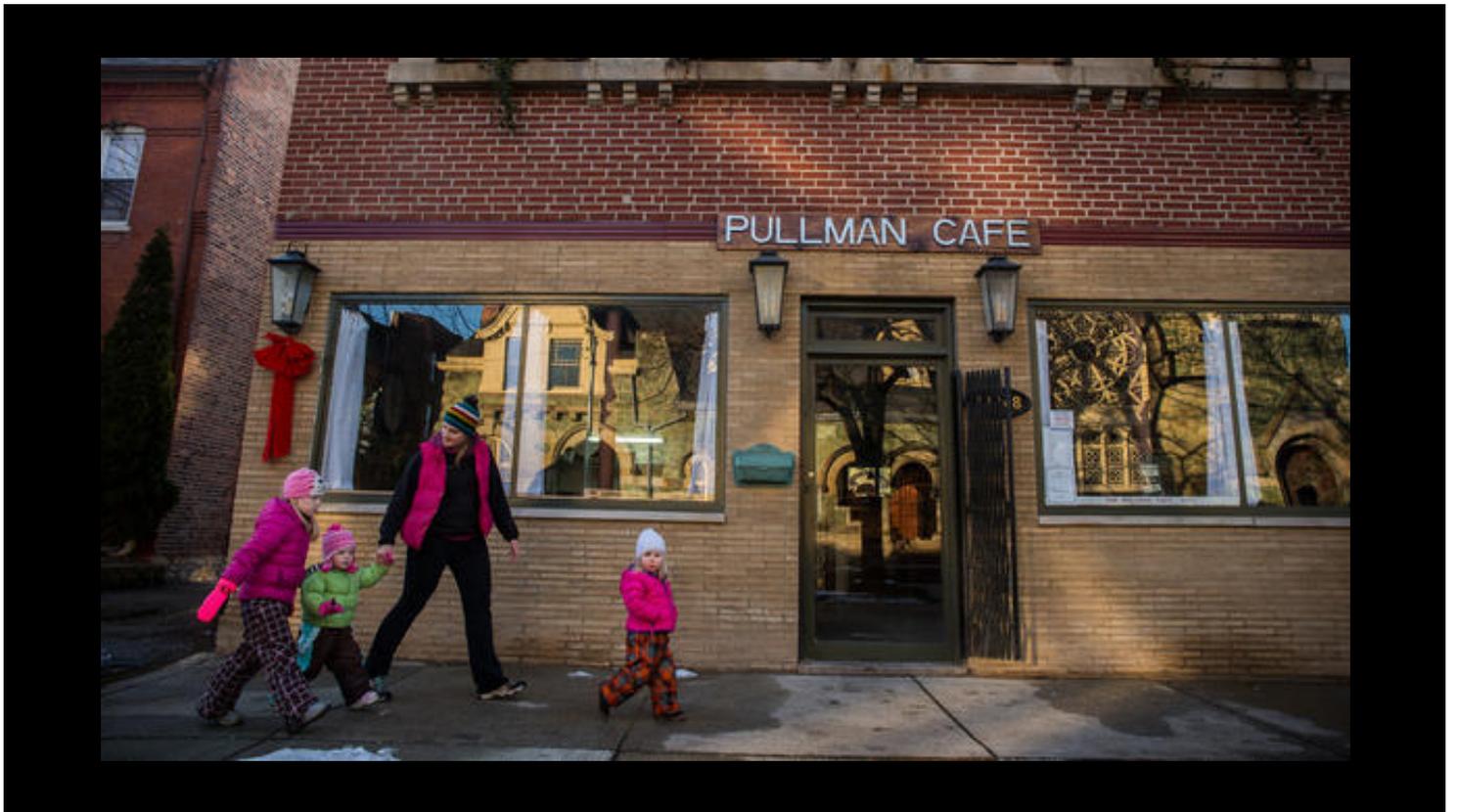


# Pullman National Monument plans pick up steam as 1st anniversary approaches



Progress is slow but coming as the Pullman National Monument marks its first anniversary in February.

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**A**s Chicago nears the first anniversary of Pullman's designation as the city's first national monument, officials say restoration plans will start picking up speed soon.

At first glance, not much seems to have changed. The National Park Service has emblazoned its trademark arrowhead banner on the visitor center it shares with the Historic Pullman Foundation. A cozy cafe has opened and serves coffee in the historic district.

Behind the scenes, however, plans to rejuvenate the former luxury rail car manufacturing neighborhood on the Far South Side are gradually materializing, including one of the first steps toward restoring arguably the park's most identifiable landmark — the administration building — and a couple of major exhibits.

On Feb. 19, the monument's one-year anniversary, the National Park Service and several of its partners

will gather in the visitors center to elaborate on what's to come in Pullman's renaissance.

"If someone were to go to Pullman, today, the question is: What are they going to see that's different?" said Lynn McClure, Midwest regional director of the National Parks Conservation Association. "I'm going to say maybe not a whole lot on the surface. The real action or change will start in the spring, and that change is happening over the next one to five years."

The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the National Park Service secured \$2 million in state money to test the 12.5-acre former factory grounds that encompass the administration building. The home of the Pullman Palace Car Co. from the late 19th to mid-20th century, the land is now a brownfield site, and its industrial past raises questions about whether soil and groundwater on the property may be contaminated.

