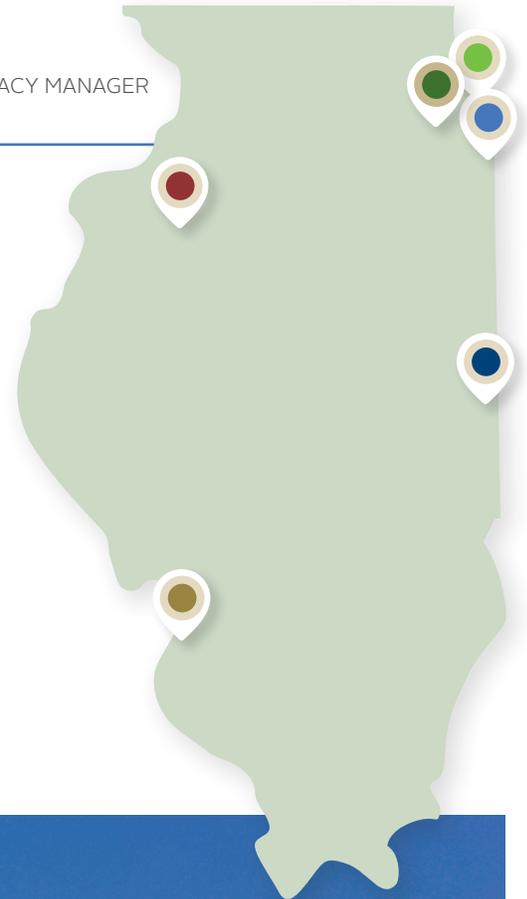
Credit Paul Morgan



● **ILLINOIS RECEIVERSHIP ACT**

Illinois communities now have a new legal tool to seek remedies for vacant, abandoned and deteriorating commercial properties. The Illinois Receivership Act, which became law on January 1, has the potential to be a transformative tool to proactively address historically significant properties that face “demolition by neglect.” Under this law, a municipality has the legal power to petition a court to appoint a receiver to take temporary control of properties. The receiver would oversee and direct rehabilitation work to address building violations and potential public-safety threats resulting from deferred maintenance. If used proactively, this process could help communities mitigate the loss of historic assets across the state, such as the now-demolished Bresee Tower in Danville.

Courtesy Brian Elliott





BY **Suzanne Germann**
DIRECTOR OF REINVESTMENT

Preservation Heritage Fund

Calhoun County

PERRIN'S LEDGE HISTORIC SITE AND VISITOR CENTER **Kampsville**

A \$5,000 grant will help Calhoun County pay for a feasibility study of the adaptive reuse of the historic "I-House" at Perrin's Ledge. Located two miles from Kampsville on a scenic byway section of the Great River Road, Perrin's Ledge Historic Site and Visitor Center is Calhoun County's first designated landmark. The site was named for property owner and local historian J. Nick Perrin, who founded the Illinois Historical Society in 1892 and later founded the St. Clair Historical Society in Belleville. Perrin purchased the property in 1905 because he considered the Ledge to be one of the most historic locations in Illinois. The site marks



where Father Marquette and Louis Joliet visited Calhoun County and met local Native Americans in July 1673. It includes Native American mounds, a cremation site and a two-story "I-House" built in 1907. Calhoun County plans to renovate the house into an interpretive visitor center, featuring exhibits and artifacts that provide information about the building and the site's history. 🇺🇸

National Trail of Tears Association

CHEROKEE TRAIL OF TEARS WAYSIDE STORE PRESERVATION PROJECT **Buncombe**

A \$5,000 grant was awarded to the National Trail of Tears Association (TOTA) to help protect the Wayside Store in Buncombe, built c. 1820 as a sundry shop. The Cherokee Tribe visited the log structure store as they crossed Southern Illinois during their

forced removal from their ancestral lands to their government-assigned home in present-day Oklahoma.



