FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 8, 2026

From the Ashes to Congressional Recognition:
U.S. Rep. Jonathan L. Jackson Honors Sam Smith and Perry Mansion Cultural Center

Congressional proclamation recognizes the extraordinary transformation of a fire-damaged Englewood mansion into a center for cultural preservation, community wellness, and economic opportunity.

CHICAGO — U.S. Rep. Jonathan L. Jackson (D-Ill.) presented a congressional proclamation at 2 p.m. on November 8, 2026, honoring Sam Smith, founder and executive director of the Perry Mansion Cultural Center. The proclamation recognizes Smith for reclaiming a drug house at 7042 S. Perry Ave. in Englewood and rebuilding the historic mansion, largely with his own hands, after it was deliberately set on fire. Jackson also intends to enter the proclamation into the Congressional Record.

Jackson has described Perry Mansion as “a cornerstone for cultural revitalization, economic growth, and community healing” in Englewood and an investment in equity, education, and economic renewal. In his congressional proclamation, Jackson wrote: “Where others saw ruins, Sam Smith saw resurrection.”

A Vision Born from the Ashes

Smith was born in Mississippi and raised in Chicago’s Henry Horner Homes as one of 15 children. He began learning carpentry from his father, a master carpenter, at age 5. In 2005, he purchased a historic Queen Anne Victorian in Englewood. After Smith cleared the mansion of drug dealers, they retaliated by deliberately setting it on fire.

“When I stood in the ashes of that house, I could have walked away. But I believed Englewood deserved something better,” Smith said.

Smith rebuilt, transforming the damaged property into the Perry Mansion Cultural Center, which opened in 2008. His determination was tested again in 2020 when a serious bicycle accident, followed by life-threatening COVID-19 complications and multiple blood clots in his lungs, left him fighting for survival. Smith had to relearn how to walk, and the center was forced to close. He returned and reopened the center in 2025.

“To have this work recognized by Congress is an extraordinary honor, but the greatest achievement will always be what this center means for the people of Englewood,” Smith said.

Building a Model That Aligns with National Priorities

What began as one man’s decision to rebuild has grown into a working model for community investment. “The Perry Mansion is poised to become a national model for community-driven revitalization,” Jackson has said.

Through its Total Wellness 360 initiative, the center operates a full gym, cardio room, and physical therapy space.

Its breathtaking landscaped gardens, created from a once-devastated property, stand as a living symbol of neighborhood transformation, now enhanced by a newly completed outdoor concert stage. Together with the center's teaching kitchen, the gardens support local agriculture and efforts to address food insecurity.

The center's human rights exhibits have included a life-sized replica of the middle decks of the slave ship *Zong*, housed in its basement for two years before being dismantled. The immersive experience confronted the history of the Middle Passage.

A collective of 15 artists from around the world fosters international cultural exchange. The mansion's completed first floor showcases museum exhibits in a space designed for television production, while additional wellness amenities and upper-floor production studios remain in development.

Together, this work mirrors priorities Jackson has championed in Congress, from accessible healthcare to human rights, historical truth, and equity. The gardens and teaching kitchen reflect his work on food security as a member of the House Agriculture Committee, and the artist collective reflects his work on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

About the Perry Mansion Cultural Center

Located at 7042 S. Perry Ave. in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, the Perry Mansion Cultural Center is a community-based nonprofit dedicated to cultural preservation, historical education, creative expression, community wellness, and neighborhood revitalization.

At the Perry Mansion, where imagination meets reality, "from nothing to something" is more than Sam Smith's personal journey. It is a vision for Englewood, driven by one belief: "It's bigger than me."

Media Contact

Media representatives interested in arranging interviews with Jackson or Smith, or obtaining additional information, should contact:

Sam Smith
Founder / Executive Director
Perry Mansion Cultural Center
773-331-5486
Sam@perrymansion.org

###