

## Nebraska City Residents Petition For Local Control Of Arbor Lodge State Historical Park

It only took a few days for over 1,000 people to sign a petition to publically support Legislative Bill 1033. LB-1033 requests the State of Nebraska appropriate \$2,107,000 for deferred repair and maintenance improvements at Arbor Lodge State Historical Park. In exchange, a local coalition of Nebraska City community groups will take over the ongoing costs of operation and maintenance.

“We understand the difficulty in balancing a state budget,” said Tim Pendrell, Executive Director for Nebraska City Tourism and Commerce, “and we are proud that as a community we were able to go to the Unicameral with a mutually-beneficial solution.”

The 72-acre Arbor Lodge State Historical Park is the birthplace of Arbor Day and a source of great pride for Nebraskans and lovers of trees around the world. The 52-room neo-colonial mansion nestled within the park was home to J. Sterling Morton, the author of Arbor Day. Morton’s vision helped transform what was once considered a barren wasteland into some of the world’s most productive agricultural land.

“It truly is a beautiful place, one that we can all be proud of,” Friends of Arbor Lodge President Tammy Partsch said of the Arbor Lodge mansion and grounds.

In August 2013, the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission announced that Arbor Lodge SHP would be closing prematurely (along with a number of other Nebraska State Parks) due to budgetary shortfalls. The Friends of Arbor Lodge Foundation rallied community support and negotiated an agreement with the Game & Parks Commission to keep Arbor Lodge open for the AppleJack Festival and Living History Days, as well as the Enchanted Arboretum auction. Following the busy fall tourism season, the community continued to discuss potential solutions to support Arbor Lodge.

In early December, a newspaper article mentioned the significant deferred maintenance total for all parks across the State of Nebraska and the immediate need for a remedy. The Nebraska City community came together to develop this solution in concern for our beloved state park and its rich heritage.

This group of community partners is led by the Friends of Arbor Lodge Foundation and includes the Arbor Day Foundation, Nebraska City Tourism & Commerce, the Nebraska City Community Foundation Fund, the City of Nebraska City, Nebraska City Area Economic Development Corporation, and now over 1,000 community supporters.

“We know how generous and committed our local community is when it comes to Arbor Lodge,” Partsch said. “What is overwhelming to us is the passionate support we are receiving from across the nation and even around the world.”

People interested in helping show their support for Arbor Lodge can sign the petition and find more information at <http://supportarborlodge.org/>.

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