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RAGDALE TO RENOVATE THE RAGDALE HOUSE

Midwest's Largest Artist-in-Residence Community Plans to Restore the Original Summer Home of Howard Van Doren Shaw

MARCH 16, 2010 – LAKE FOREST, IL – Ragdale announced today its plans to renovate the Ragdale House, the main building on the property which houses an artist-in-residence program. The full renovation will take just over a year.

Preparation for the renovation began in 2006 when Ragdale commissioned Johnson Lasky Architects in Chicago to complete a Historic Structures Report.

“The report included archival research, physical documentation, assessment of conditions and recommendations for repair,” said Amy Davidson, President of Ragdale’s Board of Trustees. “The HSR created a roadmap for guiding us as we planned which areas of the house would require more or less renovation, how long the project would take and how much it would cost,” she added.

Jack Danch, Ragdale’s Director of Property said, “The HSR documented the complete history of the house and made recommendations necessary to guide a proper renovation.” He added, “This process took over a year to complete and led to the hiring of the firm of Bulley & Andrews to provide the Foundation with preconstruction services. Now, ‘shovel ready’, we are prepared to break ground as soon as we have secured financing for this very worthwhile project.”

On March 15, the Lake Forest City Council approved Ragdale’s request to borrow \$2 million of the total cost of \$3 million, so the renovation of the Ragdale House can begin while fundraising continues. The loan would be payable over five years.

Ragdale’s fundraising for the project has been ongoing. Over the past few months, Ragdale Board members and some key supporters have raised a significant portion of the funding. Davidson adds, “We will continue to present our project and make our case to all our donors and friends, asking for their support.”

The most significant areas the renovation will address are those that relate to health and safety issues including the electrical, plumbing and heating and cooling systems.

“The plan is to also include geothermal heating and to increase electrical service to the residents,” said Roland Kulla, Vice President of Ragdale’s Board of Trustees.

Kulla, a visual artist and Ragdale alumnus, also noted the house was originally a summer home in the early part of the 20th century and therefore lacks adequate heating and proper wiring for current day needs. The renovation, he said, would assure the House will better serve the artists while in residence.

The last group of residents left on March 3 and, for the first time since the house was built in 1897, the contents of the house are set to be fully documented, packed and stored.

“As we did when we renovated the Barnhouse, we will continue to have residents throughout the duration of the renovation,” said Davidson. “We will lose five bedrooms for about a year, but will have eight artists in residency during that time.”

Tillett added, “Although we will miss the gracious, larger spaces of the Ragdale House, we will have an opportunity to ‘take our show on the road’ as places like the Gorton Community Center, StoryStudio Chicago and Open Books have been very generous in offering us space during construction. We look forward to these new partnerships.”

Plans to move into the community start with several events on April 5 & 6 with author Heidi Durrow and co-hosted with South Gate Café and Lake Forest Book Store, StoryStudio Chicago, Open Books, The Book Stall at Chestnut Court and Avli Restaurant. In addition, Ragdale is working with 826 CHI to present an Evening with authors Dave Eggers and Luis Alberto Urrea at the Gorton Community Center on Tuesday, May 4.

“Ragdale is true to the vision of Howard and Frances Shaw,” said Tillett, “which is a vital, living commitment to the creation of new artwork. I think that is extremely valuable to any community. It is certainly a source of pride and identity for Lake Forest.”

She added, “Ragdale really is Chicago’s artist community, since so many important Chicago artists have lived and worked here.”

“The artists who come to work here represent the best of established and emerging authors, visual artists and composers,” Davidson concurred, “and they add to the quality of life in Lake Forest by spending time in our schools, holding open studios, conducting readings of new work and making Lake Forest known to a broader community.”

When the renovation finishes in 2011, all three agreed the essential part of the process will be that the house will retain its charm, just be better-equipped.

“The renovation will make the Ragdale House safe and comfortable for future generations of writers and artists,” said Tillett. “This building, which so many artists consider the home of their creative spirit, will be preserved in a way that we trust the muse will still be happy to live here and visit the residents working on the great American novel, screenplay and poem!”

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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 artist’s community 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 artist’s community in the Midwest and the fourth largest in the country. Noted past residents include Jane Hamilton, Alex Kotlowitz and Audrey Niffenegger. For more information on any of Ragdale’s programs or Ragdale’s history, please visit www.ragdale.org or call (847) 234-1063 x. 205.