



Newsletter of the Center City Residents' Association

Vol. 14 No. 1 Spring 2023

Contents

CCCulture

Rittenhouse Square Fine Arts Show.....1
 Koresh Dance Announces 2023 Season.....9
 Lesser-Known Museums.....14

City Lit

PCI Increases Staff, Hours.....2
 Penn Prof Reports on Lives of Immigrants.....8

President's Letter

Pride and Priorities.....3

CCStreetwise

Too Bright in Rittenhouse Square.....4

Our Greene Countrie Towne

Ways to Turn Your Space
 into a Lush Oasis.....9
 Friends of Rittenhouse Square
 To Do Lawn Restoration.....16

Town Square

SEPTA May Cut Route 12 Bus.....11
 Encounters with Non-English-Speakers.....12
 Philadelphia Welcomes Asylum-Seekers.....17

Center City Spotlight

Journey from War-torn Ukraine
 to Beyond Literacy.....13
 Former Greenfield Principal
 Martin Brown Mourned.....19

Dining Scene

Two New European Cafes.....15
 Kura Sushi.....23

It's Academic

Focus on DEIB and Art
 at Greene Towne.....20

Living History

Remember Horn & Hardart?.....21
 The Whitman's Sampler Story.....22

What's Going On

CCRA Spring Calendar.....27

Out & About

CCRA Casino Night.....28

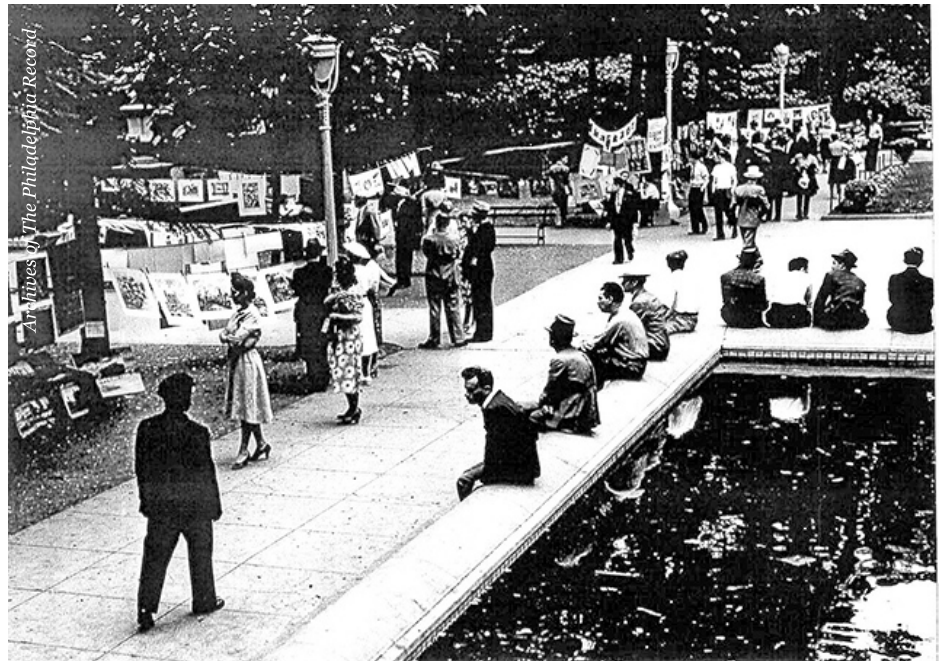
CENTER CITY RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

1900 Market Street, 8th Floor
 Philadelphia, PA 19103
 215-546-6719
 centercity@centercityresidents.org
 www.centercityresidents.org

CCCulture

Living Art History The Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show

By Charles T. Joyce



A view of the Rittenhouse Square Art Show, circa 1950s.

This article is reprinted with the permission of the Rittenhouse Square Fine Arts Association and the author.

Rittenhouse Square Park is as historic as it is beautiful: It survives as one of the five original parks that William Penn laid out for the city he founded in 1683. It's fitting, therefore, that our artists and their original fine art grace this ground, because the Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show is the oldest outdoor art festival in the nation.

In 1928, students at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, inspired by the street art exhibits in Paris, became determined to mount such a show here. According to a contemporary news account these young artists won support from other area art schools, and petitioned Governmental and Cultural authorities for permission to hang an art show in "the heart of the city – Rittenhouse Square." The encouragement these institutions provided prefigured the strong and supportive bond that continues today between our show and the Friends of Rittenhouse Square Park, custodians since 1976 of this vital urban space.

Unlike today, the inaugural "Art Flea Market" featured works hung on clotheslines "strung between the trees." In many other respects, however, that first Rittenhouse

Continued on p.2

exhibition mirrored what you see now as you explore our Show. Early patrons encountered a diverse display of genres and styles, from “the most modern of the modernists to the most conservative of the conservatists,” a mix you will enjoy today. And just like in 1928, modern visitors who venture into the center of the Square will experience the infectious energy displayed by our participating students, who continue to be the creative pulse of the Show.

Over the years, our Show generated controversies that seem almost quaint to modern eyes. In the 1930s, a local “Communist Group” allegedly infiltrated the artist ranks and “swamped the clotheslines with political propaganda in oils and watercolors” to the consternation of the Philadelphia establishment. Later, the Show was raided by Philadelphia police who removed representations of the nude figure deemed “too anatomical for the mixed public on Rittenhouse Square.”

The Rittenhouse Art show has also weathered hard times. With the nation at war in 1942, only 29 artists were able to participate, a far cry from the nearly 150 professional painters, printmakers,

and sculptors, along with more than a dozen art students exhibiting today.

Currently, the Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show, operated by the Rittenhouse Square Fine Arts Association, is a juried show exhibiting work by professional artists. From hundreds of applicants, a jury selects more than 140 professional painters, printmakers, and sculptors, as well as some art students, to exhibit twice a year.

So as you take in our 96th annual exhibition of original art chosen from among some of the finest talent in the country, you’ll see that the tradition of artistic excellence remains thriving here in the City of Brotherly Love. Art lovers and collectors, mark your calendars for the next Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show, June 2-4, 2023. For more information, visit www.rittenhousesquareart.com.

Note: All quotes and photos in this article are from archives of The Philadelphia Record, a daily newspaper published 1877-1947. Charles T. Joyce is a painter and student of history.



City Lit

PCI Library Increases Staff and Hours

By Judith Everitt, President, Friends of the PCI Library

The Philadelphia City Institute Library on Rittenhouse Square is moving toward being open eight hours a day, Monday through Friday. Now, the library has a full roster of professional librarians and two new library assistants. Programming has resumed, including Baby Storytimes, Wednesday Movie Matinees, Career Search Assistance, and English Classes. To get news about all programs, sign up for the monthly PCI Newsletter by contacting Head Librarian [Erin Hoopes](#).

The new lift makes the Children’s Library and the Community Room on the lower level accessible to all. The lift was installed just before the COVID outbreak in 2020, after a major fundraising campaign led by Friends of the PCI Library.

Library patrons can subscribe to [Booklist Reader](#), a free online publication. Each issue contains author interviews, book group ideas, and “Reserve These Reads,” a feature that lists books coming out soon. You can place a hold on these new titles before most other readers!

If the Free Library does not have a book you want, you can suggest a purchase.

- Go to <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/contact/> to find the Ask a Librarian form.
- Fill out the form with your request including book title and author.
- The librarians in Acquisitions will determine if the library can purchase the book. You will receive an email with their answer.

Alternatively, especially if it’s an older book, you may borrow the book from any library in the U.S. through Inter-Library Loan, under Programs & Services on the Free Library [website](#).

