

The Main Line Times

“Wake up, Philadelphia: Don’t move the Barnes out of Merion”

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By Nancy Herman

The Cleveland Museum is in the midst of a \$350-million expansion. It has stopped work on the project as their endowment has diminished considerably. That endowment is still however \$510 million (www.nytimes.com/2009/08/14/arts/14arts-INTHEMIDSTOF_BRF.html).

Lee Rosenbaum (culture girl) in the *ARTSJOURNAL* quotes Barnes spokesman Andrew Stewart as saying the Barnes has raised \$156 million for its planned move. That is \$50 million for an endowment and \$106 million for the whole museum. So Cleveland is spending \$350 million for a mere extension of their museum and Philadelphia is purporting to build an entire museum for \$106 million.

In 2004 the Barnes board claimed the museum would be up by 2007. Last year they said the plans would be revealed this spring. The latest date for this “revelation” is late fall.

What is obvious to anyone who is paying attention to the facts on the ground is that there is not enough money to build a fine museum on the Parkway even if the \$156 million actually exists. Part of that perhaps fantasy money is \$30 million in tax dollars from the state. It is almost laughable to assume that even Governor Rendell who “dreamed up the move” in 1995 (*Inquirer*, Oct. 16, 2008 “Barnes stages symbolic groundbreaking on the Parkway,” Inga Saffron) would in 2009 somehow find \$30 million to build a new museum when libraries are closing and cultural institutions are disappearing right and left because of lack of funds.

In the *New York Times* (“What’s a Big City Without a Newspaper?”) Donald Kimelman, managing director of the Pew Charitable Trusts, said that the Pew was not supporting the Web-only news operation because “it did not want to give birth to a long-term money drain.” No wonder Rebecca Rimel, CEO of the Pew, said that the Pew was “exiting stage left” from further cash outlays to the Barnes move. The admitted \$4.5-million annual deficit if the Foundation moves to Philadelphia would drain money into eternity.

It is time for the people who are intent upon destroying the Barnes Foundation to come to their senses and begin preserving the potential National Historic Landmark in Merion that exists in all its 12-acre glory 15 minutes from the Parkway.

Tear down those silly billboards.

Give the city back its valuable property.

Open the doors of the Barnes in Merion to the 164,000 people allowed by Lower Merion Township.

Run a shuttle from the PMA through the park past the Please Touch Museum to the Barnes.

Fire all the expensive PR people now employed at the Barnes to make this move look like something other than the heist it is.

Take \$25 million of the money allotted for the move to endow the Foundation where it is.

Save the international reputation of Philadelphia in the arts community by doing the right thing and in the process save \$131 million to be used for our existing institutions.

Nancy Herman lives in Merion.