

Cook County Soars into the Bicentennial with a New Flag

By President Toni Preckwinkle and Commissioner Scott Britton

The table is set for the final step to declare a new flag for Cook County.

Named “I Will,” the new flag echoes the past while looking to the future. It represents all that we are and all that we will be.

High school students – themselves on the cusp of who they will become – were tasked with capturing the spirit, culture, history, and innovation of the past nearly 200 years. We are grateful to the nearly 300 students who shared their vision through prototypes from hand-drawn crayon flags to digitally rendered flags, and even a physical flag in the mail.

An expert panel of designers, historians, County officials, curators, and teachers, paired 25 semifinalists with volunteer professional design mentors to perfect their work. Six finalists were presented to the Cook County Board. On Tuesday, we voted for “I Will” to represent the County into the future.

In 2020, Mississippi finally rid itself of the visual reminder of the confederacy. The change did not erase that horrible history, or free us from a continued collective responsibility. But by canceling the symbols of the confederacy, we no longer need to live with the visual reminder of that history and can more resolutely say that government is for everyone.

While the County’s old flag did not have racist overtones, it was not representative of who we are as a County - as a people. It is colloquially called a “seal on a bedsheet.” The old flag centers a simplified seal – itself a literal depiction of Cook County’s 30 Townships and the date of the County’s founding - on a blank white background with the name of the County surrounding it.

The “I Will” flag shares so much more. Blue to symbolize the County’s great lake and rivers, green for natural lands and riverbanks, red for social change, and the blank canvas of white for the innovation that has thrived and is to come. The central “Y” shape highlights the regional rivers joining at Wolf Point, while harkening back to the original County seal and the municipal device of Chicago - the “Y” symbol is used throughout Chicago to promote pride in the city.

Each of the seven points on the star represent each County region, the city of Chicago, and the Forest Preserves, which join together to symbolize residents’ unity.

The stars represent six foundational moments that represent who we are through the founding of Cook County, our commitment to health care through the founding of Cook County Hospitals Stroger and Provident, defeating disparities through the founding of the Cook County Department of Public Health, preserving national lands through the founding of the Forest Preserves, Cook County’s historic efforts in family and juvenile justice reform, and local partnerships by harkening back to the old flag’s circle of stars.

For our fellow flag devotees, rest assured that “I Will” now stands up to all vexillology standards – a word the County has learned together to mean, simply, the study of flags. It is easy to remember, symbolically meaningful, uses few colors, and has no lettering or seals.

But looking beyond its stylistic components, at its core, the “I Will” flag is a representation of our lands, culture, history, and core values that bring us together – different than a depiction of the physical boundaries that separate.

The flag ensures that we will reflect on the past while focusing on what we will build moving forward. That we will continue to strive to build the best County we can.

That’s why we’re both saying - “I Will.”