

FRIENDS of the BARNES FOUNDATION

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FRIENDS OF THE BARNES FOUNDATION MEMBERS HEAD TO NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL FOR “THE ART OF THE STEAL” TO CONTINUE EFFORTS TO PRESERVE REVERED BARNES CULTURAL SITE

(MERION STATION, September 29, 2009) The citizen advocates who have long opposed the plan to dismantle the Barnes Foundation, one of Pennsylvania’s most valuable cultural sites, will take their cause to Alice Tully Hall in New York City tonight during the New York Film Festival where the documentary “The Art of the Steal” will be screened. Several members of the organization appear in the film and will be at the screening.

The main group of members will depart by bus at 4:30pm today from the parking lot of Adath Israel, the synagogue on the corner of Old Lancaster Road and North Highland Avenue in Merion. They will be available for interviews at Alice Tully Hall after 8:00PM this evening.

The film, “The Art of the Steal” reveals the beyond-the-scenes events that resulted in the plan to move the art collection of Albert Barnes from Merion to Philadelphia. Aside from the disturbing ethical questions raised, the Friends have long pointed out that such a step would destroy the Barnes Foundation’s existence as a unique art and aesthetic experience. The plan also would expose the 85-year-old institution to grave financial risks far greater than it has ever experienced in Merion. Since the court ruling that granted permission for the move in 2004, the ostensible reason for it – financial sustainability– has been discredited as its operating deficit has declined in Merion while costs of building a new museum escalate and funding problems abound. To date, no evidence has been published to show how the Barnes Trustees will overcome the short and long-term risks of moving the art collection to Philadelphia.

According to arts management consultant, James Abruzzo, who served as the expert witness for the Friends during the court case, " The continuing attention given to this situation is not surprising. There are so many questions raised in my [2004 report](http://www.barnesfriends.org/download/Abruzzo%20Analysis.pdf) (<http://www.barnesfriends.org/download/Abruzzo%20Analysis.pdf>) that are yet to be answered and the financial optimism that may have colored the decision four years ago has certainly been diminished."

The Friends point to a number of disturbing aspects of the current plan to dismantle the Barnes:

- Unconscionable use of taxpayer money to destroy an historic, cultural landmark. To date, Governor Ed Rendell has pledged \$30,000,000 of the \$107,000,000 appropriated in 2002 for construction of a Philadelphia Barnes at a time when thousands of Pennsylvanians employed in arts and culture organizations have lost their jobs and institutions have no funding.
- Massive Cost Escalations. Estimates for the Philadelphia Barnes project range from \$300,000,000 to \$500,000,000 – well in excess of the original plan for a \$100,000,000 building. To date, no architectural plans have been made public for scrutiny and realistic cost estimation.
- Donors disappearing. The big donors to the Barnes move –Annenberg, Lenfest, Pew – are not likely to take part in sustaining the institution in the future. The Annenberg Foundation has moved its headquarters to Los Angeles, and The Lenfest Foundation has announced that its major philanthropic contributions campaign is drawing to a close. Although the Pew Charitable Trusts has long championed the move, its recent expansion in the direction of Washington, D.C. may indicate new priorities.
- Saddling a Philadelphia Barnes with a massive, perpetual deficit. The Friends ask “Who is going to fund the huge deficit for a Philadelphia Barnes?” A massive lump sum investment for a new building and much higher operating costs will create an enormous debt that the Barnes Foundation has never experienced in its existence in Merion.
- Common Sense Needed. Using massive amounts of public and private funding in a foolish attempt to “replicate” the one-of-a-kind Barnes experience that already exists in Merion would be an abysmal failure in the areas of stewardship of resources and misguided public policy.

- **Contracts Can Be Amended.** It is not too late to “turn the tide” on the Philadelphia Barnes project. Contracts can be amended and vendors compensated for work already done. This would be far less than the cost of a new building and a much better choice than dismantling the Barnes in Merion.

The Friends of the Barnes Foundation’s mission is to preserve the world-renowned Merion complex in its entirety as a site of national historic and cultural significance. For more information, visit the Friends of the Barnes Foundation website at <http://www.barnesfriends.org>

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