



S P R I N G 2 0 0 8

PPFV DECLARES 2007 “THE YEAR OF THE SHIP”

2007 was that very rare year in a museum director’s career, when a project is launched and terrific progress made in less than twelve months. (By comparison, the installation of a modern HVAC system in the Fabyan Villa has become a decade-long project, with no clear end in sight.)

Last spring, the 1893 Viking Ship was languishing in Good Templar Park, surviving only due to the passionate commitment of a very small corps of volunteers.

On March 1, **Landmarks Illinois** designated the ship as one of ten Illinois Endangered Structures, which set the ball rolling and galvanized local volunteers.

Preservation Partners played a role in this designation, suggesting the ship as a candidate when the Landmarks staff consulted us in January.

In April, a loose (but intrepid!) coalition of fans of the maritime treasure met to strategize the rescue and stabilization of the Ship, and named their effort “Friends of the Viking.” Among the friends were reps from Good Templar Park, the City of Geneva, The Kane County Development Department, the Norwegian National League, along with a military historian from Cantigny and an attorney with Scandinavian roots from Naperville. Five of the original 10 members belong to PPFV, which coordinated the efforts of the group but relied heavily on the maritime expertise of members like **Tim Vetang** and the restoration credentials of **Craig Deller**.

Our first – and unanimous – decision was to hire a team of maritime conservators to evaluate the condition of the ship, outline a stabilization plan, in priority order, and provide some indication of dollars needed to proceed.

Scott Berger – our link to Kane County Government – suggested that CDBG * funds might be available to pay for the assessment, and Board Chair **Karen McConnaughay** approved a grant of \$5,000 from this fund, provided that the ship remain in Kane County during the evaluation and stabilization process.



Days of Glory: Chicago Harbor, 1893

The “Friends” spent long hours negotiating with the Chicago Park District about the future of the now-famous artifact; at a critical October meeting, the CPD agreed to sign a statement endorsing our efforts to raise funds and implement two stabilization grants. Alderman **Richard Mell** went to bat on behalf of our plans to assess, protect, repair and stabilize the Ship (on a new cradle). Friends of the Viking got a brutal crash course in Chicago politics, the end result being the triumph of David over Goliath, but other “challenges” may await us and the Ship. Stay tuned.

Early in the summer, **Karla Kaufuss** (City of Geneva preservation director) alerted us to the possibility of a major capital grant from the American Express. We raced to file the grant application by July 20, eager to be one of 25 candidates who would divide the splendid (\$1 million) preservation pie.

Getting a big piece of the pie was frantic but fun. From September 6 to October 10, we sounded the call for votes, knowing we had stiff competition – including two Frank Lloyd Wright sites – but also knowing that fabulous advocates were promoting our cause:

– like The Little Engine That Could, the astounding saga of the Viking Ship appealed to friends all over the world – from Beloit to Oslo, from Cambridge to California. We knew that school children would respond to our pleas, but didn’t know that we could count a Scandinavian biker club among our fans.

A furious campaign ensued, with potential voters roused by daily emails from **Mary Bencini**, among others, who got closed down by AOL more than once for sending pleas to over 500 contacts at a time.



Chris Morris (center) from the Midwest office of the National Trust, gets her first view of the ship in June.

We sprinted from 4th place to second, in a remarkable final surge, almost closing in on the Chinese Center. (We were sure they handed out free egg rolls for votes.) On November 13, the **American Express/National Trust** team confirmed that we would receive the full amount of our \$52,000 grant request, and high spirits reigned. Look how far we had come since March!

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

Even before the American Express Grant was announced, our team of maritime conservators spent a chilly November day in Good Templar Park, looking at every nook and cranny – and crack – on the Viking ship, and admiring her resilience after a century (!) of neglect. Howard Wellman of HW Conservation LLC supervised two other professionals, and wrote the final report summarizing their conclusions and recommendations. The Viking “Friends” requested a few minor changes and additions, and commended the team for their professional approach and their clear devotion to our artifact.

A critical conclusion by this team: ***It must be emphasized that the Viking should only be moved one more time – to its final display space.***

Preservation Partners will implement the PIP grant, and has already received bids for the three pronged-stabilization effort. **Peter Orem**, from Midwest Groundcovers, has provided specs for two new tarp-like enclosures that will protect the east and west ends of the current shelter. **Roger Machin**, from Methods and Materials, based in Chicago, estimated his cost to repair and strengthen the cradle supporting the ship, and **Bob Fink**, from Renaissance Yachts, has described the carpentry needed to stabilize wood elements of the structure. We’ll keep you posted as work commences this spring.



Photo by Scott Berger

Craig Deller & Howard Wellman take a close look at the Viking's hull.

NOW IT'S TIME FOR A PARTY!



Preservation Partners always celebrates good news, and this year our Star Members’ Dinner did just that as we saluted the stellar accomplishments of our super 2007 volunteers. We decided to mix it up this year, and moved the usual early March dinner to February 29 - Leap Year! - and chose the historic water-front restaurant, the Mill Race Inn, as the site of the festivities. **Karen McConnaughay**, Chairman of the Kane County Board, was one of the honored stars. (Shown here with husband John.)
