

The George Mason University Libraries Announces The Partners for Livable Communities Archives Documenting Over 30 Years of Creating Quality of Life

March 20, 2013

By Mark Schwartz, communications and marketing officer for the University Libraries

Partners for Livable Communities (Partners), the Washington D.C.-based national nonprofit organization, recently gifted to the University Libraries thirty years of the organization's materials and resources about restoring and renewing communities. The collected materials represent over three decades of research and documented experience in solving community problems by providing leadership that help communities help themselves.

Over thirty years ago, at a meeting of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the idea of what would become Partners sprang from a question posed by Nancy Hanks, then the chairperson of the NEA. She asked the representatives how could they could all work together and share information to better assist communities. Soon a consortium was created to directly address issues related to livability called the Partners for Livable Places, which was officially incorporated in August 1977.

"The Partners for Livable Communities Archives will be invaluable in understanding how Partners carried out its mission as well as in understanding many of the projects it has undertaken in the past 33 years," states Yvonne Carignan, head of Special Collections & Archives (SC&A) at the George Mason University Libraries. "In addition, the materials in this collection will help researchers to understand the development of city planning in the United States, including best practices, standards, and policies that have been advanced by Partners."



Partners collected data on Wheeler Historic Farm in Salt Lake City, UT

The mission of Partners' work has always been its multifaceted goals of sustainable community development, local culture building, regional strategies, and national heritage sharing. "The resources in the archives reflect Partners' goals and commitment to initiating trends, setting standards, identifying workable criteria, and evaluating metrics to determine progress," states John Zenelis, university librarian. "The new collection is a perfect addition to the University Libraries' other archives and collections on planned communities, which continue to be used by researchers across the United States and from other countries."

Over several decades of surveying others and creating their own projects, Partners has improved the quality of life in communities through promoting social equality and economic development. These projects have included Cities in Transition, The New Civics, Celebrate the American Community, and Shaping Growth in America. During the early 1990s, as the broader concept of livability became more civically oriented, the name "Partners for Livable Communities" was adopted. The organization has assisted communities set a shared vision for the future, discover and utilize new sources for culture and economic development, and build public/private collaborations for meeting shared goals.

Its influence nationally is reflected by the [Trustees of Partners](#), which have included leaders in banking, government, philanthropy, and arts and culture. Past and present trustees have included prominent individuals from various sectors. National Government: Donna Shalala, secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; State Government: Parris Glendening, governor, State of Maryland; Local Government: Jane Campbell,



Partners analyzed the social and economic value and impact of open air and public markets for urban renewal, residential shopping for food and artwork, and support for local businesses and tourism. Above is an early scene from the now model, expansive and long-running Farmer's Market and Bazaar in the Baltimore, MD.

mayor, City of Cleveland, and Vincent Schoemehl, mayor, St. Louis; Corporate/Business: Vickie Tassan, senior vice president, Strategic Business Development, Band of America; Community Development: Mary Widener, president, Neighborhood Housing Services of America; Design, Architecture, and Planning: Michael Ainslie, president, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Communications: David Macaulay, author and illustrator; Philanthropy: Feather Houstoun, President, William Penn Foundation; Civic Leaders: Sylvia McLaughlin, Founder, Save the San Francisco Bay Association; Academic/Policy/Research: Harvey Perloff, Urban Innovations Group, University of California, Los Angeles; and International: Jacques Moulinier, vice mayor, Lyon, France.

"George Mason University Libraries is particularly well-positioned to be the home of the Partners resource materials created during the last thirty years," states Robert H. McNulty, president and CEO of Partners for Livable Communities. "For over three decades, both the university and our nonprofit have grown as unique organizations with a similar commitment to public service, innovation, and sustainability."

"The collection is a significant resource on planning and urban development," states Roger R. Stough, former vice president for research & economic development, George Mason University. "This is an ongoing area of considerable research interest at Mason and at many other universities, and a focus of study in government at the local, state and federal levels. The Partners for Livable Communities has brought new and inventive approaches to community life and urban places, and has influenced, shaped, and assisted significant projects in the field throughout the country during almost four decades."

The Partners for Livable Communities Archives contains approximately 65,000 pages of archival and research papers, 3,831 photographs and 123 various audio visual materials. The materials ranges in date form, from 1975 to 2011, and all major resources are detailed in a 152-page prospectus of the programs and projects created by Partners.



Partners were particularly interested in capital projects that converted sites into venues for the public use to celebrate cultures and art. Above is an indoor Indian arts festival at Fort Mason, in San Francisco, CA.

"George Mason University is internationally recognized for its strength in sustainability, development, and quality of life," says Zenelis. He adds, "Because of the national visibility and significance of the Partners, having this collection here at Mason adds to our capacity as a research destinations for both scholars and government officials nationally and internationally."

