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News Release

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Milwaukee VAMC Commences Repairs on Historic Ward Memorial Theater *Work begins on historic theater as crews complete initial repairs to “Old Main”*

Milwaukee (January 30, 2013) – The National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance announced today that the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center has commenced the stabilization of Ward Memorial Theater, in the National Soldiers Home National Historic Landmark District. The work comes on the heels of completed roof stabilization work on a rear wing section of the District’s “Old Main” building.



The repairs have been a key focus of a broad group of community leaders that make up the **Milwaukee VA Soldiers Home Community Advisory Council**. The group, formed after the District’s designation as one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, has come together to advocate for the protection, repair and rehabilitation of the district’s vacant buildings and identify a vision for returning the buildings to the service of veterans.

“We applaud the VA for their work to get these repairs complete, prevent further damage and help lay the ground work for the future reuse of these historic buildings,” said Dawn McCarthy, president of the Milwaukee Preservation Alliance. “The VA successfully repaired Old Main’s roof collapse before the worst of the winter weather and is now focused on stabilizing the roof of another historical and architectural landmark, Ward Memorial Theater.”

Ward Memorial Theater was designed by Henry C. Koch and constructed in 1881. It was originally constructed as a two-story multi-purpose building that included a hall, restaurant, and train passenger waiting room. The hall was also used as a worship space until the construction of a freestanding chapel. In 1897, the building was remodeled for use solely as a theater and hosted many appearances by lecturers, vaudeville troupes, and musicians. Performers appearing

elsewhere in Milwaukee often gave free shows at the Theater for the veterans' benefit. As the motion picture industry developed, the theater acquired equipment to show movies.

Today, Ward Memorial Theater has experienced significant roof and water infiltration damage, leaving portions exposed to the elements. In November 2011, one of the theater's most notable features, a stained glass window depicting a life sized figure of General Ulysses S. Grant mounted on a bay horse, was removed from the theater for safekeeping until repairs are complete.

Construction crews are at work to make the necessary repairs to prevent any further damage. The repairs will address issues with roof trusses to prevent a collapse and water infiltration issues. These repairs are expected to be complete within the year.

"The veteran community cherishes these buildings and what they represent," said Howard Hinterthuer, Vietnam veteran and Communications Coordinator at the Center for Veterans Issues. "We know there is support for returning these buildings to the service of veterans and look forward to continuing to work together toward that goal."

Similar repairs were recently made to the rear wing of the district's largest building – "Old Main." Crews repaired structural damage associated with the collapse of the building's roof and reestablished the second floor truss structure.

"Stabilization of Old Main and the Ward Memorial Theater is a great victory," said Genell Scheurell, senior field officer with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Chicago Field Office. "We can now be certain that these buildings will be safe from future damage as we work toward a long-term plan for their reuse."

For more information about the Soldiers Home, visit

<http://www.savingplaces.org/treasures/milwaukee-soldiers-home>

<http://www.SavetheSoldiersHome.com>

Or find us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/SavetheSoldiersHome>

Or Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/savesoldrshome>.

About the Milwaukee VA National Soldiers Home Historic District

In 1865, Congress established the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) system to care for volunteer Union soldiers who had been disabled during service in the Civil War.

In 1866, the NHDVS Board of Managers decided to locate one of the first three Homes in Milwaukee. It was established on approximately 400 acres of land west of the city, purchased from several local citizens.

The Homes were to provide holistic care for veterans – access to health care, safe living accommodations, vocational training, rehabilitation, and recreation. They were designed to be highly visible, reminding citizens of the federal government's support of veterans and helping to forge a stronger link between the public and the federal government.

Since 1867, the Northwestern Branch of the NHDVS, popularly known as the Milwaukee Soldiers Home, has provided care to veterans from across the country. Today the National Historic Landmark district, located on the grounds of the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center, is the only one of the original three branches to have retained most of its original buildings.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately funded nonprofit organization, works to save America's historic places.
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