



ANNUAL REPORT 2017



"The Battle is Joined"

Karyn Olivier

Part of Mural Arts' citywide 'Monument Lab'

Fall 2017



photo credit: Philadelphia Parks and Recreation for Love Your Park Day, Fall 2017

Our special thanks to all our wonderful friends and volunteers who have contributed to our ***Emerald of Germantown, Vernon Park!***

Each year we have more Friends involved in Vernon Park and each year we are delighted to welcome new groups that wish to use this wonderful public green space for concerts and special events.

We are celebrating our growth with more people volunteering their time and service and 750 Friends on Facebook. Friends of Vernon Park values each and every contribution—time, stewardship, resources, financial support, promoting and sharing and positive words of encouragement—Thank you!

www.FriendsofVernonPark.org

[@FriendsofVernonPark](#) on Facebook

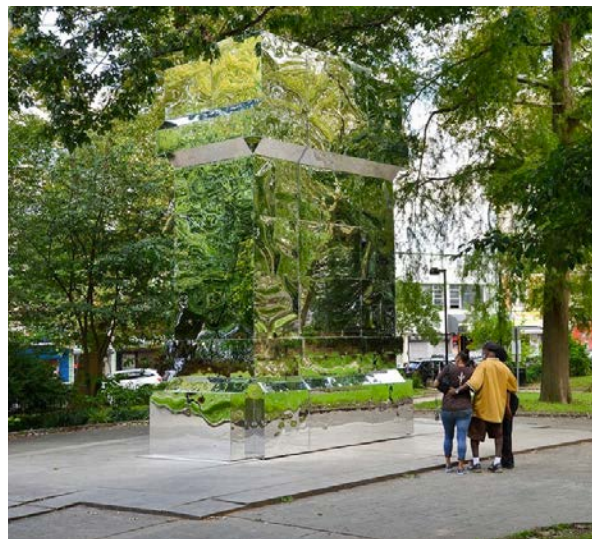


photo credits: Mural Arts' Monument Lab

ARTS, CULTURE, COMMUNITY: EVENTS IN VERNON PARK

MURAL ARTS PROGRAM MONUMENT LAB: A PUBLIC ART AND HISTORY PROJECT

This year the **Mural Arts** Program chose Vernon Park as a participation site for a most unusual city-wide special event: the Monument Lab Project. Two artists chose to work around the question: What is an appropriate monument for the current city of Philadelphia? This project aimed to build civic dialogue and stoke historical imagination as forces for social change. In an interesting juxtaposition, this project was in the planning stages before the nationwide re-examination of what we should honor and memorialize and why began.

Karyn Olivier explored the history of the monuments in Vernon Park, in particular the monument dedicated to the founding of Germantown by Francis Daniel Pastorius and the monument commemorating the battle of Germantown. She designed *The Battle Is Joined*, covering the Battle of Germantown Monument with reflecting panels, "to remind us that we, too, are instruments—the keepers and protectors of the monument, and in that role, sometimes we become the very monument itself." This artwork

was installed in mid August and then taken down at the end of November after people of all ages and interests had visited the site, wandered around it and taken photos of its remarkable images. We will miss it.

Jamel Shabazz visited from Brooklyn and explored the neighborhood of Germantown, met with Friends of Vernon Park and then planned a series of in-depth interviews with veterans who live in the area. Photos from his project *Love Is the Message* compose the mural on the side of a building at Germantown Avenue and Rittenhouse Street. The mural will be there for many years to come. More of Jamel Shabazz's photographs were also exhibited in the iMPeRFeCT GALLERY.

We held two **Community Bazaar and Flea Markets** this year in the spring and fall. In the spring students from the **Philadelphia School of Circus Arts Youth Troupe** joined us to give a demonstration of their skills. The fall bazaar was the most successful yet with over 50 vendors and many buyers despite having to change the date because of bad weather. Everyone loves the mix of stalls with crafts,



bargain second hand items and artwork. While keeping the cost of spaces low, we were able to raise funds for Friends of Vernon Park's on-going expenses, by selling second-hand items at the FOVP table.

Despite uncooperative weather, we began donation-based weekly **Yoga** classes in July with instruction from FOVP volunteer Kate Ibarra and held a special summer reading and arts program for children, ***Under the Shady Old Tree***. This series was led by FOVP volunteer Rose Slater in partnership with the **Joseph E. Coleman Library** Children's Department.

Councilwoman Cindy Bass continued to fund the increasingly 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.

The Black Writers Museum in Vernon Park hosted The ***People's Poetry and Jazz Festival*** on Saturday, August 19 headlining ***Pieces of a Dream*** with Dexter Wansel and Instant Funk. Spoken word, African dance and drumming, and a wide variety of vendors with delicious food, cultural and commercial clothing, jewelry, and art filled the park.

The Germantown Special Services District hosted the ***#OneGermantown Movie Series*** in the park all summer long and **Wawa Welcome America** generously brought its citywide Fourth of July Celebration to the Park, but most activities were rained out—can't fight the weather!

