

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL TO CELEBRATE NEW VISION FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

SEPTEMBER 18, 2009 MISSOULA - THE SWIFT BUILDING--LOCATED ON SOUTH 4TH STREET EAST AND A PART OF MISSOULA'S HISTORIC LEGACY--IS ENJOYING A RENAISSANCE THANKS TO THE HELP OF AN INNOVATIVE LOCAL CONSERVATION NON-PROFIT, ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL (EPI).

DURING A TIME WHEN MANY NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS ARE SHRINKING OR AT A STANDSTILL, EPI IS SPEARHEADING AN EFFORT TO PROMOTE COLLABORATION AND EFFICIENCIES AMONG SYNERGISTIC GROUPS.

EPI PURCHASED THE BUILDING THIS YEAR, AND NOW OCCUPIES 1/3 OF THE SPACE, SHARING WITH ADDITIONAL CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS --WATERSHED EDUCATION NETWORK, WILD ROCKIES FIELD INSTITUTE, AND AERIE BACKCOUNTRY MEDICINE.

THIS PIVOTAL STEP ILLUSTRATES EPI'S PIONEERING APPROACHES TO CONSERVATION EDUCATION AND NON-PROFIT MANAGEMENT, THE QUALITY OF ITS PROGRAMS, AND THE CRITICAL NEED THAT IT FILLS.

EPI PARTNERS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH PROFESSIONAL SCIENTISTS, TO PERFORM RESEARCH IN LOCAL BIODIVERSITY HOT SPOTS -- THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF COSTA RICA, THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, THE SEA OF CORTEZ IN MEXICO, AND THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM. THE MAJORITY OF EPI'S PARTICIPANTS ARE LOCAL YOUTH FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

A SELECT NUMBER OF U.S. HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, INCLUDING 20-30 MISSOULA-AREA STUDENTS, TRAVEL TO THESE LOCATIONS EACH YEAR AND JOIN IN THE RESEARCH, AIMED AT PROTECTING THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES. BY WORKING WITH PROFESSIONAL SCIENTISTS ON REAL-WORLD CONSERVATION PROJECTS, EPI PARTICIPANTS UNDERSTAND ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES. BY GETTING DIRECT EXPERIENCE IN NATURE, YOUTH BECOME BETTER EQUIPPED TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT NATURAL RESOURCES IMPORTANT TO THEIR COMMUNITY'S ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

THIS IS ALL ACCOMPLISHED WHILE LOCAL AND VISITING YOUTH INTERACT AND LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER AND THEIR CULTURES. FOR MANY PARTICIPANTS, THE CULTURAL EXCHANGE COMPONENT IS THE MOST POWERFUL EXPERIENCE OF THEIR TRIP.

CO-FOUNDERS SCOTT PANKRATZ AND JULIE OSBORN CREATED EPI WITH AN EYE TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY -- BOTH ENVIRONMENTALLY AND ECONOMICALLY. EPI IS RUN ON AN ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESS MODEL, WITH 70% OF EPI'S BUDGET FROM EARNED INCOME VIA STUDENT COURSE TUITION AND THE REMAINING 30% FROM FUNDRAISING. THIS EARNED

INCOME COVERS ORGANIZATIONAL OVERHEAD SO THAT DONATIONS DIRECTLY FUND PROGRAM COSTS.

ALL STUDENTS PAY AT LEAST PART OF THEIR TUITION, INVESTING THEM IN PROGRAM OUTCOMES. NEED-BASED SCHOLARSHIPS ARE ALSO GRANTED, AND ALL LOCAL STUDENTS RECEIVE SIGNIFICANT SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT.

NOW EPI IS INVESTING IN AN EVEN LARGER VISION FOR CHANGE. BY PURCHASING THE SWIFT BUILDING AND SHARING IT WITH OTHER CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS, EPI ENVISIONS THIS SPACE AS A NON-PROFIT NEXUS – A PLACE TO SHARE RESOURCES, IDEAS, AND STRENGTHEN THE VIBRANT CONSERVATION EDUCATION NETWORK THAT EXISTS IN MISSOULA.

