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### ***“Fountain of the Pioneers” complex in Bronson Park designated to the National Register of Historic Places***

#### **For Immediate Release**

**August 5, 2016, Kalamazoo, Michigan** – The National Park Service has just designated Alfonso Iannelli’s *Fountain of the Pioneers* complex in Bronson Park to the National Register of Historic Places. The designation is at the National level of significance, the National Parks Service’s second highest designation only behind National Historic Landmarks. The Fountain complex is Kalamazoo’s only historic structure designated at this level.

Completed in 1940, the Fountain of the Pioneers complex is rare in the world of art. A composite work of civic outdoor design, it combines elements of America’s Prairie School, Modernist, Art Deco, and Cultural Nationalism movements. It is believed to contain the only public sculpture that references nineteenth-century Indian Removal activity, and the period’s then commonly held European-American beliefs supporting Indian assimilation. Because of this, it has significance for its contribution to the history of art criticism through its sustained period of interpretive conversation and debate about its meaning- a practice common to public sculpture but rare for its time.

Artist, architect, and designer Alfonso Iannelli was an Italian immigrant who attended two east coast art schools on scholarship before beginning his career in New York. He continued in California and ultimately settled in Chicago after a highly successful collaboration with Prairie School architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Iannelli’s later career established him as an early American Modernist, master designer, sculptor, and architect, and a national leader and educator in America’s Modern design and design education movements. The Fountain of the Pioneers complex is an outstanding example of Iannelli’s work.

Iannelli was a longtime friend and colleague of Lydia Siedschlag, former Art Department Chair at Western Michigan University. Siedschlag received her Bachelor of Art Education degree from The Art Institute of Chicago, where Iannelli had become the institution’s first-ever Director of Design.

The fountain complex includes the east and west pools and the fountain structure located in the east pool. It was completed with funding provided by the City and the depression-era Works Projects Administration.

Although the fountain complex has been the topic of on and off controversy since its creation, the City Commission adopted a new Bronson Park Master Plan on March 7, 2016 which calls for the renovation of the fountain complex’s concrete sculpture, water systems, and lights. The Master Plan also calls for

other significant upgrades to Bronson Park and an educational component in the park to explain the art and history surrounding the fountain complex, as well as the history and current activities of the local Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians (Gun Lake Tribe) and their past and current connections to Kalamazoo.

The National Register nomination is available on the City's website [here](#).

Attachments: Photographs by William Dyer (3)

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