The Friends of the Philadelphia City Institute is a volunteer-run nonprofit organization whose purpose is to promote and provide fuller utilization of all physical and cultural facilities of the Philadelphia City Institute Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Membership dues and donations have supplemented collections, provided honorariums, paid for prizes, sponsored programs, and improved staff working conditions. Membership dues are \$25 for an individual, \$35 for a household, and \$100 for a supporter. On the Friends new [website](#), you can now become a new member, renew membership, and make donations.

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President's Letter

Pride and Priorities

By Rick Gross, CCRA President

I had intended to write a different letter for this issue of the Quarterly. Like all of us, I had hoped for (and almost expected) the Eagles to win the Super Bowl. Then we could have talked about the celebrations, the pride and the joy of winning it all! Alas, that wasn't to be. But there are some observations to make, even as excitement turned to disappointment and then a sense of melancholy settled in.



First, in the days leading up to the Super Bowl there was a sense of unity and camaraderie rarely seen around town. Strangers greeted each other with the ubiquitous "Go Birds" mantra. Everyone, including most of the dogs in Rittenhouse Square, wore Eagles gear—hats, sweaters, jackets and more. People seemed unified in the expected success of the team. Everyone was an expert on which squad and which players would shine.

The preceding Thursday, CCRA's Casino Night (a great success, with pictures closing out this issue) ended with the raucous singing of *Fly Eagles Fly*. For a few weeks the city seemed to bond together in expectation.

Defeat came hard. The Chiefs were not the villains that the Patriots had been five years before. Beating the G.O.A.T. and his less-than-straight-up coach was a mission that simply could not fail. On the other hand, Andy Reid and Patrick Mahomes were worthy adversaries, not enemies. So the loss, while disheartening, was not epic. And yes, we will be back with a great team and a remarkable young Black man at the helm.

What can we take from this experience? Civic pride, so plainly on display before the game, is refreshing, if a bit rare, in these parts. Being from Philadelphia was proudly celebrated. People everywhere in town felt connected to each other for a time, focusing on something other than our seemingly intractable problems. These feelings need to be remembered, even captured, as we move forward.

We are entering a critical political period. Ten, now 11, people are running to lead this melting pot of a city in its journey to full recovery from the pandemic. In the post-Super Bowl reality, the challenges we face are enormous. Poverty, crime, failed schools, dysfunctional city service delivery at almost every level...these are all the realities we face daily. Hopefully, the positive feelings of unity and shared expectations can bridge our traditional dystopian attitudes and actually make things work. We should at least recall the positive from the past few weeks as we rededicate ourselves to a better city.

And yes, we can still chant, GO BIRDS!

Rick Gross

Lighting Rittenhouse Too White, Too Bright in the Square

Text and photos by Bill West



LEDs in the 1800 block of Addison.



Afternoon lights on Addison.

I'm starting this story on Addison Street because my underlying purpose is to expand people's horizons when it comes to how we light the outdoors. Don't worry. I'll be getting to Rittenhouse Square very soon.

Addison Street is approximately two blocks from Rittenhouse Square. Quite a while ago, the residents decided to wrap their trees with Christmas lights. The lights are on, as far as I can tell, around the clock and every day of the year. The bulbs are LEDs.

There are two regular streetlights on this block. They're standard highway lights, very tall, with goose necks. These work well on highways, particularly Interstates, where they provide even illumination across large areas not obstructed by objects like trees, and where motorists are typically staring at the road in front of them, and not trying to look up at the night sky.

On Addison, the two highway lights are almost imperceptible. If you look carefully at the picture above you can see one of them, hiding among the trees in the background. There's a patch of pavement directly under it that's a bit brighter than the surrounding street.

The trees are basically eating the light from these two highway lamps, and much of the illumination on this block comes from the lights on the trees and the porch lights on the houses.

Mixing Light, Balancing Light

Let's look at how the tree lights work during the day—remember, they're on just about all the time.

I love the way the afternoon sunlight, painting the façades of the houses, receives a delicate complement from the bulbs wrapping the tree.

Mixing light from multiple sources goes on all the time. I don't think people necessarily think a lot about mixing sunlight with artificial lights, but this is a particularly pleasant example.

When mixing lights, it's important that they're balanced. Balancing doesn't mean every light needs to be the same. It means the lights need to work together and not fight one another.

Continued on p.5



September art show on the square.

Continued from p.4

Afternoon on the Square

Let's look at how sunlight works on Rittenhouse Square. Mother Nature, and her buddy the sun, have been teaching humans about light for a very long time. And it's fair to say that the impulse behind artificial illumination is to extend some form of daylight into the hours and places of darkness.

I think Mother Nature does a particularly good job of lighting Rittenhouse Square during the day. In summer the dappled light, created by a collaboration of the sun and trees, creates a very pleasant effect.



A picnic, a hammock, strollers, a stroller.

The only lighting problem during the day lies on the south side of the square, which is largely covered in shadows cast by the tall buildings on that side. The area still gets quite a lot of use, just not much from sunbathers.

As Day Turns to Night

My favorite part of the day is the time around sunset, when the sun shows what a talented lighting designer it really is.

First, late in the afternoon, comes the golden hour, when the low sun floods planet Earth with gorgeous, powerful, golden light. In this context, hour is a flexible term. And the golden hour doesn't happen every day—the weather needs to cooperate. But that just makes it all the more precious.

Sunsets bring their own joys of course, but they tend to be hard to see from the square, so I'm not going to talk about them here.

As the sun starts setting, we have the blue hour. With the departure of the sun's rays, the surface of the earth needs to look to the sky for light, and that light is blue. (The sun is still shining up there.) So the earth becomes blue, and the people walking around are blue, although we know they're not really blue.

At its best, the blue hour is a soft, subtle time before the sky goes a velvety black. Many of the pictures in this story were taken during the blue hour. I find they're just nicer pictures. Here's a shot of a building entrance on the south side of the square.

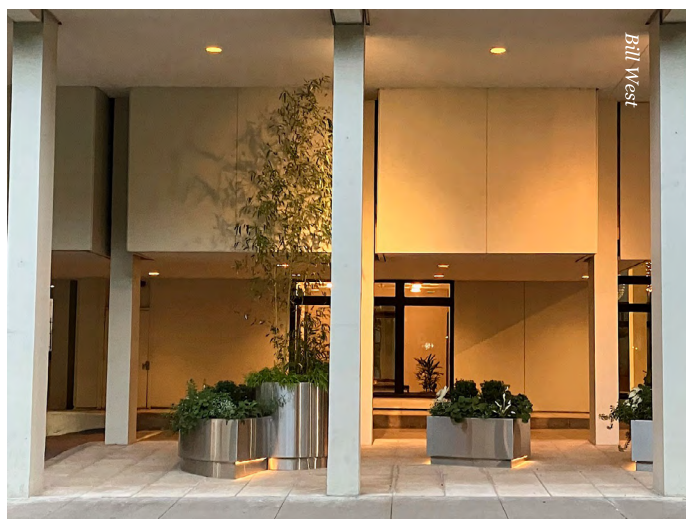


Yellow light from Thomas Edison, blue light from Mother Nature.

I love the warm, even illumination of the canopy lights, and I'm very fond of the blue masonry in the façade above the canopy. Again, it's not really blue—it just looks that way. At night, when the light of the sun has left the sky completely, the upper part of the façade will be black, perhaps punctuated by a few lit windows.

To Balance or Not to Balance

Also on the south side of the square is this building. (Years ago I photographed Ted Kennedy coming out of a fundraiser here.) There are a lot of different lights in this picture, but they are all balanced—almost balletic—and the overall result is, to my eye at least, very pleasing.



I took a picture of Ted Kennedy here.

Across the square on the north side, we have the building in the next picture. Note the very bright lights on each side of the doors. They're trying too hard, and the result is an unbalanced lighting scheme.

