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Urban Juncture Foundation Awarded Half Million Dollars to Preserve The Forum In Historic Bronzeville



CHICAGO - Urban Juncture Foundation was awarded \$500,000 by the National Park Service's African American Civil Rights Grant Program for its project, "Reactivating The Forum: Preservation of 3 Linked Buildings in Bronzeville."

The African American Civil Rights Grant Program, funded by the Historic Preservation Fund, and administered by the National Park Service, Department of Interior, has awarded \$15,035,000 million to 53 projects in 20 states to help preserve sites and history related to the African American struggle for equality.

"This competitive grant program is just one of the many ways the National Park Service is working to preserve and interpret the lesser-known facets of our nation's shared history," said NPS Deputy

Director Shawn Bengé. “From physical restoration projects to surveys, documentation, and education, this year’s grant funds will help many of our State, Tribal, local, and non-profit partners advance their preservation goals.”

Bronzeville was an ‘electric’ neighborhood in mid-20th century Chicago. Thousands of Black migrants seeking the Promised Land and hemmed in by restrictive housing covenants and a culture of segregation built a dense, vibrant center of commerce, culture, and civic activism that became the heart of Black Chicago. Bronzeville electrified the blues and created modern gospel music. It painted the Wall of Respect, catalyzing the U.S. mural movement, and established Africobra, a visual driver of Civil Rights. And, it gave birth to William Dawson, Oscar De Priest, Ralph Metcalfe, and Harold Washington, political trailblazers and predecessors of America’s first Black president.

Located at 43rd and the Elevated Train, at the heart of Bronzeville, “The Forum” was a key catalyst of this development. The Forum served as a cultural, civic, and commercial epicenter for Bronzeville for over 75 years. From its opening in 1897 through its closing in the 1970s, at least 90 different clubs and associations utilized the second floor ‘Forum Hall’ for annual dances, installation ceremonies, important meetings, and informal gatherings. It hosted performances by emerging musical giants like Nat King Cole and Milt Hinton and by a generation of established blues and jazz stars. As the headquarters for key labor and civil rights movements, it also served as an arena for political and social causes and hosted numerous political rallies and meetings. And, its seven over-sized ground-level commercial spaces provided a wide variety of retail and hospitality offerings to neighbors and commuters.

The Forum was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2019, and efforts by Urban Juncture to secure and restore The Forum are critical to preserving its legacy and fueling its future as an economic and cultural catalyst for Black Chicago.

“The NPS African American Civil Rights Grant recognizes The Forum’s significance to Chicago and the nation,” said Urban Juncture Foundation President, Bernard Loyd. “It will allow us to conclude stabilization of the complex, reactivate Forum Hall, and secure the resources needed for full restoration via our three-phase plan.”

To learn more about The Forum and to support its restoration, visit theforumbronzeville.com.

For more information about NPS historic preservation programs and grants, please visit nps.gov/stlpg/.

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About Urban Juncture Foundation

Urban Juncture advances the sustainable development of economically challenged urban neighborhoods. By bringing together community assets, particularly people, culture, and history, with like-minded external partners in a collaborative effort, Urban Juncture fosters local entrepreneurship, delivers needed products and services, beautifies the community, builds social capital and facilitates economic mobility. Learn more at www.urbanjuncture.com.

About the National Park Service

More than 20,000 National Park Service employees care for America's 423 national parks and work with communities across the nation to help preserve local history and create close-to-home recreational opportunities. Learn more at www.nps.gov, and on **Facebook**, **Instagram**, **Twitter**, and **YouTube**.