

Preservation News

Charlene Orr, executive director of Historic Mesquite, Inc. (HMI) and Historic Preservation Officer for the City of Mesquite, was recently elected to the board of directors of Preservation Texas (PT). The statewide non-profit is the advocate for preserving the historic resources of Texas and receives its funding from membership, sponsors and grants. Orr will serve as the Advocacy Committee chair for this year. PT is a statewide partner with the National Trust for Historic Preservation; HMI is a local partner with the organization.

Thanks to a grant from the Mesquite Arts Council, Historic Mesquite, Inc. now has a design for a proposed amphitheater to be constructed at the northeast end of Opal Lawrence Historical Park. The earthen structure will be constructed in the area where a former fishing pond was located and will utilize natural materials. It will seat about 248 people.

The amphitheater will be offered for activities such as lectures, performances, workshops, small concerts and weddings. The design of the amphitheater allows the sound created from any activity to be pushed to the southwest of the property, partly shielding the surrounding neighborhood from distractions.

HMI has applied for another grant that would allow the organization to seek the creation of construction documents, which will give a more definite cost estimate on the project. The amphitheater is phase three of the overall Lawrence Homestead Outdoor Classroom. Phase one and two entailed the reconstruction of a historical cabin as an introduction to a 1,010-linear foot walking trail, dotted with colorful and informative signs along the way. Those on the trail learn not only about the Victorian way of life on the farm but how that way compares to today's world. The project is a cooperative effort between HMI and Keep Mesquite Beautiful. The Outdoor Classroom is fully funded by donations and grants, including those from the Mesquite Rotary Club, Union Pacific Railroad, First State Bank, Mesquite Arts Council and others. Both organizations will begin presenting the amphitheater design and sponsorship opportunities as soon as possible.

The Lawrence Homestead Outdoor Classroom was recently named a certified Nature Explores Classroom by the Arbor Day Foundation and Dimensions Education Research Foundation. It is the first certified classroom in Mesquite, the first Keep Texas Beautiful affiliate and the first such classroom in the United States in a historical park.

Historic Mesquite, Inc. recently received a \$5,000 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Fondren Fund through the Southwest Office to complete a project known as "Preserving Our Sense of Place: Strengthening Mesquite's Preservation Plan." The grant, along with matching funds from the organization's fund-raising efforts, allowed HMI to hire consultant Larry Abrigg, AICP, to examine the current preservation ordinances, proposed additions to the City's Comprehensive Plan, and give his expert opinion and advice on going forward.

Abrigg also covered the entire city to examine the housing stock and neighborhoods for a historical resources survey. He was able to identify over 300 properties with historical

significance in the community and HMI will be looking into ways of promoting our "sense of place" through the significance. The last historical resources survey was a 1999 joint effort with Dallas County and did not include some recognized properties.