



ANNUAL REPORT 2016

photo by Ruth Seeley



To all our wonderful friends and volunteers in Vernon Park, our grateful thanks!

Friends of Vernon Park is going from strength to strength! This year was our first full year following the 2015 greening renovation. So many people have rediscovered the park and shared memories of when they were kids. Meanwhile all the new kids have been having a great time on the playground and adult fitness equipment.

The new picnic tables have been very well-used. Check out our two bulletin boards, one on the Greene Street side and one at the Germantown Avenue entrance. We post information about future events and regular meetings.

Slowly the plantings are filling out their spaces.

The easy way for you all to keep in touch with what is happening in Vernon Park is to check out our website, www.friendsofvernonpark.org, and very active [Facebook page](#). This year we logged over 500 Friends and reached others through postings on the Living in Germantown Facebook Page.



SPECIAL EVENTS

We held two **Bazaars** in the spring and fall. In the fall we had over 35 vendors and many interested bargain hunters. Thanks to everyone who participated!

Despite having to shut down a little early in the fall when the rain came, everyone had a enjoyable day. We hope these events will grow in the future and include a mix of crafts and flea market items. We had our own table of fascinating and quirky donated items to raise funds for Vernon Park.

The Germantown Life Enrichment Center showcased major local Germantown musical talent at four successful **Live@Vernon Park** concerts on Tuesday nights with Friends of Vernon Park, Germantown United Community Development Corporation and the Germantown Artists Roundtable co-hosting (with the support of the Community Office of Councilwoman Cindy Bass). Nothing more lovely than sitting with a picnic as the light slowly fades, the Parks and Recreation Showmobile glows and the music envelopes everyone.

Councilwoman Cindy Bass continued to fund the very popular **Oldies in the Park** Nights in July and August in front of the Vernon House featuring Gary Shepherd and DJ Darryl Taylor and great music for singing and dancing. These events (except when a large fallen tree got in the way) were held under the sparkling new string lighting on the avenue in front of the Vernon House.

The Black Writers Museum hosted **The People's Poetry and Jazz Festival** on Saturday, August 20 in Vernon Park featuring fantastic music by Stanley Clarke.

On July 24 (during the Democratic National Convention), the One Less Foundation and Germantown Special Services District hosted a climate rally in Vernon Park. The event drew hundreds of people, featured many prominent speakers and showed the documentary, *How to Let Go of the World and Love all the things Climate can't Change*.



Top: Volunteer Coordinator David Bower leads a pre-workday safety talk and pep talk to Villanova volunteers; Middle: President Emeritus Ruth Seeley provides volunteers with Vernon Park history as well as rain garden and other tree + plant information; Villanova volunteers remove a giant weed from a garden bed along Germantown Avenue



VOLUNTEER CLEAN UPS

We held two Love Your Park Day events in the spring and fall. The children under the guidance of Rose Slater had fun making "No Smoking" signs to post in the playground (above).

Germantown Friends Middle School students had a very productive work day in Vernon Park. Wonderful to have this group help to dig post holes and rake massive amounts of leaves!

Villanova University students came on their annual day of service and as always did a huge amount of work. They cleared out the weeds and trash under the rose bushes and pruned them. They cleared the weeds and invasive tree saplings from the bed along side the gas station, they weeded the area in front of the Center in the park and the Maggie Kuhn memorial garden. We couldn't manage without volunteer support and are particularly grateful for Villanova's annual contribution to our park's well-being.

2016 awardees

PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY



BETTY TURNER



RUTH SEELEY



SHOUT OUTS

At Germantown United CDC's Annual "For the Love of Germantown" Fundraiser June 16, FOVP President Emeritus, **Ruth Seeley** was honored as a Pillar of the Community and gave a stirring speech about the value of public spaces, volunteerism and collaboration. Ruth's (ongoing) work has been transformational for the Park and her philosophy of stewardship and generosity are contagious.

In Philadelphia Parks and Recreation's [August Newsletter](#), Vernon Park 2016 Seasonal Maintenance Attendant (SMA) **Allen Baker**, was recognized by Philadelphia Parks and Recreation as a "Super Seasonal". In the article written by PPR Stewardship + Volunteer Coordinator David Bower, many people attest to Allen's hard work and positive energy. From the article:

"This is my home. I grew up near here, and I live near here. I truly enjoy meeting and getting to know the people who come here, especially the children. When I see happy people enjoying the park, the job doesn't seem like work. I enjoy being here every day, and sometimes, before going home at the end of the day, I stay a little longer and sit on a bench and just enjoy the trees, the fresh air, and being with all of the other people here."

—ALLEN BAKER

2016 Vernon Park Seasonal Maintenance Attendant

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation's October Newsletter featured an interview with **David Bower**, reflecting on his 18 years of dedicated service to the city's parks. He has been a true Friend of Vernon Park—not only as the Volunteer Coordinator from the Department of Parks and Recreation but as a volunteer himself, working to keep the park clean and the spirit of stewardship strong!