Continued on p.6



Attack of the killer photons.

Let's go across Walnut Street into the park. Recently the park's complement of street lamps got some new bulbs. They are the reason I'm writing this story.

Have a look at this picture of the center of the square. Those are very bright streetlights.



Help! I'm melting ... I'm melting.

Then look at the snowflakes in the trees. The snowflakes and the lamps are fighting one another, and the snowflakes are losing.

As I said, these new lights are too white and too bright. I had been struggling to articulate exactly why I had such a visceral dislike for them, and then I read Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* (English translation 1985). It's a sprawling novel centered on the Battle of Stalingrad during World War II. Here's part of a description of the morning routine at a Soviet labor camp:

"The prisoners were woken by the orderlies at five in the morning. It was still pitch dark; the barrack-huts were lit by the merciless light that is common to prisons, railway stations and the waiting-rooms of city hospitals." (P. 174.)

I don't think I'm alone in my concerns about this new, intense illumination. One evening recently, I was leaving the park, a short time after the lights came on, and I passed two women entering the park. One turned to the other and said, "Who wrote this lighting plan?"

Here is my surmise: Highway engineers wrote this lighting plan, and they did what they were trained to do.

All the Park's a Stage—or Many Stages

I hope we can all agree that this park is not a highway. I would like to go one step further. I suggest we look at it as a kind of theater—an open-air theatrical venue with a circulating audience and many stages of various sizes. This was clearly the intent of Paul P. Cret, the architect who, before World War I, produced the basic design we see today.

I frankly know very little about lighting design for the stage, so I went to the Free Library and checked out a book—J. Michael Gillette's *Theatrical Design and Production* (1987). Here's what he says about the purpose of theatrical lighting:

"Obviously, there is something more to stage lighting than simply bathing the stage with light. Effective stage lighting not only lets the spectators see the action of the play but also ties together all the visual elements of the production and helps create an appropriate mood and atmosphere that heighten the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the play." (P. 263.)

And here are four basic tasks for theatrical lighting, which I have adapted from pages 264-265 of Professor Gillette's book.

- Illuminate the stage. The audience needs to see the action on the stage.
- Highlights. The most important elements, such as the prima ballerina or the prima donna, should receive extra light. And God help you if you don't have a spotlight on the diva's face at all times.
- Modeling. Figures need to appear three-dimensional, and faces shouldn't look scary unless it's Halloween.
- Mood. Lighting, and particularly color, are powerful generators of mood.

So how are we doing in the square? Let's have a look. Here's a view to the southwest down the main walkway, with a person striding purposefully in our direction.



Sashaying on the Promenade.

Continued on p.7

Continued from p.6

Even though we're still in the blue hour (note the sky), the wooden benches on the right are highlights threatening to blow out, and the shrubbery on the left is a murky, almost featureless blob. The walkway and the person in the middle of it are bathed in contrasty light that feels chillingly cold.

What young couple would want to pause for a romantic kiss in light like this?

Highlight the Sculpture

Let's see how we're treating the stars of the show here. They would be the park's sculptures, of which I'm counting five. There's [the Duck Girl](#) in the reflecting pool—think of her as our prima ballerina. And then there are [M. Barye's Lion](#), [Billy the Goat](#), [the Giant Frog](#), and [the Sundial](#). (I'm leaving out a few smaller pieces. For more, [click here](#).)

These five sculptures all work beautifully in the sunlight. I feel bad for them after sunset. They all basically disappear. Have a look at the Duck Girl. She's a dark blob out in the reflecting pool, and you certainly can't see her face.



Duck Girl in an empty reflecting pool (November).

I did notice a little something in the drained reflecting pool, directly in front of the Duck Girl. I think this may be a light, but I'm not sure because I don't recall ever seeing it lit.



Underwater light? Maybe.

You may have noticed, in the wide shot of the fountain and the reflecting pool to the left, that the right side of the fountain wall is brighter than the left side. A few days later I had a closer look and discovered this.



Fountain Lights - One Out.

The reason for the light differential is that the easternmost of the three bulbs jury-rigged in here is not functioning. (A few days after I shot this, the bulbs had been removed.)

The only sculpture that is currently lit is Barye's Lion. I'll be gentle and say the lighting here has been inadequate for a long time, and the situation has only gotten worse with the arrival of the new bulbs in the street lamps.

The other three sculptures—the goat, the frog, and the sundial—all lack dedicated illumination.

The Guardhouse

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the guardhouse in the center of the square. It is a lovely structure, and I think it bears up reasonably well under the new lights. But it looks better when the streetlights are turned off.

Continued on p.8



The guardhouse holds its own, barely.

Rescue the Blue Hour

So, beyond the sculpture, how do we fix the overall lighting scheme in Rittenhouse Square? Let's start our planning with the blue hour.

I think a lot of city dwellers are blissfully unaware that the blue hour exists. That's partly because we hardly ever get its full effect in the city—the artificial lights are too bright. Instead of trying to drown the blue hour in photons, I suggest we celebrate it.

Time is a dimension. The gates of night lie in the blue, but we don't need to rush through them. Let's see how the lights can help us with that. Right now, they don't actually all come on at once. They seem to go on by segments—a line here, a group there. But they all go on within about ten minutes of sundown.

Let's organize this process around something other than the demands of electrical circuitry, increasing the light gradually as the need for illumination increases. We might even want to put all these lights on dimmer switches, so a lamp could start softly and gradually get brighter.

That way we'd be able to see more of the blue hour, instead of essentially shutting it down shortly after it starts.

Soften the Night

Leaves eat light. [Grass eats light](#). It's what Mother Nature designed them to do. If you want to replicate daylight in the nighttime park, you need to cut down the trees and pave the lawns. Then you will have a facsimile of a parking lot in a

suburban shopping mall. I suggest we instead aim to get our nightlights to work with the park instead of fighting it.

The point here is to put the light where it's needed to achieve your goals—i.e., illumination, highlights, modeling, and mood. Instead of wasting electricity to feed trees from lamps on high poles, put the lights where they're needed, which is generally close to the ground.

You want people to see the pathways they're walking on, so they don't trip and fall. Put low lights on short poles—knee-high or waist-high—along the edge of the walk.

Worried about people being dragged off into the bushes? Light the bushes. There's no place to hide on Addison Street at night. To quote Ernest Hemingway, a clean, well-lighted place.

And yes, the very bright, merciless light that we're getting more and more of in this town actually makes the shadows look darker.

Want a soft, romantic mood? Kill the NASA-spec lights. They're useful for a night launch, but we don't need them here.

Will Rittenhouse Square ever look like Addison Street? I doubt it. But there are many opportunities for improving the light in Rittenhouse Square. It would help to start with a lighting plan that makes sense.

Note:

The Chestnut Hill Local has been doing a good job covering the new streetlights in its area. For three stories and a letter to the editor, click [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

City Lit

Penn Professor Reports on the Lives of Immigrants in Philadelphia

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

In his new book, *The Sanctuary City: Immigrant, Refugee, and Receiving Communities in Postindustrial Philadelphia*, Domenic Vitiello describes the experiences of immigrants who came to Philadelphia in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Beginning with the history of the sanctuary movement and its changing meanings over time, he combines facts and statistics with stories of individual immigrants, their struggles and successes.

The book includes detailed chapters about people who came to Philadelphia from different parts of the world: Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras); Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos); Africa (Liberia and other African nations); Middle East (Iraq, Syria, and Palestine); and Mexico.

Each group had different problems—including military, political, economic, and violent crime—in their home countries that led them to emigrate to the U.S. In some cases, the problems cascaded subsequent to actions taken by the U.S. In some, the U.S. helped people escape their home countries, and in others, the U.S. created obstacles. Each group had different and sometimes changing legal statuses.

