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Independence National Historical Park Renovates Franklin Court

Philadelphia Museum Included on NPS Centennial Challenge List

Independence National Historical Park (INHP) is excited to announce that the renovated Benjamin Franklin Underground Museum in Franklin Court has moved one step closer to reality. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and National Park Service Director Mary Bomar today announced the proposals for the National Park Centennial Challenge, a critical public- private partnership to fund \$2 billion of the President's \$3- billion National Park Centennial Initiative. The Initiative will invigorate America's national parks in time for the August 25, 2016, centennial of the National Park Service. The Benjamin Franklin museum is one of 201 proposals, totaling \$370 million, eligible for centennial challenge matching funds.

The President's fiscal year 2008 budget called for an additional \$100 million a year for 10 years to be dedicated to bolster basic park operations. Congress has included the first \$100 million for operations in the fiscal year 2008 budget that awaits final passage.

Director Bomar said, "The centennial challenge is a critical element in the National Park Centennial Initiative put forward by President Bush and unveiled by Secretary Kempthorne one year ago. The full centennial initiative is a potential \$3 billion investment in our national parks, two- thirds of it a public- private partnership of matching money."

In March 2007, The Pew Charitable Trusts announced \$6 million in funding for the complete redevelopment of the underground museum at Franklin Court, including new interpretive exhibits. In making this grant, Pew hoped that the President's Centennial Challenge would provide \$6 million in matching federal funds for this important project

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honoring Benjamin Franklin. An additional \$6 million will be contributed by other generous donors, including the William Penn Foundation, Gerry Lenfest and the Knight Foundation to cover the total costs of this \$18 million renovation project.

This project addresses the NPS Centennial Initiative Goal of fostering exceptional educational opportunities in our nation's parks. In this 2.5- year renovation project, we will replace outdated exhibits in the Underground Museum that are over 30 years old with state of the art technology to put Franklin Court on par with leading biographical museums around the world. Our modernized facilities will teach visitors about Benjamin Franklin's accomplishments, life, and enduring legacy, and building maintenance updates will ensure the durability of these exhibits.

When Franklin Court opened in 1976 for America's bicentennial celebration, the Underground Museum featured cutting edge technology and innovative exhibits to interpret the life and legacy of Benjamin Franklin as printer, diplomat, patriot, inventor and family man. Over the past 3 decades, millions of visitors have used the Franklin Exchange telephone bank to hear what other famous people had to say about Franklin (both good and bad) or watched him on the World Stage, the most expensive NPS exhibit ever developed at that time. While Robert Venturi's award winning Ghost Structure House in the courtyard outside may be a timeless design, our 31 year old Underground Museum exhibits are ready for serious renovations. INHP is excited to be able to bring this valuable museum into the 21st century.

Financial commitments to the first round of Centennial proposals exceeded the President's challenge. There are approximately \$370 million in proposals which includes \$216 million committed from park visitors, friends groups and other partners. This far exceeds the \$100 million expected from private contributions.

"There is a huge wave of excitement among National Park Service professionals and our partners," Bomar said. "We will create park- based centers for Junior Rangers, implement cutting- edge energy projects like fuel cells and geothermal and build multimedia wayside exhibits that 'talk' to visitors. This is a victory for national parks and over 270 million park visitors we see each year."

"When history is written," Bomar said, "the Centennial Initiative will be second only to the creation of the national park system itself."

The full list of centennial challenge- eligible projects and programs is available on- line at the National Park Service centennial web site www.nps.gov/2016. Details on the INHP Centennial Initiative can be found at www.nps.gov/inde/parkmgmt/centennial-initiative-2016.htm.

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