



## Frank Lloyd Wright's Laurent House Set to Open Friday, June 6 in Rockford, Illinois Opening Event Series Announced

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**April 10, 2014**

**Rockford, Illinois** – The newest Frank Lloyd Wright museum, The Kenneth & Phyllis Laurent House, will open to the public on Friday, June 6 in Rockford, Illinois. A series of events beginning Wednesday, June 4 will celebrate the opening. The opening coincides with what would have been Wright's 147<sup>th</sup> birthday on June 8.

The home, considered by Wright as one of the 35 best works of his career, is the only building ever designed by the famed architect for a person with a disability. Kenneth Laurent was a disabled, wheel-chair-bound World War II veteran who, at the prompting of his wife, contacted Wright asking him to design a home to meet his unique needs. Wright responded, "Dear Laurent: We are interested but don't guarantee costs. Who knows what they are today - ?"

The Laurents commissioned the home in 1948 and lived there from 1952 until early 2012, when the home and all of its original Frank Lloyd Wright-designed furniture was acquired by the Laurent House Foundation and added to the National Register of Historic Places.

This single-story Usonian home is both functional and beautiful, meeting the needs of its owner decades ahead of Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility requirements. The home features a solar hemicycle footprint, patio, fishpond, carport, and outdoor connectivity to the natural landscape. The modest home is built of Chicago Common Brick and Red Tidewater Cypress. Much of the labor and materials used to build the home were sourced locally in Rockford.

### **Grand Opening Events (additional details below):**

- 10 Chairs: A dinner at the Wright Table – Wednesday, June 4. Private event, limited to 10 guests, on a first-come, first-served reservation basis.
- Launching Laurent: a celebration of Frank Lloyd Wright's Laurent House – Thursday, June 5. Limited to 160 guests; open to the public and media.
- Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting – Friday, June 6. By invitation only, open to media.
- Public Tours – Saturday and Sunday, June 7 - 8. Open to the public, including media.

*Following the opening weekend, the home will be open for tours on the first and last weekend of each month, and by appointment for group tours.*

**Community Rallied to Save Laurent House**

In 2011, faced with few options and no buyer in sight, the Laurents – by this time in their 90s – made a difficult decision to place the house and its furnishings up for auction. Motivated by the possibility of losing a civic treasure, the Rockford community rallied behind the cause. In one month’s time, \$1 million was secured from public and private sources to ensure the home could remain a local treasure open for the public to enjoy and benefit from. Key in saving the house was a commitment by Illinois Governor Pat Quinn to provide \$500,000 in match funding.

The Laurent House Foundation succeeded in acquiring the home and its contents at auction on December 15, 2011. Since that time, the foundation has worked to prepare the home to open as a museum. Included in this effort were extensive restoration projects, including a complete replacement of the roof structure. Restoration was completed under the direction of John Eifler of Eifler & Associates Architects.

**A significant work of art**

“The building is unique in that it has been continually occupied by the original owners, and contains not only furnishings designed by the architect, but many personal items of the owners. In other words, it is a complete work of art,” said restoration architect John Eifler of Eifler & Associates Architects.

“Spending time with Ken and Phyllis for the last eight years of their lives was a distinct privilege. Listening to their stories of a life lived in a Frank Lloyd Wright designed personal residence, and their dream for its future, was inspirational. I know they would be overjoyed to see their dream realized and another significant Frank Lloyd Wright home preserved for future generations,” said Jerry Heinzeroth, president of the Laurent House Foundation.

