

## **"Presidential" church earns trust grant**

**Thursday, February 26, 2009**

**Carol Gorga Williams**

**Staff Writer**

**Asbury Park Press**

**TRENTON** - One of the only surviving remnants of the city's so-called "Gilded Age" received word that a welcome infusion of the gold stuff could be en route, if the state Legislature signs off on a recommendation that the Church of the Presidents receives more grant funding.

That recommendation, released Wednesday by the New Jersey Historic Trust, endorsed 2008 historic preservation funding for some 60 projects, totaling more than \$15 million.

Among those recommendations is one for \$467,296 for the city's Church of the Presidents on Ocean Avenue.

"This money will enable us to complete the entire exterior of the building, which we have been working on since 2003," said Joan Schnorbus, a member of the nonprofit Long Branch Historical Museum Association, which has been trying to restore the landmark.

One-time city resident Edgar Dinkelspiel saved the structure from demolition after it was deconsecrated in 1953. He and his wife, Florence, did their best to operate it as a museum; but by 1999, weather had taken its toll on the building and it had to be closed until it could be stabilized.

By then, his widow had the support of a new nonprofit group as it began raising money to restore the structure. Plans now call for the church to be completely renovated inside and out in four phases for about \$2.6 million.

"It is a group that is in it for the long haul and that is what it takes to restore a building like this," said Mayor Adam Schneider. "It is a great group that has been working very diligently to obtain funding from all sorts of places. And now — with this fairly significant contribution from the state — what the state has done is recognize how significant this building is. It is genuinely historic."

In fact, said Schnorbus, there is no other house of worship outside of Washington, D.C. that can boast such a lofty presidential connection: Seven U.S. presidents worshipped there. The church was erected in 1879.

"This (grant) will enable us to do the rest of it," said Schnorbus. "It will seal the envelope so the elements can no longer threaten the building. We are so excited, we are dancing on air."

For Schnorbus, the site is important not only because of what it can teach about presidential history but also what it can teach about the history of the period, in which people were beginning to vacation away from home.

"This is a chance to tell that story too," said Schnorbus. "It is such an important site."

The New Jersey Historic Trust, an affiliate of the state Department of Community Affairs, administers the grants from the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund. This list of recommendations goes before the fund administrators for ratification March 11 and then before the Legislature for a vote.

####