



ART DECO SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON
PO BOX 42722 • WASHINGTON, DC 20015

A PEAL FOR THE BELGIAN FRIENDSHIP PAVILION

August 16, 2010

Nearly 25 years ago, preservationist Barbara Baer Capitman visited the Belgian Friendship Pavilion at Virginia Union University in Richmond, noted its advanced state of decay, and pledged to "get art deco buffs behind it." Sadly, Capitman died a few years later, her goal unfulfilled. Six years ago, another visionary, Virginia Union alumnus E. Dianne Watkins took up the gauntlet, establishing Bells for Peace, Inc. to raise the funds needed both to restore the landmark building and procure a set of bells for its long vacant bell tower. Bells for Peace is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Now, the Art Deco Society of Washington, also a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is getting behind the calls of Capitman and Watkins and holding a fundraising drive and concert to support Bells for Peace and create a brighter "World of Tomorrow" for the Belgian Friendship Building.

One of only two major buildings remaining from the 1939-40 New York World's Fair, the Belgian Friendship Pavilion, designed by famed Belgian architect Henry van de Velde, was dismantled after the Fair, transported to Richmond, Virginia, and reconstructed on the campus of Virginia Union University. For most of the past 70 years, the pavilion has served as the university's basketball arena and library. The pavilion's bell tower, which greeted more than 25 million visitors to the New York World's Fair, has, however, remained silent all those years, its bells having been donated to the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Although the Belgian Friendship Pavilion was added to the National Register of Historic Places in the 1970s, the ravages of time, aided by Hurricane Isabel in 2003, have taken their toll on the exterior of the building, which is in need of extensive restoration. Restoration costs estimated at \$10 million in 1986 have now grown to \$30 million.

Barbara Capitman was one of the founders of the Miami Design Preservation League, and instrumental in the preservation of over 800 Art Deco buildings in Miami's South Beach. But Capitman's activism extended well beyond South Beach. She traveled the country, advocating for the preservation of the nation's rapidly disappearing Art Deco architecture. Meeting with local preservationists, she urged establishment of Art Deco societies in major cities throughout the nation, including Washington, D.C.

Dianne Watkins has a personal stake in the future of the Belgian Friendship Pavilion for her uncle, Dr. John M. Ellison, as president of Virginia Union in 1940, led the fundraising drive that brought the pavilion to Richmond.

Under Watkins' leadership significant progress has been made. Sufficient funds have been raised to support the purchase of four bells and completion of a comprehensive assessment of the Belgian Friendship Pavilion's current condition. Among the critical renovations needed before the first bells can be installed are a new roof for the tower to prevent further decay and design and installation of a new support system for the bells.

The National Park Service awarded a \$150,000 grant, matched by Virginia Union, to make necessary repairs and modifications to the bell tower so that it can again house a carillon. The Belgian government pledged funds to support casting of four additional bells once the tower is restored.

Commonwealth Architects of Richmond is leading efforts to restore exterior elements of the former Belgian pavilion but the speed with which essential restoration is undertaken depends on the level of financial support. Current economic conditions hamper fundraising efforts and therefore delay essential restoration efforts. Commonwealth Principal Robert Ford, Jr. said that every effort is being made to restore the exterior of the building to its 1941 appearance while meeting the needs of a contemporary teaching facility.

The Art Deco Society's fundraising concert "Dawn of a New Day" will be held October 1, 2010, at the historic Charles Sumner School, 1201 17th Street, NW. A reception, beginning at 6:30 PM, will precede the 7:30 PM concert. The concert will feature music from America's world's fairs of the 1930s performed by the Retropolitans.

In addition to the benefit concert, the Art Deco Society of Washington, in coordination with the National Building Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, and the Greenbelt Museum, organized a series of weekend events to mark the opening of the National Building Museum's landmark exhibition *Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s*. For additional details visit the Society's website--www.adsw.org. I encourage you to download the digital *Guide to Washington's World's Fair Weekend* and share it with friends and colleagues. In addition to details on the weekend activities, the guide provides additional information on and pictures of the Belgian Friendship Pavilion.

Thanks in advance for your generous contribution. With your support, this can indeed be the "Dawn of a New Day" for the Belgian Friendship Pavilion at Virginia Union University.

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PLEASE HELP CIRCULATE THIS APPEAL TO YOUR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES. CALL OR EMAIL ME TO REQUEST A DIGITAL (.PDF) COPY OF THIS LETTER THAT CAN BE CIRCULATED VIA EMAIL.

A Peal for the Belgian Friendship Pavilion Donate to Bells for Peace

If you are unable to attend the October 1st concert, but would like to help fund the purchase of additional bells for and restoration of the bell tower and other portions of the former Belgian Friendship Pavilion at Virginia Union University, please fill out the form below and mail it to

Bells for Peace Fundraiser
c/o Art Deco Society of Washington
PO Box 42722
Washington, DC 20015 USA

Make Checks Payable to **Bells for Peace, Inc.**

The checks will be presented to Bells for Peace Founder and President E. Dianne Watkins at the October 1, 2010 concert.

Name(s): _____

Please print name clearly as you wish it to appear in publications

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Country _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Amount of Donation (in U.S. Dollars): \$ _____

- \$2,500 or more (Platinum Circle) \$250-\$499 (Bronze Circle)
- \$1,000—\$2,499 (Gold Circle) \$100-\$249 (Chrome Circle)
- \$500—\$999 (Silver Circle) \$1-\$99 (Brass Circle)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION

Washington's World's Fair Weekend Registration Form

Name (s): _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone: _____ (Home) _____ (Cell)

Email: _____

- I am a current member of the Art Deco Society of Washington
- I am a member of _____ (name of Art Deco Society)
- I would like to join ADSW
- Individual @ \$35 Couple @ \$50

Please reserve the following:

Number: _____

Behind the Scenes Tour of Smithsonian Collections (Restricted to members of Art Deco Societies) FREE

_____ Dawn of a New Day Benefit Concert @ \$50

I would like to make an additional tax-deductible donation of _____

(Those making an additional donation of \$25 or more will receive priority seating and special recognition in the program)

_____ Curator-Guided Tour of *Designing Tomorrow* (Restricted to Members of Art Deco Societies) FREE

_____ Building A Century of Progress—Member of an Art Deco Society FREE

_____ Building A Century of Progress—Nonmember (Advance reservations not available. Pay at the door)

_____ Reception at The Presidential—Art Deco Society Member @ \$30

_____ Reception at The Presidential—Non-member @\$40

_____ Bus Tour to Greenbelt—Member of an Art Deco Society @ \$30

_____ Bus Tour to Greenbelt—Non-member @ \$40

Total Enclosed _____ **Make checks payable to ADSW**

Mail this form with your payment to ADSW, PO Box 42722, Washington DC 20015.