Old State Capitol's fence guest of honor at gala fundraiser

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A fence will be guest of honor at a benefit brunch Sunday, Nov. 25.

A cast iron masterpiece that is an engineering feat, the Old State Capitol fence is part of the state's historic past and a tribute to ingenuity and symbolism. It needs an estimated $500,000 to be put in shape.

The 7 foot, 2 inch tall fence is almost a third of a mile long, bears eagles, dragons, medallions,: fleur-de-lis and quatrefoil motifs.

Anchored only at the bottom with bolts but able to stand due to its interlocking parts, the fence around the Gothic-style Old State Capitol (1847-49) is one of the few original artifacts of antebellum Baton Rouge. The Old State Capitol and its fence are rated high on a national level by Robert R. Macdonald, director of the Louisiana State Museum, which includes 18 historic buildings in New Orleans.

"Old State Capitol is a great jewel for

Baton Rouge!" says Macdonald, unabashedly a fan. "It's the most important 19th century building, architecturally, in Louisiana," he says.

"It's the most important in the United States in that period as a document in the history of American architecture."

Once the state's capitol, Daquin made it look like a medieval castle, a design of architecture known as "castellated Gothic." "Fence repairs are separate from the Old State Capitol renovations," to be launched Dec. 1, with Phase I, a $2.5 million dollar outlay appropriated by the Legislature," says Macdonald. He explains that Phase II will include repair of the roof, restoration of the exterior of the building, restoration of the upper floors of the rotunda - the ironwork and glass. He states that the Legislature will be approached to fund Phase II in 1986-87, a sum of $232,000, and Phase III in 1987-88, $45 million.

"It takes time," he says. "Our magnificent fence - an engineering engineering feat - needs fixing, and it's worth it." says Mrs. Howard Samuel, president of Old State Capitol Associates, volunteers dedicated to protecting and preserving the Old State Capitol and its grounds.

"About three years ago, Friends of Cast Iron Architecture wrote to try to help save the building, and members from all over the country sent a flood of letters to help save the property, the fence as well as the building.

"We're having a benefit brunch to launch an offense for our fence. We're also soliciting donations from individuals to be a sponsor for either a picket, post, eagle or fleur-de-lis. Fifty dollars will make a donor the sponsor of a picket, $50, a fleur-de-lis; $100, a post; $500, an eagle. Those who give to the cause - "How to mend fences and influence history" - will have their names inscribed on the grounds, as contributors who helped perpetuate our historic fence.""