Wayside is one of 12 sites in Illinois associated with the Trail certified by the National Park Service as nationally significant. The Trail of Tears Encampment, which includes the Wayside Store, was included in Landmarks Illinois' 2006 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois. The store is encased in a 1940s frame barn that is in severe disrepair. If the barn collapses, it could severely damage Wayside. TOTA will use Landmarks Illinois grant funds to carefully remove the outer barn and construct a protective structure over the log store. 🇺🇸

Credit David Oliver



Landmarks Illinois Timuel D. Black, Jr. Grant Fund for Chicago's South Side

Calumet Area Industrial Commission

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL MURAL Pullman

A \$10,000 grant will help the Calumet Area Industrial Commission restore the Our Lady of Guadalupe Vietnam Veterans Memorial Mural, featuring portraits of young men from the parish who lost their lives in the Vietnam War. Our Lady of Guadalupe Church is home to the first Mexican American parish in Chicago and endured the highest number of casualties from a single congregation nationwide, making the mural both a deeply personal neighborhood tribute and a nationally significant story of sacrifice.

The mural is located on the outer wall of a three-story brick building in Pullman. It was painted and dedicated in 1970, predating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., by more than a decade, and is therefore one of the earliest large-scale public memorials honoring those who served in the war. In 2025, Latinos in Heritage Conservation included the mural on its 2025 Endangered Latinx Landmarks List. The brick building will undergo needed tuckpointing, and CAIC will use Landmarks Illinois grant funds to restore the mural following the masonry work. 🇺🇸

Credit Calumet Area Industrial Commission



Barbara C. and Thomas E. Donnelley II Preservation Fund for Illinois

Hinsdale Historical Society

R. HAROLD ZOOK HOME & STUDIO Hinsdale

A \$2,500 grant will support the Hinsdale Historical Society's overall preservation and adaptive reuse of the R. Harold Zook Home and Studio, which was once threatened with demolition. The home and studio was designed and built by Zook, a celebrated Chicago architect, as his family residence in 1924. It is where he resided until his death in 1949.

In late 2004, the property was sold to a developer who planned to demolish the buildings and build a new residence. This threat led Landmarks Illinois to include the property on the 2005 Most Endangered Historic Places list. The Hinsdale Historical Society, fortunately, was able to save the home and move it to a nearby park. This work was honored with a Landmarks Illinois Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award for Advocacy.

The Hinsdale Historical Society plans to adaptively reuse the home and studio to create the R. Harold Zook Community Gathering House. The organization will use Landmarks Illinois grant funds to help pay for a National Register of Historic Places nomination and a building assessment in preparation for the project. 🇺🇸

Credit Hinsdale Historical Society



HOW PRESERVATION CONTRIBUTES TO

THE HEALTH OF OUR COMMUNITIES

BY **Amber Delgado** EASEMENTS & ADVOCACY ASSOCIATE

In 2025, Landmarks Illinois awarded the nonprofit Onyx360 a \$10,000 grant through our Timuel D. Black, Jr. Grant Fund for Chicago's South Side to aid the adaptive reuse of Reformation Lutheran Church.

Located at 11310 S. Forest Ave. in Roseland, the church was designed by architect Solon S. Beman in the late 1800s and contributes to the aesthetic of the nearby historic Pullman neighborhood. The grant will go toward stabilizing the church, which has been vacant since 2018, when a water boiler in the basement failed. Before its vacancy, the church was home to a thriving congregation and to President Barack Obama's South Side office when he was a community organizer.

Black congregations across Chicago are dwindling in size and even closing as younger generations of Black Chicago families leave the city. A lack of resources to maintain these iconic historic structures is also a factor. Landmarks Illinois is proud to assist churches across Chicago through both our advocacy efforts and grant funding.



“‘Neighborhood and the built environment’ is one of the five social determinants of health identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.”



Clockwise from far left: Reformation Lutheran Church, which Onyx360 plans to reuse as a community health center.

Tonya Payton-Campbell, CEO of Onyx 360, speaks at an October event about their adaptive reuse project at Reformation Lutheran Church.