THE RAIN GARDEN

The Tookany/Tacony Frankford Watershed Partnership has, through Robin Irizarry, provided on-going support of the rain garden. TTF arranged for the Philadelphia Water Department to officially bring our garden into its rain garden program. This has facilitated much improved maintenance on a monthly basis by knowledgeable Water Department staff.

The rain garden is now officially a mature garden with quite sizable trees and native perennials that have naturalized well. This attracts insects, birds and snakes. Its proven success in redistributing stormwater make the garden a leading example of responsible, innovative stormwater management and it has been visited by researchers and others who want to develop rain gardens.



TREES

Unfortunately we lost 6 mature trees in the park during 2016 including a large tree that fell across Greene Street during a bad summer storm. The tree crews have finally removed most of the trunks and logs. We will be considering new plantings in 2017. Meanwhile the trees we planted in 2011 continue to grow.



IMPROVED SECURITY IN THE PARK

For many years Vernon Park users suffered from the illegal activity and harassment from a large number of loiterers outside Lee's Steaks and Hoagies at the corner of Vernon Park on Germantown Avenue. Following two years of Friends of Vernon Park's task force meetings and with the support of many local residents we were finally able to make a strong case to the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board that Lee's Steaks and Hoagies had not met the requirements of their provisional liquor license and should be denied a future license. In January the owners were given three months to sell the license with the restrictions that it could not remain at the address on Germantown Avenue, and could not be sold to a friend or relative of the current owner. The building was put up for sale in February and the business finally closed at the end of June.

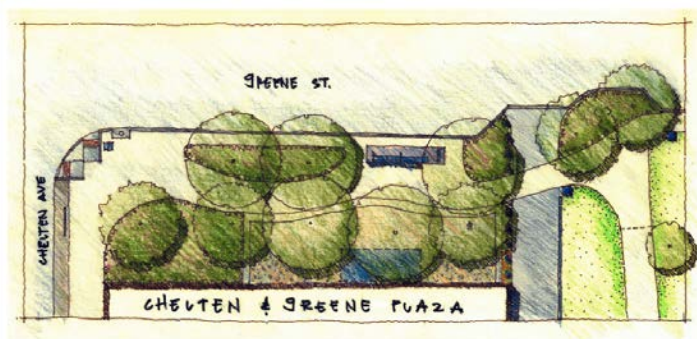
We give much of the credit to Representative Stephen Kinsey and Stacey Wright, his chief of staff, who guided and advised the Friends of Vernon Park on how best to proceed every step of the way. Captain Sekou Kinebrew of the 14th Police District and his officers gave us their full support and attention. This was a major community effort.

Many elderly residents coming to Center in the Park programs have stopped to say how much safer and nicer it is to come through the park now. Families and day care classes have expressed the same appreciation.

The success of this campaign was never assumed and we feel very lucky that the outcome was in our favor. Keeping a park safe, however, needs to be an on-going commitment. We have a Safety Leaflet of advice for people who do witness a problem or a crime, giving information on who to contact about what kind of event. It is helpful if everyone who witnesses a problem reports it promptly to the proper authority. The police, make regular tours through the park, and are very responsive if called.

We had an incident in the park in October involving a dangerous unleashed dog. We remind everyone that the law requires that dogs be leashed in the park. Police officers will be enforcing this. We ask for everyone to comply and share this information.

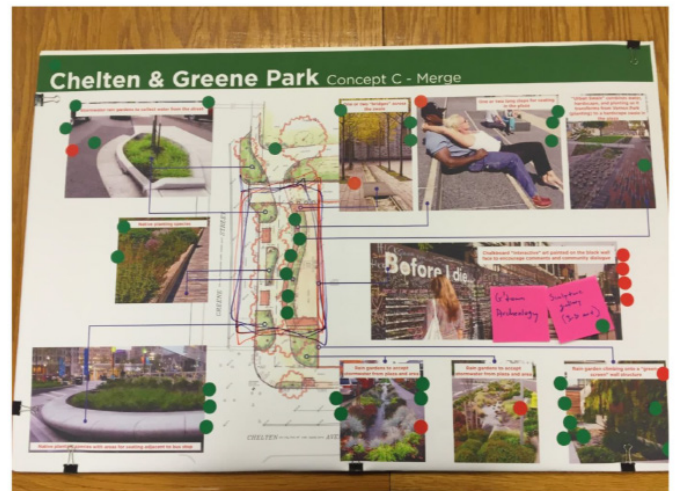
We would also like to remind everyone that Vernon Park is a smoke-free park. We all appreciate the cleaner air, particularly at the children's playground.



CHELTEN & GREENE PLAZA

LANDSCAPE AND HARDSCAPE PLANS

PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 2016



CHELTEN & GREENE STREET BUS STOP REDESIGN

Friends of Vernon Park were included in planning for a re-design of the Chelten and Greene Street bus stop. Funds will come from the State of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia City Commerce Department. Bids will be solicited this winter and we hope that work will begin early in the spring of 2017. This should open up a new entry into Vernon Park and create better overall use of the space.



