

For immediate release:

RAGDALE, IIT CLASS PARTNER TO REBUILD HISTORIC ARTISTS' STUDIO

LAKE FOREST – April 9, 2008 – The **Ragdale Foundation** has partnered with a class of fourth- and fifth-year and graduate students from an **Illinois Institute of Technology College of Architecture Design/Build class** to rebuild the Foundation's now-defunct **Meadow Studio** for its artist residency program. The team of 12 students, led by Associate Professor **Frank Flury**, have designed and will build a new artist's studio using the existing footprint and effecting as light an environmental impact on the site as possible.

The studio, located in Lake Forest's Shaw Prairie just west of the Ragdale House, was built in 1943 as a sculpture studio for Ragdale architect Howard Van Doren Shaw's daughter Sylvia Shaw Judson. Judson's brother-in-law John Lord King designed this studio where she worked for over 35 years and created many of her best-known works, including the *Bird Girl*, *Summer*, and *Cats*.

After Judson's daughter Alice Hayes took over the property and created the Ragdale Foundation in 1976, both the Ragdale House and the Meadow Studio became integral parts of the artists' community. Hayes donated Ragdale's immediate five acres and main buildings to the City of Lake Forest. She gave a large portion of Shaw Prairie, including the land on which the studio is located, to the Lake Forest Open Lands Association. The studio building itself went to the Foundation for use by a visual artist-in-residence.

Due to poor roof maintenance during the studio's early years, however, the building suffered extensive structural damage and dry rot. Ragdale closed the building in 2003 with the hope to rebuild it when funding became available. That funding materialized in late 2006 and 2007 when two private donors and the Mericos Foundation contributed a total of \$175,000 in donations and grant monies. These funds will cover the expected \$150,000 in materials and leave \$25,000 for endowed maintenance.

Ragdale Board Member and Building Committee Co-chair David Woodhouse approached Flury, who has led other successful student design/build projects for the Rural Studio in Alabama, the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center in Mississippi, and on Northerly Island in Chicago. The partnership between Ragdale and Flury's class has been surrounded by much enthusiasm.

"Ragdale's donors, Board, and staff agreed that it would be appropriate to honor Shaw's work on Ragdale as a young architect as well as the Foundation's mission of 'creating important new work' by engaging a group of young architects to design and build a new structure," Ragdale Foundation Executive Director Susan Tillett said.

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Flury and the students began their research in August by making measured drawings of the site and photographing the original studio according to Historic American Building Survey standards.

The new construction must follow strict parameters. It must keep the original footprint (approximately 1,000 sq. feet), utilize materials that are harmonious to the prairie site (such as wood, glass and stone), blend with its site and be considered to neighbors to the south. The studio may provide year-round daytime use only; artists-in-residence will have separate sleeping quarters in the Ragdale Barnhouse.

The students developed and presented individual designs for critique and refinement both in class and in meetings with Ragdale staff and Building Committee members. Dismantling of the original building followed and students ascertained certain elements that would be reused in the new structure. Dismantling was a vital research step, and informed the final plans for the new studio.

Ragdale has worked closely with the City of Lake Forest, the Historic Preservation Commission, and Lake Forest Open Lands Association throughout the process. Final designs are complete and Ragdale has secured approval and a construction permit from Lake Forest. Initial construction began in January 2008, with completion scheduled for the fall of 2008.

Ragdale is located in Arts and Crafts architect Howard Van Doren Shaw's Lake Forest country estate, just 30 miles north of Chicago. Built in 1897, the Ragdale House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1976, Shaw's granddaughter Alice Judson Hayes transformed her family's summer home into an artists' colony providing time and space for artists to create important new work. Today Ragdale hosts up to 200 artists, writers, and composers each year, making it the largest interdisciplinary artists' community in the Midwest and the fourth largest in the country. Noted past residents include Jane Hamilton, Alex Kotlowitz, Audrey Niffenegger, Lawrence Block, and Stephanie Kallos.

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For more information, contact:

Leslie Brown
l.brown@ragdale.org
(847) 234-1063 ext. 205