

WEST MANSION UPDATE

MURDEROUS EVENING PLANNED TO SAVE A GRAND LANDMARK

By Jean West Rudnicki

Like the suspense-packed television drama *24*, the clock ticks steadily in the race to save the West Mansion, a 1929 residence designed by famed Houston architect Joseph Finger. The stately manor is at risk of demolition due to its prime commercial location. A non-profit organization is working to raise funds to purchase the property and save the mansion before it falls into the hands of a developer.

A forgotten deed restriction, a fierce hurricane, and a global financial crisis are just a few of the plot twists as this drama continues to unfold. At the center of the action is the 15,000 sq. ft mansion, located on the north shore of Clear Lake and deemed “one of the most substantial, well crafted, and opulent dwellings constructed in Texas in the 1920s.” Characters include the high profile former NBA basketball great Hakeem Olajuwon, and a plethora of high-powered developers pitted against an unlikely heroine, a school teacher who has done her homework.

Linda Sansing, teacher and CEO of the non-profit organization Preserved in Time, plans to purchase the property, renovate it and turn the 79-year-old mansion into a Texas history museum complete with public tours and a tearoom. Plans now include housing a special needs school on the site, as well. The organization’s business and educational plans are posted on the organization’s website at [www.](http://www.preservedintime.org)



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Sansing, who began efforts more than five years ago, established the non-profit organization in 2003. While conducting research in the Rice University library basement, Sansing stumbled across documentation hinting at a long-forgotten deed restriction. Additional research did in fact turn up the restriction which blocks demolition of the site until at least 2012. It proved a lifesaver for the mansion, and bought Sansing’s organization valuable time. Developers, reluctant to tie

up funds in property that can’t be turned around immediately, backed away.

Last year’s financial crisis added another bit of cushion, but is a double-edged sword. While investors can’t get their hands on money to develop the property, funds are tight for non-profit organizations as well. But Sansing is undaunted in her belief that the organization will succeed. “A lot of people are going to be sad if a bulldozer comes in here in 2012 and takes it down. We’ve got to be successful,” she says.

Preserved in Time is working to raise the \$100,000 in earnest money necessary to lock in a contract and take the property off the market. It kicked off fund raising efforts with two events in November, a high tea as well as a fashion show and auction. The two events raised over \$18,000.

The third fund raiser – a Roaring 20s-themed murder mystery