

Wells Legacy Society spreads awareness about building maintenance

*Historic Campus Still at Risk-
National Historic Register campus to be
left unheated all winter
College asks art auction house for
building preservation plan*

NASHVILLE, TN, UNITED STATES, November 5, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The historic buildings of Wells College in Aurora, NY, remain at risk of irreparable harm, according to the Wells Legacy Society. Last week, the group learned that the college's leadership, which closed the school on June 30, will rely on an auction house to determine protection practices for the nationally recognized historic structures they intend to leave unheated all winter.

"Preservation experts at the highest state level have expressed grave concern and offered professional guidance on this perilous plan to turn off the heat," said Wells Legacy Society President Rachel Snyder. "The matter is urgent. Damage can occur within weeks this winter. Why entrust the protection of these architectural gems of the Finger Lakes to a NYC firm lacking any notable expertise in the field?"



Photos of the Wells Campus: Glen Park and Main Building © Karen Hindenlang, Long Library © Victoria Brzustowicz



According to a recent news release from the college, Christie's, the fine art and luxury antique auctioneers, will advise Wells on the "preservation of delicate assets, archives, books, and other

scholarly materials...until they are relocated to their new owners." No mention was made of larger holdings that were also at risk without heat, such as concert grand Steinway pianos. The college also asserted that Christie's "expertise on preservation and care extends to the buildings" on campus.

"As far as we're concerned, only a preservation architect would be qualified to evaluate and develop a plan for building maintenance," wrote Caitlin Meives, Preservation Director of the Preservation League of NYS to the Wells Legacy Society. "I have never known [Christie's] to work in the realm of building preservation nor does anything on their website suggest they have such expertise." She quoted "gold standard" technical briefs from the National Parks Service. One stated that poorly mothballed masonry buildings have been "so damaged with just one year of closure that none of the interior finishes were salvageable."

The Wells campus includes a dozen buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the 1852 limestone Tuscan villa Glen Park (home of founder Henry Wells), 1858 Gothic revival Pettibone House, and iconic 1890 four-story brick Main Building. The college's award winning Long Library designed by architect Walter Netsch and built in 1968 by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill is designated as a local landmark. All will be at risk without heat this winter, and their interiors and contents subject to severe damage.

The college's news release also noted that the Board of Trustees will list the campus for sale with the real estate broker CBRE, working through its Syracuse office. The process could take a year or more, according to the college. "We understand that any sale would need to be approved by the state Attorney General," said Ms. Snyder. "And the Trustees have an obligation to properly maintain the buildings as assets all through the winter in advance of that approval."

In addition, "the National Register status of the campus is a significant asset for any future redevelopment," according to New York State Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation Daniel Mackay. "It would be a shame for an ill-conceived or executed care-taking plan for the campus to negatively impact the historic assets that offer the campus the most appropriate path forward."

Meanwhile, the Preservation Association of Central New York recently nominated the Wells campus to the "Seven to Save" program for 2025-26 of the Preservation League of NYS. The program aims to safeguard endangered historic sites statewide. Selection would bring assistance, advocacy, and increased visibility to Aurora as the college community works to preserve the physical campus and historical legacy of Wells, now closed after 156 years.

The Wells Legacy Society was incorporated as a nonprofit on May 15 in response to the college's abrupt April 29 decision to close on June 30. It brings alumni and friends of Wells together in advocating for the preservation of all aspects of the college's legacy. For more information, visit www.WellsLegacySociety.org.

Karen Hidenlang
Wells Legacy Society
+1 315-364-7586
wellslegacysociety@gmail.com

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