Most immigrants had to deal immediately with a host of challenges here: language, housing, jobs, basic necessities, health care, schools, prejudice, violence, and threats of deportation. City government, churches and synagogues, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, and libraries helped immigrants address many of these needs.

Three nonprofits, mentioned frequently, are still active in helping immigrants today: JEVS Human Services, HIAS-PA, and Nationalities Service Center. Eventually immigrants' own communities and organizations contributed the same type of assistance, as well as legal aid, cultural programs, education, and political action.

Immigrants with a higher level of education, better English-language skills, experience living in a city, legal status, and an established community from their home country were soon able to become independent and successful. Others struggled for a long time with inadequate housing and low-paying jobs. Some who had been farmers in their home country moved out of the city to resume farming.

All tried to combine cultural preservation with integration into the larger community; and all, in some way, contributed to our city and region by revitalizing deteriorating neighborhoods, opening new businesses, performing service jobs, and enriching our lives through food, art, music, and cultural traditions.

Vitiello is Associate Professor of City Planning and Urban Studies at the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design. He holds a PhD in History from Penn. Prior to his academic career, he lived in immigrant communities and was involved with immigrant organizations.

Koresh Dance Announces 2023 Home Season May 4-7

By Keila Perez-Vega

Koresh Dance Company is excited to announce their 2023 Home Season performance, *Masquerade*, May 4-7 at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre.

Masquerade is an intra-active contemporary operatic dance performance by the Koresh Dance Company, choreographed by Roni Koresh with original music composed and sung live by American soprano and composer, Sage DeAgro-Ruopp.

A collaborative and theatrical work, *Masquerade* is elevated by the elements of live singing and dance. Audience members are immersed in an unpredictable environment of new, electronic symphonic music and movement, encapsulating the liminal space of reality folding in on itself. The line between reality and fiction no longer exists. Truth belongs to the imagination of the beholder.

Performances:

Thursday, May 4, at 7:30 pm *

Friday, May 5, at 8 pm *

Saturday, May 6, at 8 pm

Sunday, May 7, at 6 pm

*Post-performance Q&A

Groups (10+) Discount available; please email pr@koreshdance.org.

Visit KORESHDANCE.ORG/HOME-SEASON for tickets.

About Koresh Dance Company

Koresh Dance Company is fully dedicated to the enrichment of the cultural landscape and artistic reputation of Philadelphia. It presents annual home seasons as the resident dance company of the Suzanne Roberts Theatre, and has toured in over 38 states and seven countries. The Koresh Dance Company strives to be an artistic force by creating innovative and emotional dance performances for audiences in Philadelphia and around the nation. The company's original dance pieces break through boundaries of traditional choreography and offer audiences an exciting experience. To learn more visit koreshdance.org.

Composer and Musician, Sage DeAgro-Ruopp

Sage DeAgro-Ruopp holds a diploma from the Oberlin Conservatory, as well as a BM and MM from the Curtis Institute of Music, where she held the Gianna Rolandi fellowship. In addition to mainstage performances, she has appeared in concerts across the country with Curtis on Tour, various music festivals, and was featured in a Curtis Symphony Orchestra concert under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Based in Philadelphia, she is a 2022 international Astral Artists competition winner.



Our Greene Countrie Towne

The Growing Season Is Here Seven Ways You Can Turn the Smallest of Spaces into a Lush Oasis

By Travis Oliver

Whether you have a balcony, window plants, a small space inside or outside your home, you can turn your dull space into a beautiful scene.

Considering the weather conditions, such as the amount of sunlight, how windy it can be, and of course, how much space you have, will help when deciding which flowers and plants to grow.

These garden ideas can help you create a beautiful space and reap the benefits of outdoor living, especially if you live in the city and don't have a traditional yard or large outdoor space.

1. Balcony Gardening—There's a good chance your balcony has limited square footage, so take advantage of all the surface area you have available. Vertical space can be

Continued on p.10

maximized, for example, with hanging planters that hook directly onto your railing; bookshelves afford great space for herbs and other small plants.

2. Choose the right-size pots—When you begin your garden, it's important to factor in the size of the planters, and resist temptation to overcrowd. Don't forget your water bases too. Give them enough space, so your plants have room to grow.
3. Use plant stands—You don't have to spend a lot of money on plant stands. As stated previously, bookshelves are great. With plant stands, you can easily move your garden toward a window that receives the most sunlight. A multi-tiered stand allows for plenty of pots without crowding the floor. Use all the same plants to make a cohesive statement, or vary your pots and planters for a cottage container-garden feel.
4. Dedicate spots for oversized planters—Using containers and pots means that you can position your plants anywhere in your space, and is a great way to personalize and add color. Adapt the size and number of pots to the space and your taste.
5. Plant according to sunlight—You need to consider how much sunlight your growing space gets. This may mean you have to position plants in certain places, and it will help in deciding which plants to choose. If you get sunlight pretty much all day, choose varieties such as petunias or marigolds. If sun is hard to come by, primroses and foxgloves, as well as shade-area wildflowers, would be good options.
6. Weather Conditions—If your balcony is quite high up your plants may also have to survive harsh winds and higher temperatures; depending on how open your balcony is, the direct sunlight may be too much. If so, try and find more sheltered areas to position the plants. Plants that are low-lying and therefore less likely to break in the wind—such as begonias, chrysanthemum, pansies, and succulents—should fare better than taller plants such as delphiniums.
7. Keep your plants hydrated—Think about the best way to do this. Ask yourself about the number of trips you'll have to make with the watering can (and don't get more plants than you'd be willing to water). It's a good idea to invest in a watering can for those top-ups for thirsty plants. And remember, plants outside will need to be watered more often than indoor plants.

Some of the best plants to grow in containers:

1. Violas—Although usually grown as an annual, violas are frost-tolerant and many survive the winter. Their compact size and free-flowering habit are a good fit for container gardening. There are a range of bright, festive colors, including white, lilac, purple, yellow and orange.
2. Pink Dianthus—Dianthus typically prefers cooler spring temperatures, but Pink is heat-tolerant so it should perform well all summer long because it's one of the best plants for pots outdoors. It's an easy-to-grow flower for those who like their container gardening neat and tidy. Plus, it can survive indoors as long as it has sunlight.
3. Mint—this should be a staple in everyone's garden. Yes, they grow fast and furious, but the benefits are amazing. You can use mint as herbs for cooking, making tea, or a delicious mojito. Mint is also a natural bug repellent. Growing mint outdoors in a container can reduce pesky bugs from bothering you.

4. Lettuce—edible and ornamental. Growing lettuce is fast and easy. They make great decorations for your garden.
5. Strawberries, green onions, and tomatoes do very well in containers outside.
6. Fresh herbs like basil, rosemary, parsley, etc., do very well in containers. Plus, you can bring them inside and take care of them during the winter months.
7. Wildflowers (pollinators) work great in pots for outside. Grown from seeds, they come in a variety of colors.

There are countless ideas you can choose. Good luck this season. Make sure you check out the *CCRA This Week* Newsletter for more tips this season. If you have any questions, email me at centercity@centercityresidents.org.



The author's indoor garden features a flowering Christmas cactus and a lemon tree.

SEPTA Bus Revolution May Cut Route 12

By Dee Kaplan and Margie Wiener

Editor's note: As part of its planned "Bus Revolution," SEPTA is evaluating ways to improve service and reduce costs, some of which entail canceling and/or consolidating a number of popular bus routes throughout the city. Among them is the Route 12 bus, which runs through the heart of Center City, and on which a large segment of our neighborhood denizens depend.