THE SWIFT BUILDING IS THE IDEAL LOCATION FOR THIS CENTER. BUILT IN 1912, THE SWIFT BUILDING SERVED THE WORKING CLASS IN MISSOULA AS A WAREHOUSE FOR THE CHICAGO-ST. PAUL-MILWAUKEE RAILROAD. CENTRAL TO THE HISTORIC WAREHOUSE DISTRICT, THE BUILDING HOSTED THE SWIFT MEAT PACKING COMPANY, BLAIR TRANSFER AND STORAGE, AND WESTERN MONTANA MONUMENT (A COMPANY BEST KNOWN FOR MAKING TOMBSTONES).

IN THE 1970S, WHEN THE RAILWAY WENT BANKRUPT AND TRACKS WERE PULLED FROM THE RIVER CORRIDOR, AND OWNERSHIP SWIFT BUILDING CHANGED HANDS. THIS BUILDING, ONCE A HUB OF ACTIVITY, BECAME KNOWN NOT FOR ITS IMPORTANT ROLE DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSOULA COMMUNITY, BUT FOR RUMORS THAT THE BUILDING WAS HAUNTED. OVERGROWN BY VEGETATION COMBINED WITH THE COLLAPSE OF ITS INFRASTRUCTURE, THE SWIFT BUILDING WAS A PLACE WHERE ONLY A FEW VENTURED, SEEKING THE THRILL OF ENCOUNTERING GHOSTS.

BUT IN 1975, SISTERS LIN AND JUDY SMITH SAW THE BEAUTY OF THIS RUN-DOWN HAUNT AND PURCHASED THE STRUCTURE. SPENDING CONSIDERABLE WORK TO LOVINGLY RESTORE THIS BUILDING TO ITS ORIGINAL GLORY, THE SMITH SISTERS INTENTIONALLY CREATED A SPACE THAT IS A TRIBUTE TO MISSOULA'S PAST. IN ADDITION TO PRESERVING THE HISTORIC FAÇADE AND INTEGRITY OF THE SWIFT BUILDING, THE SMITH SISTERS LED A CAMPAIGN TO SECURE MISSOULA'S FIRST OPEN SPACE SANCTUARY IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN. THE RESTORED SWIFT BUILDING NOW SITS ON A UNIQUE PARCEL ADJACENT TO THE CLARK FORK RIVER AND RESTORED NATIVE PRAIRIE, WHICH IS MAINTAINED THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM OF LOCAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND THE DEDICATED LABOR AND EXPERTISE OF BOTANIST JOHN PIERCE.

EPI LOOKS FORWARD TO A NEW ERA FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION, BUILDING ON THE LOCAL RESOURCES ALREADY PRESENT. IN THIS LINE, EPI WILL BE HOSTING AN OPEN HOUSE CELEBRATION, WITH THE COLLABORATION OF NUMEROUS LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS.

MAYOR ENGEN WILL BE PRESENT TO KICK OFF THE "SWIFT FIESTA" ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24TH, BEGINNING AT NOON UNTIL 5 PM. ALL ARE WELCOME TO PARTAKE IN FREE LOCAL FOOD DONATED BY THE WESTERN MONTANA GROWERS COOPERATIVE AND PREPARED BY ORGANIC SPROUTS KITCHEN, LISTEN TO THE CROONING OF LOCAL TEEN KIRA MEANS, AND ENJOY THE

“GUITAR-SLINGING, SWEET SINGING MAMAS” DUET, CASEY*JO. LEARN ABOUT THE SWIFT AND MISSOULA CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH INTERACTIVE TOURS AND DESIGN YOUR OWN EPI REUSABLE GROCERY BAG, LEAD BY TALENTED ZACC ARTISTS.

TO RSVP FOR THE “SWIFT FIESTA” AND LEARN ABOUT EPI’S WORK IN MISSOULA AND ABROAD, GO TO WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG/EVENTS, CALL (406) 721-8784, OR EMAIL EPI AT INFO@ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG.

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