



PENN SCHOOL National Historic Landmark District

First School in the South for Formerly Enslaved West Africans

To the community of the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District—members, funders, partners, supporters, friends, and volunteers—Happy New Year!

The Penn Center Board of Trustees, Advisory Board, leadership, and staff would like to thank each and every one of you for your commitment, perseverance, enthusiasm, and unwavering support for the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District. You helped us manage the opportunities and challenges of the last twelve months and stood with us as we navigated a successful path forward out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of you, we achieved significant progress in 2022. We are proud of the work that leadership, staff, and volunteers delivered this past year to support the mission and vision of this organization that we all care about. We are deeply appreciative of the guidance from our Board of Trustees. They bring skills, experiences, commitment, and caring to governing this historic organization. Along with all of you, they are the engine of our success.

Our strength comes from our depth of understanding about the cultural, historic, environmental, and educational significance of the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District, the St. Helena Island community, and the Gullah-Geechee families and communities of the coastal Sea Islands. This depth of understanding was recently on display when the St. Helena Island and Gullah-Geechee communities united with Penn Center to forestall efforts to change the twenty-year-old CPO in order to develop a golf course and resort on Pine Island. This issue is ongoing and not yet resolved. Yet, we are proud of the community solidarity on display—an on-line petition has netted almost 5,000 signatures—and the numerous comments from near and far that recognize the stature of Penn Center and acknowledge Penn Center's effectiveness as one of many stewards of St. Helena Island's land and culture.

We begin 2023 with renewed commitment to operating a National Historic Landmark District, one of only two in the country that center Black communities, with the mission of preserving history, culture, land, and environment for present and future generations and in honor of those

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elders who have gone before us and on whose shoulders, we stand. We look to the future with hope, because we have seen firsthand, now more than ever, what is possible when we work together. We hope you enjoy reading below about the achievements in 2022 of Penn Center National Historic Landmark District and our exciting plans for 2023.

If you have any comments or questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me. I will be delighted to hear from you.

Deloris Pringle

Chair,

Penn Center Board of Trustees

2022 Highlights and Accomplishments

- Through “Culture and Community at the Penn Center National Historic Landmark District,” our Mellon Foundation-funded partnership with the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts at the University of Georgia, we launched a highly successful summer research residency program for students and faculty members from Morehouse College, Spelman College, the College of Charleston, and the University of Georgia. Also participating were students and faculty members from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Emory University, and the University of Kentucky. The good word is out about this program and this summer’s student research residency will consist of two cohorts of about ten college and university classes. See <https://penncenter.uga.edu/about/public-programs/research-residencies/>.
- In partnership with the University of Georgia and the Penn Center Board of Trustees, we obtained funding from the Henry Luce Foundation to underwrite a professionally curated exhibit of the internationally renowned paintings of Penn School student and St. Helena Island resident Sam Doyle, the first ever, scheduled to begin during July 2023 in the York W. Bailey Museum. Dr. Shawnya L. Harris, Larry D. and Brenda A. Thompson Curator of African American and African Diasporic Art at the Georgia Museum of Art, will curate this exhibit and compose an exhibition booklet.
- Thanks to the generous support and foresight of the Beaufort County Council, we are well on the way with our campus-wide historic preservation and restoration project.

- The Penn Center National Historic Landmark District PACE Program continued to secure record funding and support.
- The Summer Feed Program fed thousands of meals to out-of-school children.
- In September we held the first annual Penn Center National Historic Landmark District preservation luncheon and workshop, with featured speaker Mr. Brent Leggs, Vice President of the National Trust of Historic Preservation and Founder and Executive Director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. It was a huge success with a full house at the luncheon and a lively and informative professional workshop the following day.
- Penn Center National Historic Landmark District celebrated our 160th birthday in grand style.
- The Heritage Festival was held after a two-year pandemic related hiatus. In spite of some rainy weather, this fabulous event attracted visitors from near and far to partake of the parade, performances, film screenings, food, and cultural exhibits.
- Our Museum and Visitor Center welcomed and delivered docent-led tours and interpretive experiences to thousands of people from across the world, and our Conference Center provided comfortable lodging and excellent meeting space.
- Penn Center National Historic Landmark District received a major gift from a philanthropist that added to our endowment.
- Thanks to the advocacy work of Representative Michael Rivers and Senator George Campsen, Penn Center National Historic Landmark District has secured almost two million dollars in state earmark funds to continue the campus-wide restoration and preservation project.
- Penn Center launched a national search for a permanent executive director.

2023 Projects and Initiatives: Our Strategy in Action

The actions listed below will strengthen our capabilities, enhance the quality of our service, and equip us to build trust among community members and institutional partners, execute our mission, and deliver sustainable outcomes.

- We will continue discussions with a major funder, placed on hold because of COVID-19, to secure financial support for the construction of a Penn Center Preservation Trades School and Event Center. The facility will be located behind the current childcare center and will be a

multipurpose structure that the community may use for large special events and children's programs.

- We will launch a major membership campaign in February.
- During the summer we will launch a Penn Center Cultural Heritage Institute that includes education about traditional Sea Island crafts.
- Campus-wide preservation and restoration work will be ongoing throughout the year.
- Once the restoration is complete, the Butler Building will be used as a second art gallery and library.
- We will begin discussions with the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, to relaunch the Penn Center School for Historic Preservation with funding support from a foundation.
- The “Culture and Community” UGA/Penn Center partnership, funded by the Mellon Foundation, will convene two summer student research residencies for college and university students in May.
- The York W. Bailey Museum will implement its opportunity assessment plan with the requested funds.
- The 2nd Annual Preservation Luncheon will occur in September and again will feature a nationally acclaimed speaker.
- The 1862 Circle event will restart.
- The redesign of the Penn Hotel will be completed and funds obtained for a complete renovation and adaptation as both a meeting and lodging facility.
- Penn Center National Historic Landmark District is engaged in discussions to host an international group of museums.
- In partnership with UGA and with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation, the York W. Bailey Museum will present a nationally curated exhibition of the paintings of Sam Doyle during the summer.
- The Heritage Festival will occur in November.
- Penn Center National Historic Landmark District will collaborate with the libraries of the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill to digitize material in the Center’s archives.

- Penn Center will invest in training and upskilling our staff to build capabilities to address and solve the challenges of tomorrow.
- The “Culture and Community” Penn Center/UGA partnership, funded by the Mellon Foundation, will host an artist-in-residence keyed to the theme of “Land and Justice.” See <https://penncenter.uga.edu/2023/01/05/call-for-submissions-penn-center-artist-residency/>.
- Penn Center National Historic Landmark District will recruit and hire the following staff members: 1) a permanent and full-time Executive Director, 2) a Director of Exhibitions and Interpretation for the York W. Bailey Museum, and 3) a Maintenance and Security staff member to live on-site in Orchard Cottage.