

Preserve America Presidential Award
Lower East Side Tenement Museum, New York, NY

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

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Program Text: The Lower East Side Tenement Museum protects and interprets the physical and historic legacy of American immigration on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America. The museum is situated in a tenement apartment building that is a National Historic Landmark. From 1863 to 1935 this tenement sheltered an estimated 7,000 immigrants. The museum interprets their lives through five restored family apartments. Among last year's 130,000 visitors, 31,500 were K-12 students. Special museum programs directly serve and benefit contemporary immigrants and residents of the diverse local community. Educational offerings include interpreted neighborhood walking tours, free English classes for almost 1,000 students annually, and New York Book Club discussions on urban and immigrant experiences. The museum actively partners with community, preservation, and history organizations.

Additional Information:

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum protects and interprets the legacy of American immigration through active ongoing efforts to promote tolerance and historic preservation relating to immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a historic gateway to America. The National Historic Landmark tenement apartment building occupied by the museum was home to an estimated 7,000 immigrants from more than 20 countries from 1863-1935, and interprets their lives through five restored family apartments. Last year's 130,000 visitors included 31,500 K-12 students who came from all 50 states and 37 countries. Museum programs also work to engage underserved communities, including contemporary immigrants and diverse stakeholders in its Lower East Side community, as it works to preserve and interpret the area's rich immigrant legacy. Its educational offerings include the following: interpreted neighborhood walking tours; free English classes for almost 1,000 students annually; and The New York Book Club discussions centering on the New York and immigrant experiences. The museum actively partners with scores of community groups and preservation and history organizations.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum (Tenement Museum) submitted its application for the 2008 Preserve America Presidential Award for its ongoing efforts *to promote tolerance and historic preservation through the presentation and interpretation of the variety of immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a gateway to America.*

SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSET: The first homestead of the urban working class and poor to be preserved in America, the Tenement Museum's flagship building at 97 Orchard Street is also the first to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and the first to be designated a National Historic Landmark. In October of 1998, the humble tenement at 97 Orchard Street joined the homes of such illustrious Americans as James Madison and Woodrow Wilson when it was selected to be the 20th featured property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In November of 1998, congressional legislation declared the Tenement Museum a National Historic Area affiliated with the National Park Service, and twinned with Ellis Island. The Museum was also recently accredited by the American Association of Museums,

a nationally recognized distinction to museums for their commitment to excellence, accountability, high professional standards and continued institutional improvement.

In recent years, the Tenement Museum's visitorship has grown to nearly 130,000 served last year, including 31,500 K- 12 students, who came from all 50 United States and 37 countries. The Tenement Museum has received national and international recognition for its work to engage underserved communities, including new immigrants and diverse stakeholders from its Lower East Side community, in its work to preserve and interpret the area's rich immigrant legacy, past and present. In the coming year, new exhibitions, educational programs, immigrant art projects and community projects will help the Museum meet the exploding demand for its unique programs and services and provide new opportunities for tens of thousands from across the nation and the world to connect to the rich legacy of American immigration.

The Tenement Museum is one of the fastest growing cultural institutions in New York City, and it is a major tourist attraction in Lower Manhattan and on the Lower East Side. Last year (July 1, 2006- June 30, 2007), the Tenement Museum served nearly 130,000 visitors through its on-site programs and exhibits. Many visitors to the Museum also support other area establishments, including local restaurants, businesses and other cultural organizations. According to a January 2005 exit interview of Museum visitors, 59% of respondents said they dined at a restaurant in the neighborhood; 31% shopped at local stores; and 34% did additional sightseeing in the area, including visits to Ellis Island, Chinatown and Little Italy. In recognition of its role in driving the rebuilding and revitalization of the area

Education Programs: This past year, the Museum served 31,500 K-12 students, the majority of whom qualify for free and reduced lunch, in addition to nearly 1,000 immigrant students learning English. These programs were either free or heavily subsidized. In addition to the tours described above, these programs included:

- .English Classes: ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and ELL (English Language Learners) classes offered to nearly 1,000 students annually, free of charge.
- .Tenement Inspectors: In cooperation with NYC Housing and Preservation Department (HPD), students are trained at the Museum to recognize violations of the early 20th century housing codes and then conduct the same inspection at home and report any violations to HPD. Through this program students learn not only the history of immigration and housing reform, but also how to be citizen advocates.
- .The New York Book Club: In the only book shop in New York to focus on the New York and immigrant experience, hundreds of people gather each month to enjoy community and conversation with authors such as Pete Hammil and Frank McCourt.