*The Laurent House Foundation owns the Kenneth & Phyllis Laurent Home and operates it as a museum. The foundation was organized to acquire, maintain, and preserve this historically significant Frank Lloyd Wright home, its original furnishings and documents. The Foundation will serve to inform the public about the educational, historic, and architectural relevance of the only handicapped accessible home designed by America’s greatest architect.*

**For more information:**

John Groh, Laurent House board member, 815.489.1656 or [jgroh@gorockford.com](mailto:jgroh@gorockford.com)

[www.laurenthouse.com](http://www.laurenthouse.com)

[www.facebook.com/laurenthouse](http://www.facebook.com/laurenthouse)

**Images available upon request.**

**Advance media tours available to qualified media outlets.**

## GRAND OPENING EVENTS

### Wednesday, June 4

#### **10 Chairs: a dinner at the Wright table**

An exclusive, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for 10 guests to dine inside the Laurent House before it opens to the public. Frank Lloyd Wright enthusiasts are invited to tour the house, wander the grounds, dine and be inspired by the home and its surroundings.

Jerry Heinzerth, president of the Laurent House Foundation and John Eifler, noted Wright restoration architect of Eifler & Associates Architects, will serve as hosts for the dinner. During what promises to be a lively discussion with dinner guests, they will share their perspectives on the challenges and triumphs of saving and restoring this home, as well as the importance of preserving Wright's work and legacy.

The evening's menu is inspired by the adventurous tastes and style of Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Laurent, and catered by Abreo of Rockford. The evening's festivities begin at 5:30 p.m.

\$750 per person. Dinner is limited to 10 guests on a first-come, first-served basis. RSVP to Lori Johnson, 815.489.1673 or at <http://laurethouse.eventbrite.com>

This event is private and not open to the media.

### Thursday, June 5

#### **Launching Laurent: a celebration of Frank Lloyd Wright's Laurent House at Anderson Japanese Gardens**

A celebration of a significant community milestone, the grand opening of the Laurent House, at Anderson Japanese Gardens – the finest Japanese garden in North America. Hosted by the board of the Laurent House Foundation, all are welcome to celebrate the Launching of the Laurent House as Rockford and Illinois' newest museum.

**Janet Halstead**, the executive director of the **Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy**, will bring greetings from the FLW community and share her thoughts on the importance of preserving Wright's work and legacy.

Thursday, June 5; 6 - 8:30 p.m.

**Anderson Japanese Garden** - 318 Spring Creek Rd., Rockford

\$75 per person, cash bar, business casual or summer cocktail attire. Event is limited to 160 guests.

Each guest will receive a ticket to tour the Laurent House on Friday, June 6 or for a future date. Tours on June 6 will take place at 12 p.m., 1 p.m., 3 p.m., and 4 p.m., departing from Midway Village Museum.

**RSVP** by May 29 at <http://laurethouse.eventbrite.com>

This event is open to the media.

## Friday, June 6

### **A Cherokee Red Ribbon Cutting Celebration**

*Due to space restrictions, this event is by invitation only. Media wishing to attend should coordinate with John Groh, 815.489.1656 or [jgroh@gorockford.com](mailto:jgroh@gorockford.com).*

**10 a.m.**

#### **Speakers to include:**

- Illinois Governor Pat Quinn (invited)
- Jen Hoelzle, Illinois Office of Tourism, director
- Mayor Larry Morrissey, City of Rockford
- Chairman Scott Christiansen, Winnebago County
- Jerry Heinzeroth, Laurent House Foundation, board president
- Sean Malone, Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, CEO
- John Eifler, Eifler & Associates Architects, architect of record for Laurent House restoration
- Jean Laurent, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Laurent

This event is open to qualified, pre-registered media.

## Saturday, June 7 & Sunday, June 8

### **First & Second Day of Regular Tours: Frank Lloyd Wright's 147<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration**

Birthday cake and lemonade served. Three tours will be offered each day. Additional tours may be added as demand dictates.

**Due to space and parking limitations at the Laurent House, all tours begin at Midway Village Museum, 6799 Guilford Rd., Rockford. Guests will board shuttle buses and be transported to and from the Laurent House.**

By reservation at [www.laurenthouse.com/visit](http://www.laurenthouse.com/visit)

- 11 a.m. – Bus departs from Midway Village Museum at 11 a.m.
- 1 p.m. – Bus departs from Midway Village Museum at 1 p.m.
- 3 p.m. – Bus departs from Midway Village Museum at 3 p.m.

