

## The Barnes Files

For Better Accessibility to the Barnes Foundation, Take Down the Smokescreens  
(originally published in *The Main Line Times*)

by Evelyn Yaari

Improved access to the Barnes Foundation is a popular, sometimes heated item for discussion. There are those who would have us believe that the Barnes is blocked to all but a privileged few. In fact, it is open to everyone. There are those who create the impression that the Barnes is in some remote location. In fact, its entrance is a mere few hundred yards from Route 1, also known as City Avenue, one of the area's main thoroughfares. Convenient bus stops, a train station, and adequate parking on the premises make the Barnes ideally located. Everything looks great, except that the policies set by the Barnes current administration belie their protestations about wanting to increase accessibility. Looks like some smokescreens are in place.

The current administration of the Barnes got there in part because of their stated goal to make the Barnes more "accessible" and yet, visitation to the Barnes is as restrictive now as it was before the current administration was installed. A case in point is the reservation system. It can be reached by telephone, fax, or computer, but there is no "real time" information about ticket availability. The visitor has to put as many as five possible dates and times into the system and then wait up to 72 hours for a reply. This is a system that appears stuck somewhere in time – hardly the thing for an institution with a goal of becoming more accessible.

Why has public visitation not been expanded to take advantage of the huge increase permitted by Township Ordinance? Last year the Board of Commissioners passed an ordinance that permits visitation to increase by more than 80,000 people a year. That's a whopping increase in accessibility and yet, no provisions have been made to expand visitation at all. There

is surely plenty of space for “walk up” visitors, yet none are permitted. During the summer months that bring tourists to the region, when the Barnes Foundation schools of art and horticulture are not in session, why limit public visitation to three measly days a week? Yes, these changes would require an increase in staffing; but they would also provide an increase in revenue. Quite a big increase, actually. At \$10 admission, the 80,000 visitors bring \$800,000. Add to that the parking lot revenue at \$10 per car plus audio tours at \$7.00, and happy purchases at the gift shop and you are talking about real money! But that is not the important thing, of course. Improving accessibility is the goal, right? Or is it?

Without the smokescreens of outmoded admissions policies and the utterly specious argument that the Barnes can only be accessible at a different location, simple steps could be implemented *if* the current administration were genuinely interested in it. Oh, but wait. If things worked too well, it would throw a massive wrench into the works of those who prefer to perpetuate the myth of an inaccessible Barnes and that’s unfair. The public interest calls for making the necessary corrections without delay.

---

---

Evelyn Yaari lives in Bala Cynwyd.