

To the Aspen Hill Community and Pet Lovers Everywhere!

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All of us at LDG say thank you for your votes and support!

History in the making as area historic properties compete for funds



John Kelly/The Washington Post - A dog grave at the Aspen Hill Memorial Park in Silver Spring. The Montgomery County Humane Society is hoping to win a grant from American Express to turn a kennel building on the pet cemetery's grounds into an education center.



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Columnist

The Washington Post

History in the making as area historic properties compete for funds

By [John Kelly](#), Published: April 29

You might say it comes down to this: God or dog?

And if God, which one? Judeo or Christian? And if Christian, high-church Episcopal or African Methodist Episcopal? And don't discount the Unitarians.

Or maybe science is more your thing: the heavens as opposed to heaven.

I'm talking about [Partners in Preservation](#), a contest that launched last week and pits two dozen Washington area historic structures against one another to win much-needed restoration funds. American Express is providing the money. The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a partner.

Because these days it doesn't really happen unless it happens on the Web, the winner of \$100,000 will be chosen by Facebook likes, Instagram photos, Foursquare check-ins and Twitter tweets. The competition is fierce. You can track who's up and who's down at [partnersinpreservation.com](#).

When last I checked, Washington National Cathedral was on top with 289,530 points. Mount Vernon had 276,050 points, and the Historic Sixth & I Synagogue had 261,280 points.

The Kennel at Aspin Hill Memorial Park — dog — was in the middle of the pack, in 11th place with 50,490 points.

“We're unique in that the memorial park is the second-oldest pet cemetery in the country,” said **B.J. Altschul** of the Montgomery County Humane Society, the nonprofit that oversees the

animal graveyard, which opened in 1921. The kennel was originally used to breed schnauzers but once restored will be an education center.

“This is really going to shine a spotlight on some things about the human-animal bond that some people may not have been aware of,” B.J. said.

It certainly is an eclectic bunch of properties in the contest. Georgetown University entered with the Heyden Observatory, completed in 1844. I can just imagine those Jesuits climbing up there to look through their telescopes, silently apologizing to **Galileo** and **Copernicus** with each step. (The observatory’s exterior needs work.)

All Souls Unitarian Church on Harvard Street NW would use the money to restore its bell tower, which houses the city’s oldest church bell, installed in a previous building in 1822.

If Colvin Run Mill wins, it will use the money to restore the second and third floors of the Great Falls structure, which is in a strong fifth place. “When you’re playing against the big boys like the National Cathedral and Sixth and I and Mount Vernon, you feel like a flyweight stepping into the ring with a heavyweight,” said **Mike Henry**, administrator of the site. “I don’t have **George Washington**, and God’s not on my side.”

Well then, why vote for Colvin Run? “All we represent is what 95 percent of the population was dealing with at the time,” Mike said. “We’re not the top 5 percent, the gentry. We are the folks who smelled bad at the end of the day, who had dirt under their nails.”

It’s hard for small groups to compete against well-known sites. “We have a much steeper, uphill battle,” said **Melissa Chotiner** of Montgomery Parks. She wants people to vote for the Darby Store, a 1910 general store on Route 28 in Beallsville that’s in need of TLC.

The Athenaeum in Alexandria is a scrappy fighter, too. A [great video](#) was posted on YouTube that neatly encapsulates the building’s 160 year’s of history to the tune of **Gloria Gaynor’s** “I Will Survive.” If the Athenaeum wins, the facade will be restuccoed, and the steps will be repaired.

Why should someone vote for the Athenaeum as opposed to, say, Washington National Cathedral?

“You’re voting for the underdog,” said **Catherine Aselford**, executive director of the art space. “We’re in there, trying to get attention, get market share, get press share against really big organizations like the National Cathedral. I mean I love them . . .”

Yes? *Yes?* You love them, *but* . . . ?

But, despite my invitation, Catherine declined to run the cathedral down. Neither would **Wilma Harvey** from Metropolitan AME Church on M Street NW, which would use the money to restore its 120-year-old stained-glass windows. “I don’t want to trash talk the competition,” Wilma said. “I would like to say: We’re in the game.”

[Competitions like this](#) can be nothing more than popularity contests. But here's what's nice about Partners in Preservation: American Express actually has *\$1 million* to give away. The top vote-getter will win \$100,000, and then a panel of experts will decide how to divvy up the rest.

So, go the Web site. Learn about the 24 contestants. Attend the open house events scheduled for Saturday and Sunday. Then vote often. Voting closes at midnight May 10. The winners will be announced May 13.

“Really, there's going to be no losers,” said Mike of Colvin Run. “Historic preservation is going to win.”

For previous columns, go to washingtonpost.com/johnkelly.

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