THE YWCA BUILDING

In November we heard the good news that the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority has selected KBK Enterprises, a minority-owned business, to purchase and develop the YWCA building. The plan currently includes market rate and affordable housing along with commercial and office space on the first floor. Friends of Vernon Park, with other members of the community, hope to be included in consultations.

We hope the development of the YWCA will encourage others to develop the empty Germantown High School building and Germantown Town Hall which continue to deteriorate and cause concern. Any development of the Germantown High School building appears to be stalled as the developer of record is currently involved in litigation over a school building in South Philadelphia.



REBUILD PHILADELPHIA

This was the year of Rebuild! We attended hearings in City Hall, we lobbied, we wrote letters, we worked on educating our constituency in order to support Mayor Kenney's Rebuild Philadelphia plan to fund universal pre-k education, and fix libraries, recreation centers and parks. These plans are already taking shape and should make a big difference in the future of Philadelphia's children. The funding for this will come from a sugary drinks tax which was opposed by the soda industry. The coalition of educators, family court lawyers, library, park and recreation center friends groups was powerful indeed. So many people dedicated their time and energy to make this happen. Find out more at <http://rebuild.phila.gov>.

George Matysik, Executive Director of the Philadelphia Parks Alliance, provided information for the hearings in City Council.

PHILADELPHIA PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT & FAIRMOUNT PARK CONSERVANCY



Friends of Vernon Park is indebted to the Fairmount Park Conservancy and Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department staff. These two groups bring Friends groups together to share good ideas and support their programs.

We are particularly grateful for work of PPR staff **Barbara McCabe**, Director of Development and **Patty-Pat Kozlowski**, Director of Park Stewardship.

Dave Bower, Volunteer Coordinator for the Northwest has been a major support for all of our work and acted as a wonderful liaison with PPR. He has just retired from PPR, but we are delighted that he is staying with us as a very involved volunteer and member of FOVP.

Allen Baker, our Summer Maintenance Assistant, was a wonderful addition to the life of the park. He worked from April to October picking up litter, clearing up leaves and made Vernon Park an extra friendly place particularly for visiting children.

Jennifer Mahar, Director of Park Stewardship, and **Erin Engelstad**, Park Stewardship Coordinator for the Fairmount Park Conservancy work together with PPR and provide us with resources for program and events.



FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Friends of Vernon Park is entirely supported by **voluntary contributions**, program-specific grants from **Fairmount Park Conservancy** and fundraising events. We are very grateful for the on-going interest of the **First Presbyterian Church in Germantown** and for their generous annual donation. Our Spring and Fall Bazaar vendor fees and sales raised the balance of our funds. These funds go toward the cost of winter maintenance, publicity for programs and equipment for the special events and gardening. We make small sums go a long way! We welcome all contributions in any amount. Donations can be made online or by mail.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Friends of Vernon Park is a part of a vast, supportive network of (large and small) organizations in Germantown whose ongoing work lifts our community up—for *all* who live, work and visit. We look forward to building on these relationships and forming new partnerships for initiatives and events in 2017. If your organization is interested in working with Friends of Vernon Park, please let us know! Email info@friendsofvernonpark.org or join us at one of our meetings.

Acknowledgments

Friends of Vernon Park is very grateful to the **Center in the Park** for providing us with space for our monthly meetings.

Thanks to **Mary Wood**, former treasurer for Friends of Vernon Park whose many years of diligent bookkeeping are much appreciated.

Thanks to the **Ready, Willing and Able** crew hired by the **Germantown Special Services District**, who continue to clean up the sidewalks along side the park.

So much appreciation goes out to each and every person, young and old, who has visited Vernon Park over the past year and contributed to its welcoming, positive atmosphere. This park belongs to all of us.



JOIN US

The officers of the Friends of Vernon Park do a lot of work throughout the year so that the Friends of Vernon Park can expand and grow.

ANGELA MILES, *President*

FRED LEWIS, *Vice-president*

KIMBRELL FRANCIS, *Secretary*

CARL CHEESEMEN, *Treasurer*

RUTH SEELEY, *President Emeritus*

Our group is a mix of people of all ages and backgrounds with diverse skill-sets that support the mission of the Friends of Vernon Park:

***Keeping Vernon Park, 'The Emerald of Germantown',
healthy, green and engaged in the community.***

We encourage you to bring your enthusiasm and ideas for Vernon Park to an upcoming meeting. The Friends of Vernon Park meets the **second Wednesday** of every month at the Center in the Park from 6:00 - 7:30 pm.

***We wish you and your families, friends and neighbors a joyous and
healthy holiday season and Happy New Year. See you in the Park in
2017!***

— THE FRIENDS OF VERNON PARK



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