

## Midwest Office Annual Highlights December 2007

### **Rackham Golf Course Huntington Woods, MI**

Rackham Golf Course, located in Huntington Woods, Michigan, was the focus of considerable advocacy efforts in 2007. A developer had introduced plans to build 400 new homes on the site, and consequently destroy the historic landscape and 1925 clubhouse. Such an undertaking would have resulted in a significant loss of historic resources.

Rackham Golf Course golf course was created by Horace and Mary Rackham in the 1920s. The couple hired the nation's leading golf course designer, Donald Ross, to plan the course, and a top architect, Niels Chester Sorenson, to design the clubhouse. Stately enough to have served as a private country club, the clubhouse features Arts & Crafts tiles made by Pewabic Studio in Detroit. The finished course was then donated to the City of Detroit with the express intent of being open to all persons, regardless of gender, race or class. It was the first public 18-hole golf course in Michigan. Moreover, two deed restrictions were placed on the property stipulating that it remain a public golf course. Not only does the course possess significant architectural and landscape assets, it played a vanguard role in the evolution of race relations in this country and is notable for its association with leading African American sports icons such as Joe Louis and Ben Davis.



*Rackham Woods Golf Course, Huntington Woods, MI  
(Rackham Golf Course credit-City of Huntington Woods-12130.jpg)*

Despite the two deed restrictions dating back to 1924, the city of Detroit planned to sell the property for \$11.25 million to Premium Golf LLC., a company who proposed to tear up the course, demolish the historic resources and replace them with houses. The **Michigan Historic Preservation Network** and the **National Trust Midwest Office** worked closely with the City of Huntington Woods to help save Rackham. The organizations reviewed the historic district nomination, promoted the city's efforts and wrote letters of support. Ultimately, with the urging of the **Midwest Office** and the **Michigan Historic Preservation Network**, the City of Huntington Woods designated Rackham Golf Course as a local landmark for its significance both historically and architecturally. The historic designation halted development plans at Rackham. In June 2007, the City of Huntington Woods met the City of Detroit's

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asking price of \$6 million and purchased the golf course, ensuring the property will remain a recreational golf facility for all to enjoy.

### **Building 42 Great Lakes Naval Station North Chicago, IL**

Building 42, also known as the Hostess House, is located on Great Lakes Naval Station in North Chicago, IL. The building was designed by the Pritzker Prize-winning architect, Gordon Bunshaft, for Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM) in 1942. One of America's most prominent Modernist architects, Bunshaft spent over 40 years working for the New York office of SOM, where he designed such quintessential Modernist buildings as the Lever House. In addition to being the only example of his work in Illinois, and one of his earliest permanent structures in the United States, Hostess House represents a particularly early and significant use of glued laminate wood construction in the form of the large trusses supporting the open plan of the interior.

A series of superficial modifications by the Navy obscured the original plan and detailing of the original structure, which had not been identified by the Navy in their survey of historic structures on the base. In June of 2006, the Navy requested public comment on the proposed demolition of Building 42, and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) quickly discovered as part of their review that the rather bland-looking structure was actually a highly-significant and very early example of Modern architecture in the US. Although IHPA objected to the demolition and called upon the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation (ACHP) to participate in the review process, the Navy appeared determined to destroy this amazing building as part of a federal mandate to reduce excess square footage across the base.

The Midwest Office, in conjunction with Landmarks Illinois, mobilized an advocacy effort to solicit



public comment from several key organizations. The attention from these organizations, combined with pressure from IHPA and the ACHP, forced the Navy to consider other alternatives that could preserve and restore Building 42. After a series of meetings with the stakeholder groups, the Navy agreed to allow the Great Lakes Naval Museum Association to investigate the use of the Hostess House as the new location for the museum's collection, archives, and offices. The Midwest Office and Landmarks Illinois have worked continuously with the Museum Association to assist them with both planning and fundraising by providing pro bono architectural

services, grant funding to study the feasibility of relocating to this site, and engaging them in our Partners in Preservation grant program with American Express. The project received a considerable amount of public exposure as a part of that program and was awarded a grant of \$55,000 toward their first phase of construction. At the most recent meeting of the consulting parties, the Navy expressed their firm support for the project and made a commitment to assist the Museum Association in their efforts over the next several years.

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*Building 42  
Great Lakes Naval Station, Great Lakes, IL  
(Bldg 42, Hostess House 1 GLNTC.jpg) from Great Lakes Naval Museum Association Archives*

### **Glen Ellyn Main Street Recreation Center Glen Ellyn, IL**

The Glen Ellyn Main Street Center is a rehabilitation success story in the midst of a community plagued by teardowns and McMansions.

In 2006, the Glen Ellyn (IL) Park District surveyed residents about potential uses for a \$12.5 million bond issue that was being proposed. The citizens responded and one of their top priorities was the rehabilitation of the Main Street Recreation Center, a National Register-eligible former neighborhood school built in 1920 which was given over to the local Park District when it was no longer needed by the Board of Education.

By the time the bond issue was ready to be put on the ballot, the rehabilitation plans had morphed into a plan to demolish and re-build a new building on the same footprint as the old school building. The Midwest Office, together with the local preservation group, Citizens for Glen Ellyn Preservation, put on a full-scale advocacy effort to convince the Park District Board that a “teardown” of a historic institutional building was no more favorable than the teardown of an historic home in this community whose reputation had become one of a haven for speculative builders specializing in teardowns and the McMansion replacements.

Letters to the editors of the local newspapers, testimony at public meetings, and a full-fledged “Save the Main” yard sign effort resulted in the defeat of the \$12.5 million bond issue. In April 2007, the Glen Ellyn Park District returned to the voters with another bond issue that this time including monies for the rehabilitation of the Recreation Center. The bond issue passed and work on the old school building was completed by fall 2007. The open house to celebrate the completed rehabilitation was held in November 2007. Local newspaper coverage cited the very positive reactions by parents and teachers who are using

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the new, upgraded facility, proving once again that with rehabilitation, new generations of residents can enjoy first class modern recreational facilities in an historic environment.



*Glen Ellyn Main Street Recreation Center  
(Main St School front 2 Linda Gilbert.jpg)*