The following is from Dee Kaplan's testimony as Chair of the Academy House Neighborhood and Government Relations Committee, at a long City Council hearing January 23.

"Route 12 is apparently up for termination. This is a critical route for transporting people from Southwest Philadelphia, Grays Ferry, Old City, Society Hill, and Center City to Pennsylvania Hospital, Jefferson, Wills Eye, and the clinicians surrounding them.

"Route 12 in Center City traverses Locust Street (rife with residential buildings) and makes a right turn on 8th Street, where passengers can disembark at 8th and Spruce, virtually at Pennsylvania Hospital's front door. The bus continues down Pine Street to pick up riders from Old City, Society Hill, and Queen Village, bringing them up Walnut Street to access Jefferson, Wills Eye, and the large Penn Medicine medical building, among others.

"Many of Route 12's passengers are elderly and/or disabled. They are unable to walk to Chestnut Street to get an eastbound bus, then walk back as far as Spruce or Pine Street for a medical appointment or procedure. They also do not have the means to take cabs or Uber, particularly because many have frequent appointments.

"Never present a problem without a solution, so here are a few ideas:

"1. SEPTA mentioned that frequency is an issue. Our Route 12 passengers need a reliable schedule around which they can plan healthcare visits. Frequency would be great, but they just need that bus!

"2. SEPTA wants to increase weekend service. Most people do not see clinicians on weekends, so this is not a priority. Better to have curtailed weekend service if it means preservation of the route.

"3. SEPTA wants to eliminate redundancy. Because several other routes move west along Walnut Street, I would propose that, rather than turning from Spruce at 7th Street onto Walnut, the Route 12 continue West on Spruce Street. That would actually be more advantageous for most Route 12 riders. [In fact, according to long-term riders, Route 12 previously remained on Spruce Street.]

"4. SEPTA is concerned about low ridership. If ridership is low on Route 12, couldn't SEPTA be creative and use a smaller vehicle rather than a full-sized bus?

"Please find a way to keep Route 12. It is essential. Eliminating it will cause great hardship to senior citizens and people needing medical attention and quality healthcare. I was astounded to hear about the reconfiguration of Route 42, which I only learned about at today's hearing—a route that services Children's Hospital, HUP, the Perelman Center, and the VA Hospital! This one was a shock. I use this route frequently and can tell you it's always crowded. It's a lifeline. If the powers that be were to ride on Route 42, they'd see how many kids are on it going to Children's Hospital with their parents. It makes one truly wonder if there is any commitment on SEPTA's part to helping Philadelphia's citizens access healthcare!"

In the aftermath of the hearing, during which 60 community members voiced concerns about the plans, SEPTA announced that changes would not take place until the fall of 2024, allowing more time for revisions and community weigh-in.

Many riders feel SEPTA has neither communicated its proposed "Bus Revolution" changes well to the public nor given proper notice of its public hearings. The potential changes to Route 42 will affect not only patients traveling to healthcare sites in University City, but also scores of employees who rely on this route to get to and from work.

To direct your thoughts about the proposed route changes to SEPTA, [email planning@SEPTA.org](mailto:email_planning@SEPTA.org). To make your voice heard, contact City Councilmember Kenyatta Johnson and City Council Members-at-Large at <https://phlcouncil.com/council-members/>, as well SEPTA at <https://www.septabusrevolution.com/>



Center City's popular Route 12 bus may be on SEPTA's chopping block.

Crossing the Language Barrier Encounters with Non-English-Speakers

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

People who speak no English or only limited English are entering our city all the time. Employees and volunteers who work in organizations that encounter non-English-speakers may have difficulties communicating. Encounters with new arrivals, visitors, city-service users, and hospital patients are a few situations in which interpreters or written translations are available. (Interpreters work in spoken or sign language; translators work in written language.)

Of foreign languages spoken in Philadelphia, Spanish is number one—used by more than two-thirds—followed by Portuguese, Chinese Mandarin, Haitian Creole, Vietnamese, Arabic, French, Russian, and others, according to Philadelphia’s Office of Immigrant Affairs. The city estimates about 10,000 Ukrainian newcomers will have come to Philadelphia in 2022.

A member of the Granny Peace Brigade, a volunteer group whose members meet and greet asylum-seekers arriving by bus, reports: “Governor Abbott of Texas has been sending busloads of asylum-seekers who have crossed the U.S. Southern border from South or Central America or Caribbean islands to various northern cities on private charter buses. ...Most speak Spanish; a few understand a little bit of English. Some come from Haiti and speak French or Haitian, and some speak native dialects from South America.

“The Philadelphia Office of Immigrant Affairs sends Spanish-speakers to meet the buses and take them to the City’s welcoming facility on E. Luzerne Street in North Philadelphia. Arrivals have a difficult time because often they do not understand what’s going on around them.” Some Grannies speak Spanish and others often use Google Translate.

The Passenger Assistance team at Philadelphia International Airport (PHL) assists passengers with language issues. The team is part of the Guest Experience Department and assists U.S. Customs and Border Protection as needed by interpreting information to arriving international passengers. Some of the many languages spoken by the team are Spanish, Vietnamese, and French.

Philadelphia’s Office of Immigrant Affairs manages Language Access Philly, the city’s language access program that ensures city departments can communicate with people with limited English proficiency. In addition to bilingual staff, interpreters are available by phone or in person and perform translation of documents. Interpretation and translation services have been used for 85 languages by 62 city agencies. For more information on languages and the city, go to PHL Language Service Usage [LAP- Experience Builder \(arcgis.com\)](#)

“Most visitors we encounter speak at least limited English,” says a volunteer at the Philadelphia Visitor Center at Independence National Historic Park. “Foreign languages we hear most frequently are Spanish and French. Many visitors come with a list

of things they want to see and do. We can point those things out on a map and give directions, and we have brochures in eight languages that cover basic highlights of the city.”

At Penn Medicine and Jefferson Health, non-English-speaking patients can request an interpreter when making an appointment. Penn offers more than 140 languages. In addition, Penn Language Link, an organization of medical, nursing, and pre-health students provides volunteer interpretation services for patients.

A hospital chaplain reports that she encounters patients who do not speak any English or just a few words. Some speak Spanish, Portuguese, African languages, or Asian languages. The hospital provides an interpretation service by phone. “A nurse who speaks the patient’s language may serve as a medically knowledgeable interpreter. An English-speaking family member or friend accompanying the patient might not be able to accurately interpret medical issues.

“Chaplains frequently have very personal conversations with patients. Subjective feelings recognized in American culture may not have descriptive words in other languages and vice versa. Subtle ideas are difficult to interpret. A conversation back and forth through an interpreter does not flow easily, and it can be frustrating for the patient and chaplain. For privacy reasons, a patient might not want the interpretation assistance of a family member or friend in the conversation with a chaplain.” Nevertheless, the chaplains do the best they can under difficult circumstances.

Over three-quarters of Americans speak only English. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, “only 20 percent of Americans can converse in two or more languages, compared with 56 percent of Europeans. Experts estimate about half of the human race is bilingual, at least.”

[Preply](#), a language learning company, surveyed more than 1,000 Americans about their language skills. Key findings showed that more than 30 percent of Americans who studied a foreign language did so because it was required in school, and fewer than one in ten studied a language to proficiency. Most respondents believe learning a second language is important, and many regret not learning a second language.

There may be countless situations where no official interpreter or translation document is available. How many bus drivers, police officers, restaurant servers, store clerks, and others serving the public speak foreign languages? Bilingual bystanders may volunteer to interpret.

