

Historic Preservation Grants Available Now

This article appeared in The State Journal-Register on July 22, 2017

The rich history found in the architecture and structures of the Springfield community doesn't simply need to be remembered; it can be restored, revitalized and celebrated for future generations to know.



2016 Recipient, Enos Park Neighborhood Improvement Association

A group of organizations and individuals saw a need for this kind of mission, working together with a common goal to preserve and enhance historical properties in Springfield.

In 2008, the Citizens Club organized a celebration for the 40th anniversary of the Old State Capitol's rededication, and a small amount of money, nearly \$400, was left over from the event.

Paul O'Shea, an architect who served as the City of Springfield's planning and design coordinator, brought the idea for an endowment fund to the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln.

"I asked John Stremsterfer (president and CEO of the Community Foundation) if we could start a fund with that money. John said, 'Well, we can start an acorn account for now. But from acorns giant oaks grow,' " O'Shea laughed. "And grow it did; now the fund tops \$90,000. I often mention an ancient proverb because it refers to the importance of looking ahead at the prospects for accomplishing good things: 'The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.' "

The fund's first grant was awarded in 2012, for \$4,000 to Downtown Springfield, Inc., for an interactive wayfinding system. Other grants, made annually, have benefited groups such as the Springfield Art Association, Elijah Iles House Foundation and Enos Park Neighborhood Improvement Association.

"Our grants are issued to people, groups and organizations who have a goal of restoration and preservation, and we're helping them make that happen," O'Shea said.

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Fletcher "Bud" Farrar has recently stepped into the role as grant committee chair of the CFLL Historic Preservation Fund. In his experience, he's found that public interest and adequate funding are the major components to determine whether a building can be preserved.

"If Springfield wants to save a building, there are ways and means to do that, but we need more voices to keep these buildings — not only the ones in immediate danger but also to preserve buildings before the point that they are too deteriorated to save," he said.

O'Shea continues to follow up with 2013's grant issued through the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce Foundation for Massie-Massie & Associates to develop design concepts for the Jackson Street Corridor, connecting the Lincoln Home with the Capitol Complex. Preserving and revitalizing these kinds of spaces around downtown offer huge benefits to the community, O'Shea said.

"We don't want people to get in their cars after experiencing the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum and drive to the Lincoln Home and the blocks around the Capitol and Governor's Mansion; we want them to walk and experience Fifth and Sixth Streets, for example," he said. "A huge part of it is about long-term economic development as well. If people are walking through a beautiful downtown, visiting the shops and restaurants, it's a win-win for everyone.

"A strong inner-city core leads to a stronger city and region as a whole. We want to enhance and help create the physical elements that tie in so well with our city in a historical sense, what Lincoln has done here and the buildings that are in existence," he said.

Working with the Community Foundation has helped public interest and available funding to grow exponentially, Farrar and O'Shea agreed.

"I can't say enough about working with the entire Community Foundation. I've found them to be extremely helpful and very forthcoming with information," O'Shea said. "They also have many avenues of outreach that are beyond what we could do on our own."

Not only does the fund grant money, but those involved with the fund also organize gatherings to share the stories of the buildings and educate the public about the fund's mission, Farrar said.

"We want to create a preservation ethic in Springfield, to build a culture of preservation," Farrar said. "I've been around town for 40 years, and in the past, when a building was threatened, too many want to tear it down. We want to make this town like other historical towns where preservation is an honored value."

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This year, up to \$7,500 in grants are available through the CFLL Historic Preservation Fund, and applications are due by Aug. 7.

To apply, complete an online application available through the Community Foundation's website at cfl.org.

Contributions to the fund are also accepted year-round for those interested in making a meaningful impact on local historical preservation.

— For more information about supporting or establishing a fund at the Community Foundation, visit CFLL.org or contact 789-4431 or info@CFLL.org.