Preservation + accessibility

Onyx360 plans to convert Reformation Lutheran Church and the adjoining school into a community health center. The organization's mission is to reduce healthcare disparities by delivering holistic, community-centered and culturally responsive health and wellness services. In addition to making healthcare accessible to marginalized communities, it offers free educational workshops and resources to support health and wellness. It currently has one center in South Shore, and this new Pullman location will allow the organization to expand its services.

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities across Chicago have struggled to access healthcare due to a myriad of factors. Decades-long disinvestment in Chicago's South Side neighborhoods contributes to food and pharmaceutical deserts, leading to adverse health complications for marginalized communities. Travel to receive healthcare can also be a major obstacle for disabled and elderly populations. The adaptive reuse of Reformation Lutheran Church is more than the preservation of a historic building — it exemplifies how adaptive reuse can salvage not only bricks and mortar but also community.

Preservation + social determinants of health

“Neighborhood and the built environment” is one of the five social determinants of health identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These determinants are non-medical factors that affect health outcomes, including conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age. The other four determinants are: education access and quality; health care and quality; social and community context; and economic stability. Historic preservation and adaptive reuse can positively impact all these factors.

The closure and vacancy of Chicago churches, public schools, hospitals and locally owned businesses perpetuate the loss of community, initially ignited by urban renewal in the 1960s. Displacement followed by divestment erases the historical context of neighborhoods, and that erasure is felt in the individual lives impacted by this communal loss.

Preservation + human rights

The built environment should reflect care for people who live, work and play in a community. Having easy access to fresh food, healthcare institutions, public schools, and a sense of identity and belonging shouldn't be relegated to specific neighborhoods or to people in a particular tax bracket. Adaptive reuse of the city's existing built environment can significantly improve the health and well-being of all residents. ■■



TOXIC TOURS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

BY **Lauren Dalton** MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

In November, Landmarks Illinois Easements and Advocacy Associate Amber Delgado attended a neighborhood tour of Little Village, an area impacted by disproportionate pollution from local industries and toxic facilities. The event was a part of Toxic Tours, a collaboration between UIC Latino Cultural Center, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, Neighbors for Environmental Justice and Southeast Environmental Task Force that highlights the problem of environmental pollution in five “Sacrifice Zones:” Altgeld Gardens, Calumet River Region, Little Village, McKinley Park, Pilsen and the Southeast Side.

These predominantly Black and Hispanic/Latinx neighborhoods are consistently subject to outdated zoning laws that prevail above community needs. This is evident in the demolition of the 2024 Most Endangered site, the Damen Silos in McKinley Park, which proceeded despite community pushback due to pollution concerns.



Chicago's Little Village illustrates a broader global issue. We know saving places can have health benefits and promote reinvestment. The built environment is part of the cultural memory of racism, and initiatives like Toxic Tours are imperative if communities and their allies are going to engage in racial justice and equity initiatives.

Furthermore, areas already affected by years of environmental racism and inequity have been targeted recently by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Across Illinois, people are coming together as communities to continue to fight for their health and well-being. Keeping our communities safe is an ongoing and collective effort when structures of power fail. 🇺🇸

Above: A mural in Little Village, People on the Toxic Tour in Little Village, November 20, 2025.

BY THE NUMBERS

The River Edge Historic Tax Credit Program (RE-HTC) has been extended through 2028. Set to expire at the end of 2026, the critical tax credit incentivizes the reinvestment and reuse of historic places in the Illinois river communities of Alton, Aurora, East St. Louis, Elgin, Peoria, Rockford and Sterling. A report prepared by PlaceEconomics and released in May 2025 by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources shows the significant positive impact the RE-HTC has had between 2012 and 2024. View the full report at dnrhistoric.illinois.gov.

73

RE-HTC projects
in Illinois have been
completed or are underway

\$643M

**the amount of
private investment**
generated through
RE-HTC projects

524

**the number of direct,
indirect and induced jobs
created**, on average, each
year by projects using the
RE-HTC. These jobs have
generated \$35.5 million of
income every year.