If you studied a language before, you can relearn it more easily than learning a new language. Learn to speak one or more of 30 languages, at your own pace, with Duolingo’s “bite-size lessons” on their free mobile app or [website](#). For more ideas on learning a new language, see this recent [article](#) in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Meet Valentyna Kuznetsova Inspiring Journey from War-torn Ukraine Led Her to Beyond Literacy

By Amanda Labrador, Communications Director, Beyond Literacy

A version of this article first appeared in the newsletter of Beyond Literacy (BeLit). Reprinted with permission.



Valentyna Kuznetsova learns English as a Second Language at Beyond Literacy.

On February 24, 2022, Valentyna Kuznetsova's life changed forever. Living near the city of Sumy in Northeastern Ukraine, Valentyna and her family awoke to gunshots and airstrikes outside their home. Russian tanks and troops filled

the streets as violent warfare broke out. Only 10 kilometers from the Russian border, Sumy was one of the first cities captured during the invasion. Scared and confused, the family sheltered in their basement, sleeping in shifts for safety.

In March, Ukraine established “green corridors” to help civilians—mostly women and children—evacuate their homes safely. Seeking refuge from the attacks in Sumy, Valentyna and her 9-year-old son, Stanislav, boarded a passenger bus to Poland. The traumatic journey was fraught with violence and devastation including collapsed bridges and roads, limited access to gas, and ongoing warfare despite the government-issued ceasefire. “The journey from East to West Ukraine was long and difficult for a small child. We were very scared and alone,” Valentyna said.

After seeking refuge in Poland for a few months, Valentyna and Stanislav were hopeful they would be able to return to their home in Ukraine. Longtime residents of Sumy, Valentyna's family was deeply rooted in their village's workforce. Valentyna, who has a master's degree in accounting, had managed Sumy's local bank branch for over 20 years. She was heartbroken to learn her family's home and community had been devastated by the attacks.

Fearing for Stanislav's education, safety, and mental health, Valentyna reached out to family living in America. Her mother and husband encouraged Valentyna to make the journey without them. They stayed behind with their beloved pets—knowing they would not be able to survive such difficult travel—and the remaining elderly community who were unable to relocate due to health concerns and limited resources.

Valentyna and Stanislav traveled to Philadelphia, where they moved into her sister-in-law's family apartment. Valentyna and her son knew little of America, the English language, or how to survive in a big city that was so different from her village.

“In Poland, it was just me and my son in a country I didn't know. Here in America, I have help. We can feel safe.”

Back in Sumy, Valentyna exuded an outgoing, bubbly personality. She took pride in knowing her customers at the bank and engaging them in conversation. Arriving in the U.S., she struggled with not speaking English, feeling like that part of her identity was stolen from her. Motivated to improve her quality of life in Philadelphia, Valentyna sought out virtual English-proficiency classes and enrolled at Beyond Literacy last September.

When Valentyna first began classes at BeLit, she was scared to speak in English and worried about making mistakes. Her ESL teacher, Shaina, quickly eased her worries and gave her the confidence she needed to start participating in class. “When I speak with Shaina, I don't feel scared because she always helps me and makes me feel good in my lessons,” Valentyna said. “I like that she is hands-on and really involved with her students.”

What Valentyna appreciates most about her BeLit classes are her fellow classmates, who make her feel part of a community again. “I look forward to my lessons because for those three hours, I can speak to people. We laugh, talk about our dreams, and forget about our problems.” [When I Study At Beyond Literacy... - YouTube](#)

Since starting classes, Valentyna's English skills have greatly improved. Shaina says Valentyna's willingness to take risks and her improved confidence are inspiring. “At first, she got discouraged easily; but she's had patience with herself and her learning process,” she said. “Now, she's vocal, candid, encouraging, and positive. She knows when she needs to ask for help and when she can trust herself to figure something out independently.”

Valentyna has found comfort and routine in her new home. Relieved to discuss more than the war, she now shares her progress in English classes with her family at the dinner table each night. She also feels peace knowing that Stanislav is adjusting positively to life in America. Since starting 3rd grade, he has made new friends, enjoys reading books, is playing sports and is quickly learning the language. “My son is happy every day and I'm really thankful for his teacher.”

After only a few months with BeLit, Valentyna has been able to progress in her studies and move into the Advanced English level. Her goal is to return soon to a career in accounting here in Philadelphia. Valentyna believes that speaking fluent English will mean more than learning a new language—it will be a pathway to a better opportunity and a fresh start in a supportive community. She explains, “Everyone has problems, but we can choose life.”

Beyond Literacy is a Philadelphia nonprofit organization whose mission is to expand opportunities and improve lives by unleashing the power of literacy through free, high-quality education. Learners speak 18 different languages. Over 70 percent are women.

[Beyond Literacy's](#) Center City Campus is located at 211 S. 13th.

Lesser-Known Gems Greater Philadelphia Museums and Attractions

By Margie Wiener

Want to learn about more unusual museums, attractions, and collaborations in our area? Before visiting, check these helpful websites for up-to-date information.

Opening March 23, the [African American Museum](#) in Philadelphia boldly collaborates with the [Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts](#) to present *Rising Sun: Artists in an Uncertain America*. Featuring new art installations spread across multiple galleries at both institutions, this groundbreaking exhibition highlights 20 artists responding to the critical question: Is the sun rising or setting on the experiment of American democracy?

The traditional style [Shofuso Japanese House & Garden](#) in Fairmount Park reflects the history of Philadelphia's Japanese culture from the 1876 Centennial Exposition to the 2007 installation of its contemporary paintings. After being [vandalized](#) in the Summer of 2022, Shofuso triumphantly reopens March 22.

The recently reopened [Athenaeum of Philadelphia](#) on Washington Square, a National Historic Landmark membership library in the Italianate Revival Style, is celebrated for its world-renowned architectural archives about Philadelphia and the world. Contact Bruce Laverty, Curator of Architecture, for a free tour of the building, including its paintings and artifacts, as well as a history of the library.



The Athenaeum of Philadelphia Reading Room.

On the Camden waterfront, the [Battleship New Jersey](#), the most decorated in Navy history, earned distinctions in World War II, and the Korean, Vietnam, and Cold Wars, as well as conflicts in the Middle East. On the Delaware River waterfront, [Independence Seaport Museum](#) in Center City is Philadelphia's historic maritime museum. Venture inside the Spanish-American War-era cruiser Olympia and the WWII-era submarine Becuna.

The [Benjamin Franklin Museum](#) in Old City is terrific for kids of all ages. Prepare to guffaw! This short [video](#) offers a preview.

[Christ Church](#) in Old City boasts a still-thriving congregation since its founding in 1695. Congregants included 15 Declaration of Independence signers. Sit in the same wooden pews where

George Washington, Ben Franklin, and Betsy Ross worshipped. The [Neighborhood House's](#) 108-year history is remarkable for its creative outreach to serve immigrants in need.

[Masonic Temple](#) in Philadelphia, on the Avenue of the Arts just north of City Hall, is a "hidden gem." This National Historic Landmark with a majestic Norman-style exterior invites visitors into an interior fantasy world of named ceremonial rooms evocative of a range of idealized architectural styles: Oriental, Gothic, Egyptian, Renaissance, Ionic, Corinthian, and Norman.

The [Henry] [Mercer Museum](#) (named for the famed archaeologist) and [Fonthill Castle](#) in Bucks County dazzle with an eclectic mix of Medieval, Gothic, and Byzantine architectural styles. Wend your way through intricate corridors into 44 rooms to view exquisite tiles and artifacts of all sizes that were used before the Industrial Revolution.

[Museum of Illusions Philadelphia](#) in Center City immerses visitors in more than 60 visual and educational [exhibits](#) featuring holograms, stereograms, and optical illusions designed to tease the senses and trick the mind. https://moiphilly.com/events/?mc_cid=a7811688fd&mc_eid=31ce1efc34

Philadelphia's [Magic Gardens](#), at 1001 South Street, is a quirky, immersive, mixed-media art museum composed entirely of glittering mosaics. Check out both the outdoor sculpture garden and the two indoor exhibits.

