The Glen Leven Center Partnership

Two years ago, a prominent Nashville family left the Glen Leven estate on Franklin Road to the Land Trust of Tennessee. The Land Trust is the state’s pre-eminent conservation group; one of its primary founders was Phil Bredesen. The Center for Historic Preservation has worked with the Land Trust on various historic preservation programs, largely tied to our farmland legacy program, the Tennessee Century Farms program. We also joined together to support the effort to reclaim some 100 acres of land in Franklin as a new battlefield park for the Civil War era. Those partnerships will continue on their way, but the new Glen Leven venture can take us in exciting new directions, especially in achieving the MTSU academic master plan.

Over the last 2 years, the Land Trust has talked to multiple groups on what to do with Glen Leven, an antebellum mansion, which played a significant role in the Civil War Battle of Nashville and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Beginning in December 2008, the Land Trust turned to the Center for the development of a reciprocal, long-term partnership. These conversations have turned into a planning process involving Kim Hinton, of Tuck Hinton Architects in Nashville, and municipal officials in Nashville. The planning will culminate in October, when Glen Leven will be the host for two major sessions of the National Preservation Conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a conference for which the Center for Historic Preservation is a major sponsor.

Our shared vision is for the establishment of a “Glen Leven Center,” with the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, being a primary public partner, along with local government. Glen Leven and its surrounding 64 acres would be a demonstration center for sustainable approaches in land conservation, water quality issues, organic farming (Land Trust concerns) and in historic preservation, heritage tourism, and education (our concerns).

The Land Trust will work with the Center for Historic Preservation to develop a feasibility plan to convert the manor house into classroom, meeting space, and for the Center to have a satellite office. The opportunity for Center staff and graduate students to work closely with the Land Trust on shared projects is positive for all concerned--especially valuable for doctoral students. Another key here is that our Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area program can work with graduate students and faculty to present historic interpretation through exhibits to residents, visitors, etc. The Civil War remains such a topic of interest to a wide audience, and that will increase with the forthcoming Civil War 150th anniversary. For our graduate/doctoral classes in historic preservation and public history, the new facility also has immediate benefits. In the 2010, I will be able to teach my doctoral seminars at Glen Leven: graduate students will have immediate hands-on lab experiences.

In the future we also would want to broaden the partnership to adult learners. We would want to talk to Dean Mike Boyle and others about doing adult learning classes in historic preservation and obviously there are other units at the university who may want to offer specialized or graduate classes through the Glen Leven facilities.
What are the values of the Glen Leven Center to the university?
1. Low cost, effective way to project a key MTSU doctoral program and MTSU itself into Nashville, particularly West Nashville,
2. Demonstrating to the huge Nashville alumni base that MTSU is in the city and helping to create a better urban environment
3. Creating a new Nashville-based lab for students in historic preservation and other sustainability ventures: we see it as a way to attract, recruit, retain, and train students, particularly doctoral students, to MTSU
4. Create the potential for a new continuing education venture for a Nashville-based audience

What are the values of the Glen Leven Center to the Center for Historic Preservation?
1. Attracting a better quality graduate student
2. Creating a venue where our Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area program can interpret the Battle of Nashville
3. Create another learning lab in historic preservation, like the Downtown Heritage Center in Murfreesboro, but this one would delve more into building technology and sustainable environments. The Downtown Heritage Center in Murfreesboro is not a historic building and that fact limits what we can do there as a living laboratory. Glen Leven opens the door to all of those possibilities.
4. Create a Nashville-based lab for our Library of Congress project: providing Teaching with Primary Sources education to adult learners in a historic setting would please the Library, and our supporters in Nashville. To meet the program’s potential, we need to make the Library of Congress program bigger than just what we can do at Murfreesboro campus.
5. Project into the often-limited access Nashville cultural/historical scene as a strategy of creating, cultivating new opportunities for external funding.

What are the costs to the Center for Historic Preservation: limited at this time but certainly manageable in the future. We have identified Nashville-resident staff members who would be ideal to meet our responsibilities and commitments at Glen Leven. We plan to assign graduate students time there for the development of exhibits and visitor services. We may need to spend up to $15,000 to $20,000 for the development of an adaptive reuse study, and will take those funds from our Center foundation account. Needed exhibit costs, since they would be focused on the Civil War story, would be provided through our Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area monies (our federal funds), at perhaps another $10K. We also should share in the utility costs of the facility, and this may take $12K a year: but like at the Downtown Heritage Center, our federal money can bear those costs since we would be interpreting a major Civil War property in Nashville.

These totals, in other words, call for NO NEW monies from MTSU at this time. I may however put in an application for the faculty programs that the MTSU Foundation funds for new partnership/public service ventures to help pay for the feasibility study and other start-up costs.

Certainly I believe that the Glen Leven Center venture embodies how we can restructure at a time of new budget realities to create significant opportunity for the university while, at the same time, we keep to the academic master plan of academic quality through experiential learning, strong inter-locking partnerships outside of the university, and a superb commitment to public service through research and education. This project has all of those qualities-- it will take work, but the payoff could be considerable indeed.