676

net new housing units
created at RE-HTC projects

44%

**increase in
retail sales**
in historic districts within
River Edge Redevelopment
Zone communities since the
tax credit began



WELCOME NEW STAFF MEMBER!

Nicole Rakers DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Landmarks Illinois welcomed Nicole Rakers to the team in November to lead fundraising efforts. Nicole is a dynamic fundraising professional with over a decade of experience supporting nonprofit organizations in raising the funds necessary to support their missions. Landmarks Illinois is excited to have Nicole's expertise and focused attention on meaningful donor engagement.

Visit our staff webpage, landmarks.org/staff, to learn more about Nicole.



ON THE LI PRESERVATION NEWS BLOG

In September 2025, the Illinois Supreme Court rejected a fourth appeal of *Hanna and Mrowka v. City of Chicago*, most likely ending nearly 20 years of litigation over the constitutionality of the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance. The court found in favor of the appellee, the City of Chicago, concluding that its Landmarks Ordinance is constitutional and was fairly applied in the cases of two historic district designations from the 2000s. The outcome in the city's favor is an important vindication of not only Chicago's historic preservation ordinance but also of the constitutionality of local historic preservation ordinances around the state. Kendra Parzen, Advocacy Manager, digs into this case on the Landmarks Illinois blog.

Read it at landmarks.org/resources/preservation-news.

EASEMENT REMINDER

If you have a historic preservation easement on your property, update your communications preferences by emailing our Easements & Advocacy Associate Amber Delgado at adelgado@landmarks.org. Please ensure your mailing address, email address and phone number are up to date in our system.



TRIBUTE

Carl H. Johnson, Jr. 1931-2025

Illinois lost a longtime preservation champion in September. Carl Johnson of Galena passed away at the age of 94. He and his wife, Marilyn, dedicated their lives to preserving Galena's unique history and were instrumental in making the town a tourist destination known for its iconic 19th-century architecture and quintessential historic main street. The couple received a Landmarks Illinois Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award in 2020 for their extensive and inspirational preservation work. Carl was a prolific painter, taking inspiration from the historic places around him. Marilyn, a former Landmarks Illinois board member, said they were destined to move to Galena in 1979 so Carl could pursue his dream of being a full-time artist. She also said joining the Landmarks Illinois Board "changed our lives."



UPCOMING EVENTS

2026 PRESERVATION FORWARD MARCH 12, 2026

Join us for our signature fundraising event, Preservation Forward, at The Old Post Office in Chicago. Drawing more than 800 professionals and community advocates from across the state, Preservation Forward offers exceptional opportunities to connect with people who are passionate about our built environment and the work we do together.

This year's celebration will highlight our 2026 Influencers, people and organizations that exemplify the vision and resourcefulness needed to move community-led projects forward through innovative funding strategies.

2026 Landmarks Illinois Influencers



BMO Bank N.A.,
Represented by Darrel Hackett, CEO, BMO U.S.



Sunny Fischer,
Board Chair, National Public Housing Museum



Route History Museum,
Represented by Drs. Stacy Grundy and Gina Lathan

For event details and sponsorship opportunities, visit www.landmarks.org. Reservations go on sale in January!

LANDMARKS ILLINOIS AND THE INTERNATIONAL MASONRY INSTITUTE ANNUAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRAINING

FEBRUARY 19, 2026
8:30 A.M. – VIA ZOOM

Free. Registration Required
Registration link at Landmarks.org/events.
Reservations go on sale in January!

CONGRESO 2026 IN CHICAGO

AUGUST 19-21, 2026
SAVE THE DATE

Join Landmarks Illinois as we partner with Congreso, hosted by Latinos in Heritage Conservation, a national convening of Latinx preservationists, architects, historians, artists, educators and community leaders. This summit is dedicated to advancing the preservation of Latinx places, stories and culture. We look forward to welcoming attendees to the historic Palmer House.

Tickets go on sale in January.

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