Two free concerts were given, supported by the City of **Philadelphia's Performances in Public Spaces** initiative, managed by the Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy. September 10, **the PRISM Quartet** with Greg Osby and Rudresh Mahanthappa, known for their bridging of jazz and classical music gave a concert and on October 15, the **Delaware Valley Opera Company** performed.

On September 9, **The One Less Foundation** with some support from FOVP and the Johnson House organized the **3rd Annual Run Germantown 5K** which began and ended in Vernon Park. This event is growing each year.

And in October some of us were lucky enough to meet and listen to an impromptu concert by Yahya, a member of the Sun Ra Arkestra, playing the tenor sax in front of the **Sun Ra Arkestra Mosaic**.



VOLUNTEER CLEAN UPS & ACTIVITY DAYS

We held a fantastic **Love Your Park Day** this fall and welcomed a wonderful group of volunteers to the park. They raked thousands (millions?) of leaves and helped us plant three new native trees and many daffodil and crocus bulbs.

Campus Philly organized a landscaping and clean up day for over 50 students from many of the area's Universities and colleges on April 8th. This group showed real muscle by digging out enormous tree roots!

In May a local troupe of **Cub Scouts** troupe held a cleanup and birdfeeder making service activity in the Park.

A group of students from the **Waldorf School of Philadelphia** students from came to visit on June 8 & 9. They spent half their time weeding and gardening and half on an art project so that the message, "Germantown, Here Comes the Sun!" could be hung along the Greene Street fence and be enjoyed by passers-by.

Villanova University's hard working students came on their annual day of service in September. 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 the back of the church on Rittenhouse Street. We couldn't manage without volunteer support and are particularly grateful for Villanova's annual return to get a number of big projects completed before winter arrives.

A group of **Crefeld School** students came in November to help set Belgian blocks at a corner where the trash trucks turn and usually churn our park into mud. An amazing job, done with tutoring from FOVP Volunteer coordinator Dave Bower and Parks & Recreation SMA Allen Baker.

Friends of Vernon Park wishes to recognize **all** of the wonderful neighbors, friends and park users who take a moment when enjoying the park to pick up any stray litter or clear paths of branches. The spirit of stewardship is alive and well in Vernon Park, thanks to you!



THE RAIN GARDEN

Robin Irizarry of the **Tookany/Tacony Frankford Watershed Partnership** has provided on-going support of the rain garden. Through TTF we have continued to work with the **Philadelphia Water Department's Soak It Up Program**. The program has funded an intern to keep the rain garden functioning well. It has also provided funds for tools and some replacement shrubs and plants in spots which needed more greening. The intern has been keeping the channels and pipes clear so that they can carry rainwater from the roof of Center in the Park into the rain garden. The rain garden is a mature garden with sizable native trees and perennials that have naturalized well. Birds, snakes, butterflies and other insects can be seen frequently.

On October 12, volunteers celebrated a milestone achievement in City Hall courtyard with Philadelphia Water Department's Green City Clean Waters Program. We have now greened **1,000 acres** of land and **over 1.6 billion gallons** of polluted water are being kept out of our rivers and creeks each year.

If you would like to have a tour of the Vernon Park rain garden and learn more about stormwater management, please contact us.



TREES

Following the loss of a number of large London Plane trees in 2016 and 2017 we have begun to plant native trees so that we will continue to have a sustainable green canopy into the future. We planted 3 trees on our fall **Love Your Park Day**. If you walk around the park you can see good sized trees that were planted in the 1990s and most of the trees we planted in 2011 are doing well.

SHOUT OUT

"I took my grandchildren to Vernon Park today. They had a really good time. As did I just watching them. Met some nice people. Thank you for quietly changing the park back to where children play on a beautiful day like today."

—P.M.



SECURITY IN THE PARK

As many of you will remember, we were able to get the **Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board** to remove Lee's Steaks and Hoagies Liquor License in 2016 improving the experience of seniors, pre-schoolers and everyone else entering Vernon Park from the Germantown Avenue side. We have again met with the officers of the **14th Police District** and are very grateful for their continued attention to occasional illegal activity in the park.

There have been several incidents involving unleashed dogs this past year, including an attack on a dog walker and on other dogs. These attacks were reported promptly to the authorities and have resulted in one citation. We remind everyone that the law requires that dogs be leashed in the park. Police officers will be enforcing this. Please comply and share this information.

We would also like to remind everyone that Vernon Park is a smoke-free park (as are all public parks in Philadelphia). We all appreciate the cleaner air, particularly at the children's playground.

CHELTEN & GREENE STREET BUS STOP RE-DESIGN

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. Unfortunately there have been various delays to the execution of this plan but we hope as historical issues are resolved that it will finally break ground in the spring of 2018. This will create better overall use of the space and a new entry into Vernon Park.

THE YWCA BUILDING

In 2016 we heard the good news that the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority had selected KBK Enterprises, a minority-owned business, to develop the YWCA building. In 2017 state officials, city officials and KBK held a community meeting to share details of KBK history and their plans for the building. Friends of Vernon Park, with other members of the community attended the meeting and shared their preferences for the building. The plan currently includes moderate rate housing, with commercial and office space on the first floor.