The agencies, which partnered with the Illinois [Environmental Protection Agency](#), are awaiting test results of soil samples collected in the fall. The Illinois EPA could supervise volunteer cleanup efforts as soon as this spring, paving the way for the administration building, a sprawling red-brick structure marked by an iconic clock tower, to be renovated into the new visitors center.

The administration building has been largely dormant since it and much of the factory district were damaged in a 1998 arson. However, the National Park Foundation, the park service's philanthropic arm, has raised almost \$8 million for work on the monument.

The preservation agency also mapped out preliminary restoration efforts for a 1911 steel rail car used by Robert Todd Lincoln — the son of Abraham Lincoln — when he was chairman of the board of the Pullman Palace Car Co. The rail car, named Advance, was donated to the state by the Canadian National Railroad.

The historic Hotel Florence could be upgraded with a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express for the repair and restoration of the hotel's many stained-glass windows.

"It may not appear that a lot is going on, but compared to a lot of other national parks, we're moving at light speed," said Paul Labovitz, the park's acting superintendent.

Enamored by the neighborhood's history and intimate sense of community, Larry and Carol Lagadinos traded the warmth of Fort Worth, Texas, to retire among the celebrated row houses of Pullman. The couple witnessed the designation of the monument five months after they bought their house and put off winter travel plans to follow the happenings in the historic neighborhood.

"We really thought this first winter we'd be going away," Carol Lagadinos said. "And now we don't want

to go away. We want to be here in spite of the cold because there's just too many exciting things happening. Like, I'd be really mad if I missed the one-year celebration."

Another group involved in Pullman neighborhood renovations is the Bielenberg Historic Pullman House Foundation. The foundation is guiding the Pullman House Project, and it aims to add several new exhibits that interpret life in Pullman during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Over the past three years, the Bielenberg foundation has been fixing up its first exhibit — the home of Thomas Dunbar, a carpenter who went on to serve as head of manufacturing, and the Historic Pullman Foundation has provided some period-appropriate furnishings.

The National Park Service appropriated last week \$180,000 for fiscal year 2016 for Pullman National Monument's first budget, said Christine Powell, a spokeswoman for the park service. The park will get yearly appropriations in addition to the opportunity to compete for additional federal funds for maintenance, seasonal hiring and special projects.

"It's sort of the envy among the smattering of new national monuments," McClure said. "For the past two years now, a lot of new national parks have been established, and in my opinion none are in as good shape as Pullman."

Even before the National Park Service handed down a financial plan, park Ranger Sue Bennett became the monument's first permanent employee, overseeing the site with help from Labovitz, who also serves as superintendent at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. They will add young, seasonal ranger interns to the staff over the summer. Bennett established a rapport with several area schools, including Gwendolyn Brooks College Preparatory Academy, formerly the Pullman Free School of Manual Training, in an effort to involve local people, Labovitz said.

"We'd love to recruit young people in the Pullman community to help us tell the story," Labovitz said.

Although there aren't exact attendance numbers for the monument's first year, Labovitz said several thousand tourists visited the temporary Pullman visitors center. The center has videos on the neighborhood's history through today's preservation efforts and a number of local artifacts, including furniture from the Pullman Mansion on Prairie Avenue and an 1896 award that named Pullman "the world's most perfect town."

Staff in the information center recently added a world map and a container of pins in hopes of plotting global visitors.

"Some people from Germany, Sweden, England will come here with an address on a letter that they got from a relative who worked for Pullman," said Michael Shymanski, president of the Historic Pullman

Foundation. "They'll try to track down the house they live in, the cemetery they're buried in. It's just fascinating."

Outside of the visitors center, tourists are mainly limited to self-guided walking tours throughout the neighborhood. Labovitz said all of the monument's partners have seen an increase in visitors.

The 42nd annual Historic Pullman House Tour had a record year with roughly 2,000 visitors touring the 120-year-old landmark homes, which range from executive mansions to 14-foot-wide worker cottages. As in past years, proceeds from the tour are converted to grants for restoration and preservation projects in the Historic Pullman District.

The Lagadinos opened their doors for the first time to participants in the home tour. Larry Lagadinos has admired neighborhood houses for their distinctions as much as their history.

"Every house has a set of stories," Larry Lagadinos said. "Some are newer, some are different. Some people don't touch 'em, some people modernize them."

Other projects in the works:

- Pullman Artspace Lofts, affordable housing geared toward artists and their families, plans to build on a vacant lot east of South Langley Avenue, between 111th and 112th streets, and between two vacant row houses. Work is scheduled to start in early 2017.
- Construction is expected to start in spring on a retail strip on 111th Street, west of Doty Avenue. A Chipotle and a Potbelly Sandwich Shop will be among the tenants in the initial row of five shops.
- Several Chicagoland transit entities are collaborating on the Pullman Transportation Plan, a report funded by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, that will explore public transportation issues for an anticipated increase in visitors to the national monument. The plan is expected to be completed by the end of the year.
- Metra is exploring improvements to its Metra Electric District line, including 103rd, 107th, 111th and 115th/Kensington stations, and it will invest \$150,000 this year in its 111th Street station (the closest to the monument) to replace the platform deck boards, replace or repair the station house, and rebuild the staircase and hand railings.
- The Chicago Department of Transportation is expected to convene public meetings this spring to discuss developing a bicycle infrastructure plan to complement the 95th Street Red Line station, Pullman and other areas of interest in southeast Chicago.

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