

Press Conference Remarks

Wendy Ross, Executive Director, Friends of John Jay Homestead

March 5, 2010, John Jay Homestead State Historic Site

The Friends of John Jay Homestead are grateful to Assemblyman Robert Castelli for helping to bring the funding plight of New York State Historic Sites and Parks to everyone's attention.

We recognize that New York State is in a dire fiscal situation, and over the last two years we have already seen big funding cuts to John Jay Homestead. The Friends of John Jay Homestead have responded by shouldering an increasing share of the burden.

We have been a good partner to the state by contributing over one hundred thousand dollars to cover routine costs such as grounds maintenance and roof and plaster repairs. This is over and above the close to one million dollars we have spent in the past two years on special events, education programs and special restoration projects.

We are encouraged that the governor's administration recognizes the importance of keeping John Jay Homestead up and running. We believe they have found a short-term solution to the funding challenge, by recommending a transfer of Environmental Protection Funds to keep this and other parks and sites open.

But now we need to urge the New York State Legislature to design and approve a budget that ensures funding for all parks and sites, including John Jay Homestead.

This budget crisis has given us the opportunity to think about how important this site is to the cultural life of our community, and to the local economy. We have seen hundreds of thousands of visitors at this site over the past years. Our annual Homestead Country Fair Weekend, our lecture series, and our house and garden tours are some of the special events many of you have attended. The restoration of the main barn, the schoolhouse, the gardens and the ice pond are special projects that many of you have helped us to fund.

And our plans for the Education and Visitor Center, opening next year, will transform this site and provide even more opportunities for interaction with our community. We are tremendously proud of the contributions that Friends of John Jay Homestead members and volunteers, have made to this site and our community.

We hope that the New York State legislators recognize that public/private partnerships such as ours, are one of the most effective ways the state can use public resources to leverage private funding and even more important, contributions of volunteer time and commitment.

The Friends of John Jay Homestead have partnered with the State of New York for over thirty years. We are committed to the preservation and development of John Jay Homestead, and we are working to determine a long-term solution to the financial stability of this nationally important historic site. We cannot ever let this national treasure be closed.

So we urge all New York residents to join with the Friends in our efforts to ensure that the John Jay Homestead will remain open for all New Yorkers and all Americans, in perpetuity.