There have been no further signs of interest in the empty Germantown High School building and Germantown Town Hall which continue to deteriorate in the center of our community and cause major concern. We remain hopeful that there they can be creatively repurposed.

PASTORIUS MONUMENT

During the 2015 renovation in the park, the side panels were discovered to be in danger of falling off and were strapped on to prevent further damage. We are very grateful that the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Department stabilized the monument this fall and plan to complete the restoration in the spring of 2018.



COMMUNITY PARTNERS LEAD BIG WIN FOR GERMANTOWN

Our friends at **Germantown United CDC** identified and led the successful *"Partners in Preservation: Vote Your Main Street"* campaign for Germantown to win the top spot in a national contest that will bring improvements to two historic sites right near Vernon Park! Thanks to all of you who voted—Three Cheers for Germantown!



FROM THE PRESS RELEASE:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Open Doors in Germantown: The Germantown United Community Development Corporation intends to use the \$150,000 grant to preserve and provide structural improvements to **Parker Hall** and the **John Trower Building**, significant 20th century African-American historic sites. The eponymous John Trower building was operated by a well-known businessman and philanthropist who was considered the wealthiest African-American in the U.S. Parker Hall was an integrated social hall that served as a USO-like facility during World War II for African American soldiers. Both buildings will continue their current use as the Crab House restaurant, a popular local business, and ACES, a small museum focusing on multi-ethnic contributions to the U.S. Military in World War II.



PHILADELPHIA
PARKS &
RECREATION

PHILADELPHIA PARKS AND RECREATION & FAIRMOUNT PARK CONSERVANCY

Friends of Vernon Park is indebted to **Fairmount Park Conservancy** and **Philadelphia Parks and Recreation** staff. These two groups bring Friends groups together to network, share good ideas and support our programs. We are grateful for work of PPR staff led by **Barbara McCabe**, Director of Development (and wish her all the best in her retirement from PPR!) and **Patty-Pat Kozlowski**, Director of Park Stewardship and the whole team of Park Champions at the Conservancy, led by **Jamie Gauthier**, Executive Director.

David Bower retired from PPR last year, and we are delighted that he has become the Volunteer Coordinator for FOVP and has brought such generous, transformative energy to Vernon Park.

Allen Baker, our Summer Maintenance Assistant, has worked his second successful year in the life of our park. He worked from April to October for PPR picking up litter, clearing up leaves, doing landscape work and acting as an ambassador to the park users. He has been hired as the Philadelphia Water Department Soak It Up Program intern (See Rain Garden) and is now working 1 day a week for FOVP through the winter. Children and families all welcome his friendly presence.



Tile by FOVP member Rose Slater, installed in Center in the Park lobby

SHOUT OUT

"Great job, people! I'm delighted to see this after the recent negative videos posted from Germantown on social media. This here proves that people do care. Thank you, folks. Each & everyone of you."

—J.M.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The work of Friends of Vernon Park is entirely funded by voluntary contributions, program 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 Bazaar vendor fees and sales raised the balance of our funds. Our 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 donations in any amount which can be made online:

www.friendsofvernonpark.org

or by mail:

P.O. Box 48374, Philadelphia, PA 19144

We are very happy to announce that Friends of Vernon Park were awarded non-profit 501(c)3 status by the Internal Revenue Service this year enabling those who itemize their taxes to include donations to Friends of Vernon Park in their deductions, starting with FY 2018.

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 2018.

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 open monthly meetings.

Friends of Vernon Park is very grateful to the **Center in the Park** for providing us with space for our monthly meetings. We would also like to acknowledge the tireless advocacy efforts of our local elected officials, **Councilwoman Cindy Bass** and **State Representative Stephen Kinsey**, and their entire teams—thank you for all you do for Germantown and Vernon Park.

JOIN US

The officers of the Friends of Vernon Park work hard throughout the year so that the group can expand and grow. We welcome all who wish to join.

ANGELA MILES, *President*

BOB SEELEY, *Vice President*

KIMBRELL FRANCIS, *Secretary*

CARL CHEESEMAN, *Treasurer*

RUTH SEELEY, *President Emeritus*

Our group is a mix of people of all ages and background with diverse talents and gifts that support the mission of the Friends of Vernon Park:

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



STAY IN TOUCH. Check out the information about future events and meetings in 2018 on our Facebook page, our website and our two bulletin boards on the Greene Street side and the Germantown Avenue entrance. Sign up to receive our newsletters and announcements. We encourage you to bring your ideas to our meetings and join our group.

Friends of Vernon Park meets on the second Wednesday of every month at the Center in the Park from 6:00 - 7:30 pm.

Friends of Vernon Park wish you and your families, friends and, neighbors the warmest Season's Greetings and Happy New Year. See you in Vernon Park in 2018!

Friends of Vernon Park
P.O.Box 48374
Philadelphia, PA 19144

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