FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FROM ASHES TO A NEW ERA: PERRY MANSION CULTURAL CENTER EXPANDS ITS VISION FOR ENGLEWOOD

After surviving arson, a near-fatal illness, and years of rebuilding, founder Sam Smith is transforming a historic Chicago mansion into an expanding center for wellness, arts, media production, and community engagement.

CHICAGO, IL (October 26, 2026) - What began as one man's determination to save a fire-damaged Victorian mansion in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood has become a story of resilience, restoration, and community investment. The Perry Mansion Cultural Center, located at 7042 S. Perry Avenue, is entering a new chapter under the leadership of founder and executive director Sam Smith.

Smith grew up in Chicago's Henry Horner Homes as one of 15 children. Beginning at age five, he worked alongside his father, a master carpenter, learning the skills that would later help him restore a neighborhood landmark.

Years later, Smith purchased a Queen Anne Victorian in Englewood, only to discover that the property was being used as a drug house. After evicting those operating it, he faced a devastating setback: two days later, one of the former occupants returned and set the house on fire. As Smith sifted through the ashes, a neighbor asked why anyone would buy property in Englewood. That night, Smith had a dream. Instead of selling, he rebuilt the house himself.

During one late-night restoration session, while welding the front door at approximately 1 a.m., Smith turned to find 13 young men from the block watching from the gate. The restored building would become the Perry Mansion Cultural Center.

A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE AND A RENEWED MISSION

In 2020, Smith was struck by a driver while riding his bicycle. He was later hospitalized with COVID-19, developed multiple blood clots in his lungs, and nearly died. His recovery required him to learn to walk again, and the cultural center closed during this period.

Working without a construction crew or grant funding, Smith reopened the center in 2025 after building a gym, a separate cardio room, and a small physical therapy room. His plans for the property continue to grow.

EXPANDING WELLNESS, MEDIA, AND THE ARTS

Current development projects and improvements include:

- **Physical therapy:** Expansion of the existing room to provide additional wellness and rehabilitation space.
- **Wellness amenities:** Addition of a cryotherapy chamber, hyperbaric chamber, cold plunge, infrared sauna, and UVB light therapy.

- **Commercial kitchen:** Construction of a kitchen intended to serve wellness center participants.
- **Media production:** Conversion of rooms into television production studios.
- **Outdoor performances:** A completed concert stage in the landscaped backyard garden, ready for community performances.

PRESERVING HISTORY AND CONFRONTING THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

For two years, the mansion's basement housed an immersive Middle Passage exhibit featuring a wooden replica of the Zong, the ship whose crew threw more than 130 enslaved Africans overboard in 1781 in an effort to claim insurance compensation for people treated as cargo. The exhibit has since been dismantled.

Smith has described the Zong as a symbol of slavery as brutal commerce: human lives bought, sold, and insured, enormous profits generated, and no atonement ever made. The exhibit reflected the center's commitment to education and historical remembrance.

A NEW CHAPTER FOR ENGLEWOOD

The Perry Mansion Cultural Center has been covered by the Chicago Defender, Chicago Tribune, Chicago Reader, and Block Club Chicago. Its latest transformation offers a new opportunity to document Smith's work and the ongoing redevelopment of this historic Englewood property.

Media representatives are invited to tour the Perry Mansion Cultural Center, meet Smith, and see the expanding wellness spaces, television production areas, commercial kitchen project, and completed outdoor concert stage. Interviews and on-site tours can be arranged through the contacts below.

ABOUT PERRY MANSION CULTURAL CENTER

Located at 7042 S. Perry Avenue in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, the Perry Mansion Cultural Center is a community-focused institution founded by Sam Smith and dedicated to cultural education, wellness, artistic expression, and community engagement.

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