

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Missoula-based non-profit celebrates move to historic building Community invited to Ecology Project International's "Swift fiesta"

October 12 MISSOULA - Preservation of a historic building, revitalization of a downtown corridor, and a burgeoning nexus for conservation education – are all causes for a celebration. Ecology Project International (EPI) recently purchased the historic Swift building to serve as its new world headquarters and on Saturday, October 24th at noon, EPI is throwing a party to commemorate this momentous occasion and invite Missoula to join them in their efforts to strengthen conservation education regionally and worldwide.

EPI partners local high school students with scientists in biodiversity hotspots around the world – the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands, the Sea of Cortez in Mexico, and in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

A select number of U.S. high school students, including 20-30 from Missoula, 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. Direct experience in nature prepares these youth to make informed decisions about natural resources important to their community's economic and environmental health.

In spite of the economic downturn this year, EPI is investing in an even larger vision for change. After almost 10 years of operation, inspiring more than 6,000 people in their field programs, co-founders Julie Osborn and Scott Pankratz are expanding their vision to strengthen local conservation efforts. By purchasing the Swift building and sharing it with other conservation organizations, EPI aspires to create a non-profit nexus – a place to share resources, ideas, and strengthen the vibrant conservation education network that already exists in Missoula.

"We are thrilled to be a part of preserving the historic Swift building for the city of Missoula, and to create a welcoming space for community members to get involved. We hope to see lots of folks come by on Saturday to learn about this piece of our town's history," says Advancement Director, Julie Osborn.

Built in 1912, the Swift Building served 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, the railway went bankrupt and tracks were pulled from the river corridor. Once a hub of activity, the building became overcome by vegetation and collapsing infrastructure.

In the late 70s, sisters Linda and Judy Smith saw the beauty of this run-down haunt and purchased it. 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 working class 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.

EPI looks forward to a new era for conservation education, building on the local resources already present. 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 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. Tour the Swift building and learn about additional Missoula conservation organizations. Make sure you arrive early to design your own EPI reusable grocery bag, lead by talented ZACC artists.

To learn more about EPI's work in Missoula and abroad, go to www.ecologyproject.org, call (406) 721-8784, or email EPI at info@ecologyproject.org.

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