Historical Tours and Exhibits

- .Tours of 97 Orchard Street: To date, the Museum has restored five apartments within 97 Orchard Street to represent different historical moments and interpret the lives of families who once lived there. In the development of each new apartment, the Museum reaches out to local community members. For instance, to develop the *Moore Family Tour*, which invites visitors to explore the story of the Irish Moore family in 1869, the Museum brought in advisors from the area's immigrant population, religious leaders, public school students and physicians, allowing the diverse voices of the Lower East Side community together with historians and public health scholars to find expression in the fabric of the exhibit.

- .Walking Tours: Neighborhood walking tours focus on the Lower East Side's past and current role as an immigrant neighborhood. The Lower East Side Stories Neighborhood Walking Tour was created as part of the Museum's Lower East Side Community Preservation Project. The tour explores the Lower East Side and how different immigrant groups shaped, and continue to shape, the community. Tour sites are representative of the neighborhood's various constituencies and offer a platform for meaningful dialogue examining what makes a community.

ROLE OF NOMINATED ORGANIZATION & PARTNERS: In Fiscal Year 2007, the Museum worked with over 80 partners from across the nation and the world, including:

- .Promotional partners including the National Parks for New York Harbor; Museums of Lower Manhattan; Lower East Side Business Improvement District; Lower East Side Preservation Coalition and others who have worked with the Museum on projects to preserve and promote the area's cultural institutions and rich immigrant heritage;
- .Community partners who work with the Museum to explore ways to preserve the immigrant history of the local Lower East Side Neighborhood through zoning or landmarking, including Chinese American Planning Council; City Lore/Place Matters; Educational Alliance; Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue & Museum; Mariners Temple Baptist Church; P.S. 42; Rebuild Chinatown Initiative; Seward Park Library, St. Augustine's Church; Trust in God Baptist Church; and United Jewish Council of the East Side, Inc.
- .Educational partners who have worked with the Tenement Museum to review its educational programs and develop new programs for upcoming exhibitions, including ArtEducation for the Blind; Literacy Assistance Center; New York Immigration Coalition; New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and United Neighborhood Houses as well as faculty from the College of the Holy 0055; Columbia University, Hunter College; New York University, and University of Chicago.
- .Cultural organizations that have come to the Museum to observe its innovative educational and community programs and explore this type of programming at their own sites include the Asian American Art Alliance; Chowmahalla Palace, New Dehli; Immigration Museum, Melbourne; the Nassau County Museum of Art; Queens Museum of Art; the Smithsonian; Texas State History Museum; USS Constitution; and Walters Art Museum.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION: The Museum and its staff received the following awards in recent years:

- .A prestigious National Leadership Award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for its *Shared Journeys* English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program.
- .First prize in the annual American Association of Museums' Brooking Paper on Creativity in Museums writing competition which was awarded to the Museum's Education Director for her paper "Immigrant Voices: A New Language for Museums."
- .The Historic Preservation Award for Nonprofit Achievement from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. The Museum received this award based on its "outstanding contribution to preservation of the nation's heritage, by telling the story of immigrant life in New York and in interpreting this important theme in American history."
- .The Tenement Museum's Founder and President, Ruth J. Abram, was invited to serve as an expert panelist at the Preserve America Summit in New Orleans which featured preservation experts from across the nation and key note address by the First Lady, Laura Bush-
- .The Museum's Founder and President was inducted into the Museum Hall of Fame, along with museum professionals from across the country.

Finally, the Tenement Museum enjoyed over 330 media placements, including: CBS Market Watch; Chicago Public Radio; *China Press*; *Food and Wine Magazine*; *Gothamist.com*; *History Magazine*; *InStyle Magazine*; *Irish Echo*; *Jewish Week*; *Miami Herald*; *New York Magazine*; *New York Post*; *The New York Times*; *Philadelphia Inquirer*; Radio Free Europe; Sino Television; *Time Out New York*; *The Times Literary Supplement*; *Toronto Star*; *Village Voice* and Yahoo.com, among others.

CRITERIA FOR AWARDS

The Preserve America Presidential Awards are annual awards given to organizations, businesses, government entities, and individuals for:

- exemplary accomplishments in the sustainable use and preservation of cultural or natural heritage assets;
- demonstrated commitment to the protection and interpretation of America's cultural or natural heritage assets; and
- integration of these assets into contemporary community life, combining innovative, creative, and responsible approaches to showcasing historic local resources.

The recipients are chosen through a national competition administered by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Department of Commerce, and the Department of the Interior, in cooperation with the Executive Office of the President.