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Contact: Marilyn Katz/Brian Berg
Mkatz@mkcpr.com
Brian@mkcpr.com
312-282-8260

Pullman National Monument’s Leaders Observe Labor Day by Gathering for Groundbreaking at the Birthplace of IL Labor Movement

September 7, 2020 – (Chicago, IL) – One hundred and twenty-six years after the Pullman Palace Car workers’ strike influenced and foreshadowed the nation’s Labor and Civil Rights movements, on Labor Day --- with its deep origins in Illinois, **Senator Dick Durbin, Mayor Lori Lightfoot, Colleen Callahan, Director**, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and **U.S. Representative Robin Kelly** gathered at the historic Pullman Clock Tower to celebrate the onset of construction of the Pullman National Monument site.

Joining the elected officials at the groundbreaking for the \$34 million, 12-acre complex were **Liisa Stark**, representing both Union Pacific Railroad and the other **National Park Foundation** donors, which provided the first donated funds in 2014; Chicago Federation of Labor President **Robert Reiter**; and **Teri Gage**, Superintendent, Pullman National Monument for the National Park Service – the entity that is responsible for the construction and operation of the finished monument with its various historic and educational aspects.

After a brief opening by 9th Ward **Alderman Anthony Beale**, who, joined community activists in the decades-long fight to win designation of Pullman as a National Monument, **Ms. Gage** spoke of the National Park Service’s plans for the iconic clock tower building and the agency’s commitment to partnership and collaboration. “When renovation is complete next year, visitors will walk through the doors behind us, into this beautiful clock tower building and experience the fascinating Pullman story in an impressive state-of-the-art visitor center,” said Ms. Gage. “The National Park Service is thrilled to be a partner in sharing the Pullman story and thankful for the opportunity to work so closely with the community and the partner groups represented here today. It’s truly an honor.”

Gage’s words were echoed in a variety of ways by all the assembled leaders. **U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, (D-IL)** who initially introduced legislation to protect the Pullman District in 2014, said: “This hallowed ground is where the parallel tracks of American history, the struggles for economic and racial justice, meet. The bloody Pullman rail strike nearly 125 years ago led to the creation by Congress of a national Labor Day holiday and it ultimately advanced the rights--and economic security--of all workers in America. Once the Pullman Monument campus and Visitors Center opens, hundreds of thousands of people each year will learn about the Pullman workers who helped give us Labor Day and the Pullman porters who helped fuel the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to Chicago and other cities in the North—and how they helped make possible the Civil Rights victories of the last century.”

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Add 1/Pullman National Monument

Speaking in front of the historic, soon to be transformed Clock Tower, built in 1880, into a new Visitor Center, **Mayor Lori Lightfoot** reflected on Pullman as the prototype of the new community. “One cannot help but be impressed by, and learn from, all that Pullman, with the leadership of CNI, Alderman Beale and others, have done to reinvent this great community. Little more than a decade ago, declared dead, the community with the assistance of Alderman Beale, CNI and others has demonstrated that by building on its assets – communities that were too easily written off, can thrive,” said Mayor Lightfoot.

Congresswoman Robin Kelly voiced similar thoughts. “Pullman once again is a new destination, a place to visit, to live and to work. Thanks to the efforts and the leadership of those here today, it’s a community using history to build a better, brighter, future.”

Robert Reiter, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor added: “I am proud to be here in Pullman for this special occasion at this historic place. Labor made its stand in Pullman and eventually won the 8-hour day from which the Black Trade Union was born, and ensured that working men and women would not be cowed into wage slavery. That same determination is with us today – in this community which fought back when abandoned and that determination remains today in the men and women – who work to feed, clothe, transport and care for all in this society. We remain committed to the welfare of all.”

In closing, **IDNR Director Colleen Callahan** accentuated the work to be done on 12-acre site. According to Ms. Callahan, the renovation includes transforming the iconic Clock Tower and Administration building into the Visitor’s Center with exhibits that will recount the history of Pullman as a model town, as a labor mecca and as an antecedent of the Civil Rights and labor movements. Once completed in the Spring of 2021, the exhibits will feature George Pullman and the Pullman Palace Car Co. that was the first to hire African Americans from the community for jobs as porters, waiters, and housekeepers that were seen as a milestone in the Civil Rights movement in the 20th century. It will also feature a new outdoor public space.

Additional exhibits will showcase the development of Pullman as a model town, the history of strife-ridden labor relations where the 8-hour work-day was born and tell the story of the Pullman porters who worked in sleeper train cars across the country and formed the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the nation’s first Black labor union that became the doorway through which many Civil Rights gains were made. “More than 300,000 visitors a year are anticipated to visit the National Monument Site,” added **Colleen Callahan**, Director, IDNR.

The groundbreaking for the 12-acre campus is the latest milestone in the revitalization of the Pullman community where a new 150,000 square foot Amazon distribution center and 400,000 square SC Johnson manufacturing facility will open in the fall, creating 400 jobs. Earlier this year, the Amateur Athletic Union agreed to make the Pullman Community Center its new Midwest headquarters, and residents moved into Pullman Artspace Lofts, the first new residential complex in Pullman in more than 50 years. These developments and opportunities were catalyzed by the designation of the National Monument site on Feb. 19, 2015, and the more than \$350 million of public and private investments that include redevelopment of the 180-acre Ryerson steel site and creation of 1,500 jobs that has made Pullman “a model for neighborhood revitalization.”

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Add 2/Pullman National Monument

9th Ward Alderman Anthony A. Beale highlighted the theme of the site and economic opportunity. “I’m excited because the National Monument is once going to become a vital destination where people will be going to not only to work, but also to visit and to learn. Today as I see the two Gotham Greens greenhouses, the Whole Foods’ and Method Products plants, the Pullman Community Center, and the new restaurants and retail, I’m grateful for the support for the Monument from Union Pacific, the Traubert/Pritzker Foundation and all of our community partners for their commitment to National Monument and help building a sustainable community and a brighter future for our residents.”

The Monument’s master developer is the [Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives](#). It is being designed by Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture, Bauer Latoza Studio, site design group, and constructed by GMA Construction Group, Spaceco, Inc., and W.E. O’Neil Construction.

Cornelius Griggs representing the development team said, “[The GMA Construction Group](#), as a minority, disadvantaged, veteran owned business is elated to be the Prime Contractor on such an important and historic project for the Pullman community and our country.”

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