The [President's House: Freedom and Slavery in the Making of a New Nation](#) on Independence Mall explores the paradox of slavery and freedom at the site of the nation's first executive mansion. Here is where Presidents George Washington and John Adams lived during their terms, and where nine enslaved people served the first president. This open-air, 24-hour site features a huge glass display case containing archaeological specimens unearthed in 2007.



The President's House Site tells the story of the paradox of liberty and enslavement in one home—and in a nation.
Photo: Courtesy of Independence National Historical Park.

Continued on p.15

[Simeone Foundation Automotive Museum](#) in Northeast Philadelphia houses one of the world's greatest collections of racing sports cars, tracing their evolution. More than 75 historically significant cars include Ferrari, Alfa Romeo, Mercedes, Jaguar, Bentley, and Porsche.

[The Wagner Free Institute of Science of Philadelphia](#) in North Philadelphia, a rare surviving Victorian-era natural history museum dedicated to free science education, was constructed in the 1860s by architect John McArthur Jr., who later designed Philadelphia's City Hall. With more than 100,000 specimens still displayed as they were in the 1800s, a walk through the museum transports visitors back in time. Free.



Wagner Free Institute of Science's Cecil, the Draft Horse, in the Exhibition Hall.

Dining Scene

Two European Cafes Open in CCRA Neighborhood

By Dawn Willis

Looking for a taste of France? Or perhaps a taste of Italy is more your style? You are in luck—J'aime French Café and Bottega Rittenhouse have opened their doors on South 17th Street.

The first new café to join the CCRA neighborhood is Bottega Rittenhouse, at 263 South 17th Street. Luan Tota and his wife, Dori, opened the doors in August. Very much a “mom and pop” shop, the café is a family-run business, with their two daughters also working behind the counter. The café serves Illy coffee, homemade Italian pastries, and delicious homemade pasta. You can buy the fresh pasta available each day, or you can order specialty pastas, such as gnocchi. They also have weekly pasta specials. Bottega Rittenhouse boasts a full kitchen that serves breakfast and lunch—sandwiches, pasta dishes, soups and salads. Everything is homemade and fresh.

Dori says she and Luan want the café to have a European vibe and energy, “I love the mornings in the café—people coming in and out, ordering espresso and pastry to go, sitting for a quick bite before work. It's a very cool vibe. I love it!”

The former owners of Branzino, the Totas also sell imported Italian pantry items at Bottega Rittenhouse. For the holidays they offered gift baskets made to order. The owners invite everyone to come and try the café at least once. “Illy coffee is very popular in Europe and is a nice change from the other coffees served here in the U.S. Stop by and try something different.”

Two blocks south, at 1644 Pine Street, is the French Café J'aime. French pastry chef Bastien Ornano opened the doors of the patisserie in August. This is the second location for J'aime; the first is located at 212 South 12th Street. Bastien says he wanted to open up a second, smaller location in the Rittenhouse

neighborhood near where he and his wife live. Living close to the shop is handy, since Bastien begins his day at 4:00 am baking pastry for his cafes. J'aime also serves fresh bread daily, but the bread is not made by J'aime.

Originally from Marseille, Bastien says he wanted to create the “newer vibe” of the current Parisian pastry shops. It is light and airy, and is mainly a to-go shop. He says he was a little nervous opening in Rittenhouse, as he knows the residents here have high expectations. “Everyone has been super nice and friendly. Business has been busy. It is a blessing to be here.”

We welcome both of these new businesses to the neighborhood.



Café J'aime, at the corner of 17th and Pine.

Friends of Rittenhouse Square Announces Major Lawn Restoration Project

By Joshua Darfler, Executive Director, Friends of Rittenhouse Square

For nearly 50 years, the Friends of Rittenhouse Square has had a mission to preserve, protect and beautify Rittenhouse Square Park in Center City.

At our annual membership meeting in January, the Friends of Rittenhouse Square (FRS) announced a new multiyear lawn restoration project. This large undertaking, which has been in the planning stages for over a year, is designed to create new, lush, resilient grass throughout the entire Square, marking the first major lawn restoration in more than 20 years.



Sadly, in the decades since this last restoration, along with increased visitation since the start of COVID, the lawns have become especially barren, and thus their health has been a particular concern for FRS. Board member and Vice President of Landscaping and Operations Doug Blonsky and Operations Director June Armstrong have been leading this project.

As the retired President and CEO of New York's Central Park Conservancy, Blonsky has particular expertise in this area. "To grow healthy lawns," Blonsky said, "you need to start with healthy roots." Over the years, the foot, paw, and equipment traffic throughout the park have caused the soils in Rittenhouse Square to become extremely compacted, preventing proper penetration of water, nutrients, and oxygen—all necessary for robust root growth.

In a healthy lawn, grass roots can be found as deep as 12 inches below the surface, allowing them to store and access more reserves. These deep root systems then allow grass to quickly regrow and expand after being mowed or disturbed. In poor soil conditions, where oxygen and nutrients reach only a few inches below the surface, grass is not able to fully establish its roots and is thus easily damaged and destroyed—leading to dirt patches where nothing grows. The major focus of this project is to address and remediate the compacted soils throughout the park.

FRS is excited to continue our partnership with BrightView Landscapes to complete the work. BrightView Landscapes notably worked with the National Park Service to execute the lawn restoration project at Independence Mall in 2019, and has also been helping manage Rittenhouse Square's lawns for over five years.

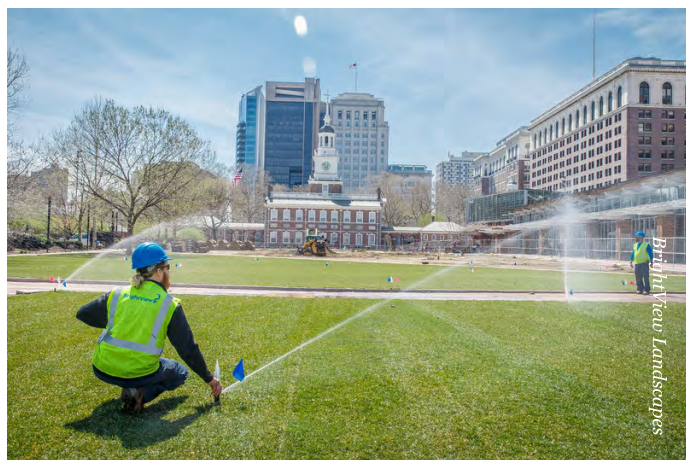
Crews from BrightView Landscapes will use their expertise to rebuild the soils in Rittenhouse Square, including aerating 10 to 12 inches below the surface, and adding soil amendments to improve quality and prevent future compaction. Their team will then re-grade the space to prevent water pooling and runoff before planting new grass.

Armstrong is working with BrightView Landscapes to research and identify proper grass species to plant. Her goal is to "select species that are able to not just survive, but actually thrive in Rittenhouse," she said, "given the heavy use of the space and the challenges of our changing world. We are looking at heat- and shade-tolerant grass species that are more prevalent in lawns further south, such as Virginia."

FRS will be working to complete repairs and upgrades to the lawn-irrigation system, and restoring protective mulch rings around our large trees to help preserve and protect them. Work will start in April with a test plot on the south end of the Square, and will then expand to include all lawns over the next couple of years. While sections are being remediated, they will be closed to the public, to allow the new lawns to fully establish, but we will work to ensure there is always ample open space for the public to enjoy, and that everyone is kept informed about the progress.

