

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Ecology Project International relocates to historic building**

MISSOULA-BASED CONSERVATION EDUCATION ORGANIZATION BLOSSOMS INTO COMMUNITY RESOURCE

JULY 15, 2009 MISSOULA – ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL (EPI) IS TAKING A MONUMENTAL STEP NEXT WEEK IN MOVING INTO THE HISTORIC SWIFT BUILDING. A MISSOULA-BASED CONSERVATION EDUCATION NON-PROFIT, EPI IS PROGRESSING FORWARD WITH AN AMBITIOUS CAMPAIGN TO PURCHASE THE BUILDING, DESPITE THE CHALLENGES OF THE CURRENT ECONOMY. EPI PARTNERS SCIENTISTS WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT SEVERAL ECOLOGICALLY FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS WORLDWIDE INCLUDING COSTA RICA, THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, MEXICO, AND YELLOWSTONE, WITH THE MISSION TO IMPROVE AND INSPIRE SCIENCE EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS WORLDWIDE THROUGH FIELD-BASED STUDENT-SCIENTIST PARTNERSHIPS.

THE PURCHASE OF THE SWIFT BUILDING - LOCATED AT THE EAST END OF SOUTH 4<sup>TH</sup> STREET - WILL PROVIDE LONG-TERM STABILITY FOR THIS INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL NON-PROFIT; AND WITH FURTHER SUPPORT, DEVELOP INTO A RESOURCE FOR THE VIBRANT CONSERVATION EDUCATION NETWORK THAT EXISTS IN MISSOULA. EPI WILL OCCUPY 1/3 OF THE SWIFT BUILDING, AND WILL HOST ADDITIONAL CONSERVATION EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS – WATERSHED EDUCATION NETWORK, WILD ROCKIES FIELD INSTITUTE, AND AERIE BACKCOUNTRY MEDICINE.

IN ADDITION TO BECOMING A COMMUNITY RESOURCE FOR ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS INTERESTED IN CONSERVATION EDUCATION, EPI WILL MAINTAIN THE HISTORIC INTEGRITY OF THE SWIFT BUILDING. BUILT IN 1912, THE SWIFT BUILDING SERVED AS A WAREHOUSE FOR THE CHICAGO-ST. PAUL-MILWAUKEE RAILROAD UNTIL THE LATE 1900S. CENTRAL TO THE HISTORIC WAREHOUSE DISTRICT, THE BUILDING ALSO HOSTED THE SWIFT MEAT PACKING COMPANY 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, THE SWIFT BUILDING BECAME ABANDONED. 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.

IN 1979, SISTERS LIN AND JUDY SMITH SAW THE BEAUTY OF THIS RUN-DOWN HAUNT AND PURCHASED THE STRUCTURE FROM THE RAILROAD. SPENDING CONSIDERABLE EFFORT TO LOVINGLY RESTORE THIS BUILDING TO ITS ORIGINAL GLORY, THE SMITH SISTERS PRESERVED ONE OF MISSOULA'S ONLY INDUSTRIAL HISTORIC BUILDINGS WHILE ALSO CREATING A BEAUTIFUL AND FUNCTIONAL OFFICE ENVIRONMENT. IN ADDITION TO PRESERVING THE HISTORIC FAÇADE 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 BY VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP AND EXPERTISE OF BOTANIST JOHN PIERCE.

OVER THE LAST DECADE, THE SMITH SISTERS CONSIDERED VARIOUS OFFERS FOR THE SWIFT BUILDING, BUT NONE MET THEIR VISION FOR HOW THE FUTURE OF THE BUILDING WOULD APPROPRIATELY CONTINUE THE HISTORICAL LEGACY THEY HAD WORKED SO HARD TO MAINTAIN. AFTER MORE THAN A YEAR OF DISCUSSIONS, LIN AND JUDY AGREED ON A BARGAIN SALE PRICE TO EPI. EPI DIRECTOR SCOTT PANKRATZ SAYS, "IT WASN'T A YEAR OF NEGOTIATIONS. IT WAS A YEAR OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: WITH LIN AND JUDY, AND WITH THE BUILDING."THE LONG-TERM VISION OF EPI CO-FOUNDERS PANKRATZ AND JULIE OSBORN IS TO CREATE A COLLABORATIVE SPACE WITH A MISSION TO IMPROVE CONSERVATION EDUCATION EFFORTS. THIS, COMBINED WITH THEIR INTEREST IN MAINTAINING THE HISTORIC INTEGRITY OF THE BUILDING AND NATIVE PRAIRIE, HAS ENABLED EPI TO BECOME THE SWIFT'S PROUD NEW OWNER.

MOVING FORWARD IN THIS TROUBLESOME ECONOMY IS A DIFFICULT TASK, ESPECIALLY FOR A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, BUT PANKRATZ AND OSBORN REMAIN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF EPI AND ITS EXPANDED ROLE IN THE MISSOULA COMMUNITY. EPI WELCOMES THE INTEREST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN EDUCATING ABOUT CONSERVATION PRACTICES AND PROTECTING AND RESTORING BIODIVERSITY LOCALLY AND WORLDWIDE.

IN CELEBRATION OF THIS MOMENTOUS STEP, EPI WILL BE HOSTING A "MOVING-IN" CELEBRATION, OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17<sup>TH</sup>. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EPI'S WORK IN MISSOULA AND ABROAD, GO TO [WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG](http://WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG), CALL (406) 721-8784, OR EMAIL EPI AT [INFO@ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG](mailto:INFO@ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG).

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