

The Main Line Times, February 14, 2008

Headline: *Barnes Foundation responds to accessibility issue.*

To the Editor:

I read with interest Evelyn Yaari's recent piece about "access" to the Barnes Foundation. While Ms. Yaari makes some interesting proposals, her solutions are not as simple as they seem.

It is true "access" has been an issue for the Barnes Foundation for years -- but the restrictions have not been imposed by the current Barnes administration. Policies that forbid "walk ups" and restrict visitor numbers exist because they were created by Lower Merion Township commissioners and an Orphans' Court decision during the 1990s. The Montgomery county commissioners and a group calling themselves "Friends of the Barnes Foundation" have recently filed law suits to prevent the Barnes Foundation from moving the gallery collection to Philadelphia. What many do not realize is that some of the members of the "Friends" were the same individuals who once prompted Lower Merion Township to restrict the Foundation's visitors in the first place and have kept the Barnes Foundation embroiled in legal wrangling for years draining resources and driving up costs.

The Barnes welcomes the ordinance passed last summer to increase visitation at the Barnes. We are considering options to increase the visitors while the gallery collection remains in Merion. At the moment, education classes for adults and school groups are scheduled in the galleries during all the non-public days. Even as we look beyond the present school year's schedule for opportunities to expand the public hours, we have other considerations related to the collection. In preparation for the move, we have begun a large scale digitization project in the gallery and our conservators will shortly begin preparing the collection to move, all of which will impact public access to rooms

or sections of the gallery. We are also considering the long term future where the Arboretum will be an asset not only for its renowned horticultural classes, but as a beautiful public garden to be enjoyed by all in the community.

As Ms. Yaari noted, with increased visitors comes the need for increased staffing, which results in increased costs. The net revenue from increased visitation would not sustain the Foundation into the future. The reality is more cultural institutions cannot survive just on revenues generated by attendance. These institutions require large gifts that can be invested to ensure their viability and future.

The Barnes Foundation has begun to build an endowment to survive. It has found a resource in a group of public and private benefactors who want to see the world-renown collection accessible to a wider audience, and also expand its educational mission.

The Barnes Foundation has an endowment to go to Philadelphia, but not to stay in Lower Merion. While the Montgomery County commissioners have suggested floating a bond (which the Foundation would repay) to keep the Barnes financially stable, this scenario in no way ensures its future survival.

The Collection may be in Philadelphia, but the Barnes Foundation's property in Merion will be operated by its trustees as home to a reinvigorated horticulture program. The Barnes Foundation can and will have the best of both worlds -- a beautiful new facility to house its collection and art educational programs in Philadelphia and a continued presence in Lower Merion where the foundation's legacy began.

Phyllis Beck
General counsel to the Barnes Foundation