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**HISTORIC AERIAL PHOTOS TO BE PRESERVED AND MADE AVAILABLE ONLINE
\$56,000 state grant to provide equipment and software to improve research capabilities**

You never know when you might need an aerial photo of some part of Westchester dating back to the 1920s or 1930s. But when the time comes, the Westchester County Planning Department will be ready.

More than 6,300 aerial photographs, mostly used by developers, recreation planners, reservoir managers and the like, are being scanned by staff at the Westchester County Archives. With the award of a \$56,934 grant from the New York State Archives to the County's Dept. of Information Technology, these images will be made more easily accessible to the public through an Intranet system in the Planning Department. In addition, the Archives will remove them from regular office use to environmentally controlled storage, thereby preserving irreplaceable images of Westchester's past.

"These are priceless photos – some of which were only discovered 15 years ago," said County Executive Andrew Spano, who initiated this particular state grant program when he was county clerk, chairing the Local Government Records Advisory Council for the NYS Archives. "We want to make sure they're properly preserved and catalogued, and made available to anyone who wants to see how our county has changed over the years."

The historical collection, maintained by the Westchester County Planning Department, dates back to 1925 and the era of bi-planes winging over a largely undeveloped county landscape. This priceless group of photos has continued to be handled almost daily and with no backup to preserve them.

Patty Dohrenwend, director of the Westchester County Archives and Records Center and the grant's project director, noted that the preservation of these valuable photographs is a long-term goal of the Archives.

"Since the aerials were discovered in 1990, and recognized for both their historic and current value, we knew that an imaging project was needed to improve access to them while preserving them for generations to

MORE

PAGE 2 – AERIAL PHOTOS

come. Thankfully, with state-of-the-art imaging and the server system currently maintained by the Department of Information Technology, the time is ripe and the project can move forward with the assistance of this state grant.”

The aerial photograph collection is the result of 14 fly-overs between 1925 and 2000, roughly one set for every 5 years. Because the sets vary in size and are indexed to different indexing maps, finding the photos relating to a particular area is often painstaking and laborious. Experienced staff persons may spend hours assisting researchers preparing an environmental impact statement.

Excellent reproductions of an area or region’s aerials are often needed. Constant use of the collection has resulted in damage to the photos. Some sets are quite complete; others are missing photos. Of the oldest, most historical sets, there are few negatives and no backup copies, yet 95% of the research requests are for these. Reproductions often require producing a negative and then a print from an outside vendor on contract to the county – costly and time-consuming for the public.

Under the grant project, a specialist will implement a plan developed under a preceding planning grant for \$11,576 that was awarded from the same state grant fund in 2003. Using Geographic Information Systems software, the high resolution images of the photos will be geo-referenced to their index maps. A web interface will be developed using specialized software, currently employed by the Library of Congress to display its maps collection online. Grant funds will also provide for a public terminal in the Planning Department that will offer speed in referencing the photographs on a large monitor and the ability to print many of them in-house.

The original photographs will be made part of the permanent collection that is housed in environmentally controlled vaults at the Archives facility in Elmsford. The public will continue to have access to the originals there during public visiting hours, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Westchester County is one of 470 local governments and community organizations that will receive \$11.4 million in grants from the New York State Archives’ competitive program to care for their public records. The funding comes from a small percentage of the fees collected when people file or record documents with county clerks and the Register of the City of New York.

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