Admission to the Laurent House is \$15 per person.

These tours are open to the media.

*We welcome the opportunity to assist guests with disabilities to enjoy the Laurent House. For assistance and information on accessibility, contact Juli Braken at 815.987.1676. Accommodations will be made to allow guests with disabilities to park at and arrive directly at the Laurent House for tours and events.*

## REGULAR, ONGOING TOURS

The Laurent House will welcome tours on the first and last weekend (Saturday and Sunday) of each month. Upcoming tour dates are as listed below. Additional tours will be added as demand dictates. Group tours are available by reservation.

Regular tours will depart from Midway Village Museum, 6799 Guilford Rd., Rockford, at 11 a.m., 1 p.m., and 3 p.m. each day tours operate. Minimum group tour size is four people.

- June 28 and 29
- July 5 and 6
- July 26 and 27
- August 2 and 3
- August 30 and 31
- September 6 and 7
- September 27 and 28
- October 4 and 5
- October 25 and 26

Admission is \$15 per person. The Laurent House experience is best suited for children over the age of eight. Please visit [www.laurenthouse.com/visit](http://www.laurenthouse.com/visit) for additional tour and admission details.

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## HISTORY OF THE HOME

Kenneth and Phyllis Laurent first met when they both worked at the National Lock Company in Rockford, IL. Soon after marrying, World War II began and Kenneth enlisted in the U.S. Navy. During his tour of duty, however, Kenneth suffered problems relating to his spinal cord that required surgery. That surgery left him paralyzed from the waist down. Kenneth spent the next several years hospitalized in the Hines VA Hospital outside of Chicago.

As they anticipated Kenneth's discharge from the hospital, the Laurents began exploring housing options that would accommodate his new and unique needs. In 1948, Phyllis discovered an article in *House Beautiful* magazine titled "Love Affair of a Man with His House." The article was written by Loren Pope and described his home designed by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The Laurents soon realized that Wright's thoughtful designs and open floor plans were exactly what they were looking for in their new home.

In August of 1948, Kenneth wrote the world famous architect requesting that Wright design a house for himself and Phyllis. Along with a proposed budget and a description of the lot he wished the house built on, Kenneth also included the following explanation of his needs: "To give you an idea of my situation, I must first tell you that I am a paraplegic. In other words, due to a spinal cord injury, I am paralyzed from the waist down and by virtue of my condition, I am confined to a wheelchair. This explains my need for a home as practical and sensible as your style of architecture denotes."

After many hitches and starts, punctuated by letters of impatience from the Laurents and pleas for patience from Wright, the plan was finally committed to paper nearly a year after the initial request was sent. One night in July 1949, after the apprentices left the drawing room to attend a performance at the Taliesin theater, Wright went to work. When the apprentices returned a scant two hours later, they found the entire floor plan and perspective drawing of the house complete. Wright's genius had allowed him to completely build the house in his mind during the previous year.

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After approval by the Laurents, formal drawings were completed and a contract for the services of Frank Lloyd Wright was signed in July of 1949. The house was completed nearly three years later in May of 1952. The end results allowed Kenneth to realize his full potential as a human being by giving him unrestricted access to everyday living. Wright gave him the level playing field many take for granted.

Wright developed an uncharacteristic friendship with the Laurents and maintained close contact with them in the years after the house was built. He would visit them personally at the house and invited them to “drop in anytime” at Taliesin, Wright’s Wisconsin home. The Laurents participated in his birthday celebration there every year until Wright’s death in 1959.

The Laurents and the house Wright built for them held a special place in Wright’s heart. Wright personally selected the Laurent House to be included in a book showcasing 35 of his most significant buildings. Wright also told many of his clients, on their journey from Wisconsin to Chicago, to stop over in Rockford and see “my little gem.” An indicator of their friendship, Wright’s widow, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, invited the Laurents to a memorial dinner at Taliesin-Hillside on June 8, 1959.

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