Greetings from the Heritage Commission

Despite recent economic challenges, great progress has been made in local historic preservation efforts. Here are a few highlights from 2009:

- Congratulations to Deborah Walker on the designation of her 1928, 12-room bungalow as a local historic landmark! Located at 13407 East 35th Street South, the property was built by the Schowengerdt family, who at the time owned and operated an 800-acre dairy farm at this site. From the design and floor plan down to the materials and craftsmanship, this house serves as a unique example of a high-style, 1920s bungalow.

- Phase II of the Jackson County Courthouse was completed in summer 2009 bringing the grounds around the building back to their original 1933 appearance while addressing significant drainage issues that were eroding the building’s foundation. This project also added over 70 additional parking spaces around the Square.

- In November 2009, the City hosted the annual Missouri Preservation statewide conference, bringing professionals and advocates from across the state to our community. Missouri Preservation is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocacy, education, and public assistance in the preservation of architectural and historical landmarks that embody Missouri’s distinct heritage. To learn more about Missouri Preservation, visit www.preservemo.org.

Without question, we are a community desiring to uphold the ideals and values of our past; to enjoy today and protect for the future. We are very fortunate that we have one of the richest historical frameworks in the state, thanks largely in part to our City’s dedicated staff and our hard-working, enthusiastic volunteers. Still, I often encounter residents who have lived here for years but who have yet to take a tour of the Vaile Mansion, the 1859 Jail, the Bingham-Waggoner Estate, or the Truman Library.

As we head into 2010, my hope is that we all become more active in enjoying and preserving our historic legacy. Visit a historical site, volunteer, and spread the word about our City and its historic treasures. My personal challenge to all citizens: Visit at least two local historic landmarks in the year ahead, and share with someone new all that our community has to offer.

-Jeffery Shawhan
Chair, Independence Heritage Commission
1) Use Your Building's Custom-Built Assets

Older, historic buildings were innately designed for energy conservation and to respond to regional, environmental needs. For instance, overhanging roofs, porches, awnings, and shutters provide insulation from the elements, while thick walls provide thermal mass and buffering. Large, operable windows provide natural light and promote air circulation, while mature landscaping provides a barrier from the cold. Features like these should be retained and regarded as built-in bonuses.

2) Give Your Windows an Energy Boost

Add storm windows to help your historic house perform better. Wood storm windows protect the exterior of your windows and, more importantly, they provide an additional layer of insulation from the elements.

3) Address the Attic

As much as 35% of warm air (the air we work to keep inside during colder seasons) escapes through your attic. Luckily, this is also the place that is, arguably, the easiest and most cost-effective issue to remedy. Ideally, you want your attic space to mimic the same temperature as the outside. Natural insulation materials such as wood, plant fiber, or wool are especially recommended for attics because they are durable, yet breathable.

4) Reuse Rather than Replace Windows

Thinking about replacing your windows? You might want to rethink your options. Windows are an easy target and are too often blamed for energy loss. In reality, just 10-25% of energy loss actually comes from windows. People commonly jump to replace their historic windows because companies promise that their replacement windows will not only save them time and money, but that their products and services are the "green" thing to do. However, your old windows are probably more cost-effective than they appear. Many windows that have been on the job for 50 or 100 years (or more) can continue to do so, and can be just as energy efficient during the winter as a new window, especially when well maintained, weatherstripped, and combined with a storm window.

5) Do Not Be a Draft Dodger

At some point we've all felt it - a draft from an unknown location, but there are easy ways to detect and to seal holes and gaps throughout your home. Consider the smoke test - use a lit incense stick and note where the smoke travels. If the smoke moves horizontally, you have probably located a source of a leak. Primary culprits are typically ductwork and holes in the attic, around pipes, and at electrical outlets. For even better draft prevention, install weatherstripping or caulking along doors and windows to form a tighter seal.