



73½ South Professor Street
P.O. Box 455
Oberlin, OH 44074-0455
Phone: 440-774-1700
Fax: 440-774-8061
Website: www.oberlinheritage.org
E-mail: members@oberlinheritage.org

For Immediate Release – April 12, 2010

Contact: Patricia Murphy, Executive Director, (440) 774-1700 or patm@oberlinheritage.org

Photo Available Upon Request

Pride, Progress, and Historic Preservation: Reviving a Historic Community in Madagascar

The Oberlin Heritage Center presents Oberlin native, Karen Schoonmaker Freudenberger, in a fascinating talk about historic preservation efforts in Madagascar, presented at Kendal at Oberlin's Heiser Auditorium on Tuesday, April 27 at 7:15 p.m. Madagascar may be known widely for its outstanding biodiversity and especially its charismatic lemurs. However, in this illustrated program, Freudenberger leaves the lemurs in the forest and turn her audience's attention to the secondary city of Fianarantsoa where a dynamic but very poor urban community is working together to save the architecture of their historic neighborhood. Freudenberger shares images and stories from her 11 years in Madagascar where she worked with Old City residents on community revitalization, historic preservation and heritage tourism initiatives.

In Madagascar, before 1830, commoners were not allowed to live in permanent structures (which were reserved for the royalty). When that rule changed, people started building homes from mud brick and tiles. This is the period when the Old City of Fianarantsoa was constructed. Initially, a thriving royal city, things changed over time and by the 1980s, the Old City was in a state of collapse. Wealthier families moved out and three or four houses fell down every year as the hurricane winds battered the historic hilltop. Without adequate sanitation facilities, health problems were rampant. Freudenberger tells the story of how she worked with this neighborhood to turn around its fortunes, rebuilding not only houses, but the pride of the community.

Karen Schoonmaker Freudenberger (Oberlin High School Class of 1973) has been working on community development issues in Africa for twenty five years. She spent the last 11 years in Fianarantsoa with her family and now lives in Burlington VT, from where she continues to mentor the Old City project.

For more information about this free program to which the public is warmly invited, or for news of other Oberlin Heritage Center events or activities, visit www.oberlinheritage.org or call 440-774-1700.

###END