

The Bulletin

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“Demolition Begins for Barnes Move to City”

by Jenny DeHuff

PHILADELPHIA – Hundreds poured onto Ben Franklin Parkway as local community, state and city officials announced the ceremonial groundbreaking of the Barnes Foundation’s move to Philadelphia yesterday.

Under the weight of giant hydraulic tweezers, the façade of the Youth Study Center, the former grim and looming juvenile detention center, came tumbling down, marking the first act of demolition to pave the way for the coming of the Barnes. Additionally, the city unveiled 10-foot high banners totaling 400 feet in length, which will give prospective visitors an indication of what to expect of the new site.



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According to Aileen Roberts, a Barnes Foundation board of trustees' member and chairwoman of the building committee, the state-of-the-art facility, slated for opening in 2011, will include special for special exhibitions, an art conservatory, classrooms, an auditorium, a retail gift shop and a café. Landscaped grounds will reference horticultural aspects of the Merion Arboretum.

Plans for the 4.5-acre site include galleries that replicate the scale, proportion and configuration of the original galleries in Lower Merion. Architectural renderings of the \$400 million project are expected next week.

"This move is vital to ensuring the future of the Barnes," said Barnes Foundation President Derek Gillman. "By doing this, we are fulfilling Dr. Barnes' vision to show this great work to people who might otherwise not get a chance to see it."

But the mayor, the governor and members of the board of trustees were met with resistance from a group of about 30 irate protesters, who chided Gov. Ed Rendell for advocating to move the coveted art collection from its current home in Lower Merion to 20th Street and Ben Franklin Parkway.

Robert Zaller, member of Friends of the Barnes Foundation in Lower Merion, said that governor should be ashamed of himself. "Barnes is rolling over in his grave and has been doing so ever since these shenanigans began nearly 20 years ago," he said. "I resent, to put it mildly, having my tax dollars used to move part of the patrimony of the place I call home and to destroy one of the world's great sites of art and culture, the Barnes Foundation."

Mr. Zaller called the investment a "white elephant."

"Barnes did not imagine turning his foundation into a museum or to have hordes trooping through it," he said. "He meant for it to be used for a very serious educational purpose."

Mr. Rendell thought otherwise.

"This is special for art lovers all over the world," said Mr. Rendell. "It will give an opportunity for this collection to be seen by so many more people, rather than a limited few."

Mayor Michael A. Nutter, who said he owns a house only four blocks from where the Barnes now lies, said he had heard from neighbors in the area that the museum should either "shut down or leave."

"So here's a little of what you asked for," he quipped.

The Barnes Foundation, established by Dr. Albert C. Barnes in 1922, was originally created "to promote the advancement of education and the appreciation of the fine arts,"

Barnes literature says. The gallery holds one of the world's largest collections of impressionist, post-impressionist and early modern paintings.