



News Release

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\$16 M RENOVATION OF GRAGG PARK GARNERS STATE HISTORIC DESIGNATION

HPARD Headquarters Receives City, State and National Landmark Designations

HOUSTON, TX – The Houston Parks and Recreation Department will unveil its offices in the historic Gragg Building, 2999 South Wayside, in a public ceremony on Dec. 11th at 10:30 a.m. The building will be designated a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark by the Commission. This honor is the third historic designation bestowed on the Gragg Building, which is already listed as a city landmark and is on the National Register of Historical Places. The building, also known as the Farnsworth Chambers Building, was part of the recent Gragg Park Campus \$16M renovation which included the renovation of an existing warehouse to create the new Recreation and Wellness Division Building.

“The renovation is simply spectacular. It’s preserved the building’s character and historic significance while making it a work place that should serve our department and the city for the next 50 years,” said Joe Turner, Director, Houston Parks and Recreation Department. “We’re honored that our headquarters will be receiving a third historic designation in recognition of its architectural significance and role in our nation’s space history. It’s fitting that our department, which is tasked with stewardship and preservation of greenspace, is headquartered and responsible for such a treasure.”

Originally commissioned by the Farnsworth & Chambers Company construction firm, the Gragg Building was designed by the architectural firm of MacKie & Kamrath in 1956. The architects, inspired by the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, enlisted the assistance of modern landscape architect Garret Eckbo for the project. The result was a perfect example of a mid-twentieth century design

that incorporated many of the decade's new and exciting design elements while integrating the structure into its surrounding landscape.

In 1961, W.D. York and Gragg Drilling Company purchased the building as a real estate investment and rented the space to the newly formed National Aeronautics and Space Administration. NASA moved from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia to Houston at the height of the space race, to fulfill President Kennedy's quest to beat the Soviets to the moon. Our country's first generation of explorers - John Glenn, Virgil "Gus" Grissom, Alan Shepard and the rest of the Mercury 7 - walked the halls of the Gragg Building and planned the remaining Mercury space flights there until 1964, when NASA moved to its permanent headquarters in Clear Lake.

The City of Houston purchased the Gragg Building in 1976, and the Houston Parks and Recreation Department occupied it in January of the following year. Oil tycoon Oscar Lee Gragg donated the surrounding acreage to create Gragg Park. Additional acreage was purchased by the City to create the 48-acre park which houses HPARD's Gragg Park Campus. The campus is comprised of five buildings: the Gragg Building; the Recreation and Wellness Building; the Fleet Management Building; the Facilities, Development and Management Skilled Trades Building; and the Facilities and Management Building.

The local firm of HarrisonKornberg Architects won the commission to renovate the Gragg Building and improve the surrounding park and adjacent maintenance facility. Renovations respect the historically significant building exterior and interior public spaces, while creating a sustainable "green" building. HarrisonKornberg focused on increasing the efficiency of resources used both during the construction process and in the daily life of the building by its occupants. They combined new finishes with many reused materials, like mahogany veneer panels on the interior and the building's signature green stone on the exterior. Additional environmentally friendly amenities include: an increase in natural lighting, an energy saving motion sensitive office lighting system, water and resource conserving water and soap dispensers and a paperless hand drying system. When complete, the building is expected to receive a LEED "Silver" certification in recognition of its attainment of green design, construction and operation standards.

"In updating this beautiful building to suit its current use, we have tried to be very respectful of MacKie & Kamrath's original design intent," said Daniel Kornberg, Principal of HarrisonKornberg Architects. "Wherever possible, we have reused original materials and reestablished original spatial configurations, while creating new ways for the building to be seen and experienced."

In keeping with the aeronautical history of the building, Houston Interior Designer Kelly Gayle Amen has created the Lt. General Thomas. P. Stafford Astronaut Commemorative Bench. The bench, featuring laser-cut spacecraft images drawn by General Stafford himself, will be displayed in the Gragg Building's courtyard.

The historic Gragg Building will continue to serve as the main headquarters for the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. Future plans, scheduled to beginning in 2010, include offering the site as a unique indoor/outdoor public event space available for rentals. Details on these plans are still in the planning stage and will be available on the Department's website when finalized.

For more information on the Gragg Building or the Houston Parks and Recreation Department, call (832) 395-7022, or visit www.houstonparks.org.

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