

EXPLORING NEW ANGLES

Supporters of Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park come up with creative ways to raise necessary funding

by Fran Mannino

Like many in the nonprofit world, supporters of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park have had to think on their feet during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tours of the house, designed by Wright in 1950 for Russell and Ruth Kraus, came to a halt in the spring due to social distancing protocols.

Located on a little over 10 acres at 120 N. Ballas Road in Kirkwood, the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park is one of only five Wright-designed homes in the state of Missouri. It is run by a small staff and a legion of dedicated volunteers and board members.

The pandemic has had a definite impact on the organization, said Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park Executive Director Kathryn Feldt.

“We closed the house for public tours early on to protect our docents and the public,” said Feldt. “As a result, we’ve had a significant loss of tour revenue.”

The organization’s annual fundraising gala had to move online this year, which made raising much-needed money for the house a little more challenging. Still, Feldt said she considers the 2020 “Preserving What’s Wright” benefit a success.

“While we did not raise what we would have if we were able to have an in-person event, we did have several patrons who supported the event,” she said. “We engaged a number of people in our online auction, which featured unique Wright-inspired items and experiences.”

In addition to public tours, the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park has hosted field trips for almost 500 students, from grades four through the university level. This outreach also had to be reimagined.

“Since the house had to close due to COVID, we are offering free virtual field trips this year,” said Associate Director Lydia Nunes.

“The field trips can include a live tour via Zoom, a pre-recorded video tour, an interactive Q&A and a downloadable hands-on activity,” she said, adding that funding is provided through a grant from the Crawford Taylor Foundation.

Eureka High School teacher Diane Lucas has been bringing her interior design students to the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park for the past 10 years. This year, due to the pandemic, a 15-minute video tour of the house was shared with the class via Zoom, then staff answered questions from the students.

Making the Wright-designed house accessible to young people is an important part of the organization’s mission, said Nunes.

While the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park is closed due to COVID-19, “insider” virtual tours are available.

| photo by Michael Swoboda



The central living area of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park. | photo by Michael Swoboda

“Field trips give students a chance to experience the uniqueness of the house in person, learn about Wright and his design principles, and to think about how architecture impacts their daily life,” she said.

Developing a Wright-Inspired Collaboration

During the pandemic, a unique partnership has emerged between college students and the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park.

“A team of students and faculty are creating a dynamic virtual tour as a collaborative class project,” said Feldt. “The team is led by Michael Swoboda, assistant professor of graphic design, digital imaging and computer illustration at St. Louis Community College-Meramec.”

Swoboda has been taking his design classes on tours of the house since 2005, but his personal history goes back much further than that.

“When riding the school bus to Kirkwood High School 30 years ago, I would look out the windows in the dead of winter and see those dazzling geometric forms — and what seemed like a collision of triangles — which would be otherwise hidden in the late summer, fall and spring,” said Swoboda.

“The entire region benefits from having this architectural trophy as part of our collective cultural scene,” he



St. Louis Community College-Meramec Professor Tim Linder pilots a drone to capture aerial footage of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park.

| photo by Kathryn Feldt

added. “It is a masterpiece — we would call it a mini-‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ — only a mile from campus. It’s a resource that demands our attention and study.”

When live tours ceased due to the pandemic, Swoboda came up with an alternate way to engage his students. In August, he reached out to the Ebsworth Park team to discuss his interactive project.

Over the course of a year, while working to capture the house in all four seasons, Swoboda said he, his academic design and photography colleagues, and advanced design students will build imagery, content and motion assets in the form of a short video or interactive piece. Design and editing of the project should be complete in May.

“Simply stepping on the grounds of a house like this automatically engages an observant design thinker,” said Swoboda. “Being able to work on a project that uses design and technology to describe the history and purpose of compelling subject matter is exactly the kind of activity that I want all of our

students to have.”

In-person tours of the house will remain on hold during the pandemic. However, there are ways the public can help the organization maintain its funding for educational programs and upkeep, said Feldt.

“One of the most important ways to support the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park during this time is to become a member, which is easily done through our website, Ebsworthpark.org,” she said.

“Sending a gift membership to someone for the holidays or any occasion is a particularly good approach for gift giving this year. People can also stay engaged by participating in social media.”

Memberships include a variety of exclusive online learning opportunities, including “insider” video tours of the Frank Lloyd Wright House in Ebsworth Park and other Wright sites, and other benefits. To learn more, visit Ebsworthpark.org. Holiday ornaments are also available through the website.