As a member-supported nonprofit organization, the Friends of Rittenhouse Square has worked tirelessly to champion our beloved Square and to raise the funds and support necessary for the maintenance of, and improvements to, the space. Rittenhouse Square is celebrated for its beautiful landscaping, clean environment, and thoughtful stewardship of historic trees and statues, all of which are made possible through the generosity of neighbors, friends, and members. Recently, the group has overseen the installation of 160 new custom benches, providing comfortable and clean seating throughout the Square; the addition of more than 90 hanging planters, adding flowers and beauty all summer long; and the replacement of uneven and deteriorating perimeter sidewalks, helping to ensure everyone's safety.

Rittenhouse Square has many fans but can always use more Friends! While this work is overseen by Friends of Rittenhouse Square, it is only made possible by the support of our members and donors. To learn more about the Friends of Rittenhouse Square, and how to support our efforts, go to www.friendsofrittenhouse.org. We look forward to seeing you around the Square and on the lawns!



Testing of the irrigation system on the completed lawn restoration project at Independence Mall.

Recent Asylum-Seekers Reaffirming Philadelphia's Reputation as a Welcoming City

By Margie Wiener

Since mid-November, the media has been full of news that more busloads of asylum-seekers have arrived in Philadelphia from Texas. According to the [Mayor's Office](#), as of December 29, 15 buses have come, carrying more than 600 people.

As of mid-February, Philadelphia has officially been declared a "Certified Welcoming" city. [Here's](#) what it means for immigrant communities.

A barrage of terms—"refugees," "asylum-seekers," "immigrants," "migrants," "sanctuary city," and "welcoming city"—has accompanied them. Many of us want to help.

According to the International Rescue Committee, both refugees and asylum-seekers flee their country of origin because of war, violence, or persecution. An official entity determines that refugees can be given international protection based on well-founded fear. On the other hand, the asylum-seekers' claim for refugee status has not yet been determined legally; they must prove to authorities that they meet the criteria to be covered by refugee protections. Not every asylum-seeker will be recognized as a refugee.

Ever since the first bus arrived from Texas, the City's Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA) press releases officially declare a Note on Terminology advising "using 'individuals and families seeking asylum' to describe arriving people. Asylum is a form of protection available to anyone at risk of serious harm in their home country who must leave in search of safety in another country."

Thousands of individuals and families who have fled extreme danger and have been fully screened by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol before coming to Philadelphia have nevertheless been described as illegal immigrants or migrants. Crossing an international border for asylum is not illegal. According to U.S. and international law, an asylum seeker's case must be heard.

"Sanctuary city" means different things in different places. The term, which has no precise legal definition, generally refers to jurisdictions that put rules around or limits on cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. "Welcoming city" is a more generic term.

The Philadelphia Inquirer recently published an in-depth [article](#) providing a broad, socio-historical perspective on the most recent wave of asylum-seekers and on Philadelphia's specific role in serving as a sanctuary city.

In Philadelphia, a major aspect of being a "sanctuary city" is that local police do not help ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) round up, arrest, and remove undocumented asylum-seekers. City officials affirm that that is the federal government's job (some people mistakenly think that "sanctuary" means the city is harboring fugitives). Indeed, Philadelphia does not officially label itself a "sanctuary city." The OIA believes the phrase has become too politically loaded and Philadelphia prefers the term "welcoming city."

As Mayor Kenney proclaimed, "We are a proud welcoming city that celebrates its vibrant immigrant community. We've welcomed thousands of Afghans, Ukrainians, and if you go back into our city's history, every ethnic group that is here came as refugees for the most part, and these folks are no different."

Immigrants have come in waves. Many of the most recent Philadelphia asylum-seekers hail primarily from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. Before this current influx, a huge wave of Ukrainians fled to the U.S. after Russia invaded their country in February 2022. According to the [city's announcement](#) at the time, "Our best estimate is that at least 10,000 Ukrainian newcomers will be coming into the Philadelphia region through 2022. As of July 17, 2022, there have been 3,772 sponsors in the Philadelphia region applying to welcome Ukrainians."

Although Asian [immigration waves](#) occurred decades earlier, the past two years have gravely impacted Philadelphia's Asian American communities because of [anti-Asian attacks](#) fueled by pandemic misinformation.

Immediately after passengers disembark near 30th Street Station, they're greeted by a highly coordinated team of providers, including representatives from the Office of Emergency Management, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, and an array of non-profit partners that provide emergency health screenings, shelter, food, on-site language interpretation, legal, social, and other services. On average, approximately 70 percent of these asylum-seekers choose to remain in Philadelphia, and are swiftly taken by SEPTA buses to the Welcome Processing Center at 600 E. Lucerne Street in North Philadelphia.

Philadelphia officials encourage donations to the city's [Welcoming Fund](#), which disburses money to regional nonprofits aiding asylum-seekers. Among the major area refugee-resettlement agencies are the [Nationalities Services Center](#) (NSC), [HIAS Pennsylvania](#) (HIAS PA), Bethany Christian Services (BCS), and Catholic Social Services (CSS).

Both NSC and HIAS PA have long provided comprehensive services in social support (such as housing placement), language access, legal and citizenship counseling, health and wellness, community integration, and employment. Thriving immigrant-aid organizations pitch in, including [Casa De Venezuela](#), [Gente De Venezuela](#), [Juntos](#), [New Sanctuary Movement](#) (whose [Walmart shopping list](#) is designed to give items directly to arriving asylum-seekers), [Aquinas Community Center](#), [PA Immigrant Family Unity Project](#) (PAIFUP), [PA Immigration and Citizenship Coalition](#), [Alianza Latina](#), the [Wyss Wellness Center](#), and the [Maria de los Santos Health Center](#).

So far, the City's fundraising campaign to [provide SEPTA Key cards](#) to asylum seekers has distributed at least 15 cards. (Donated supplies cannot be accepted.) The best way to support organizations that provide aid is through monetary donations to

Continued on p.18

the Philadelphia Welcoming Fund or to the vetted groups named above that are providing immediate and long-term relief.

A great general resource guide can be found [here](#).

Specific Resources by Category include:

Healthcare Providers Offering Foreign Language Interpreters:

[The Philadelphia Health Refugee Collaborative](#) is a regional coalition comprised of the HIAS, NSC, and BCS refugee-resettlement agencies, plus eight [refugee health clinics](#). Jefferson Health System, the regional torchbearer in meeting the needs of immigrants where they live, launched such initiatives as a Hispanic women's clinic, clinics in Chinatown and South Philadelphia staffed by Chinese and Spanish speakers, and the Wyss Wellness Center in a mainly Southeast Asian community in South Philadelphia.

Language Interpretation and Translation Services: Language Access Philly is Philadelphia's language access program ensuring that city departments can communicate with people with limited English proficiency. Its staff and interpreters are available by phone or in person to interpret or translate documents. Any organization or individual needing interpreters should contact PHL Language Service Usage at [LAP- Experience Builder \(arcgis.com\)](#). (For more on this topic see article on Page 12.)

Legal Services: The [Nationalities Services Center](#) and [HIAS Pennsylvania](#) are the primary nonprofits offering legal services to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Literacy and English Language Classes: [Beyond Literacy](#) (formerly Center for Literacy), Philadelphia's largest literacy agency, helps adults and families improve their reading, writing, math, English-language, digital literacy, and workplace skills. (For more on Beyond Literacy, see Page 13.) Several organizations teach English as a Second Language (ESL). The city coordinates the [myPLACE](#) network offering adult education and career readiness classes across 10 sites. The [Next Level Learning](#) program works with community partners to give adult learners access to education, digital skills training, and a path to job readiness. The Free Library's [Languages and Learning Center](#) works with adults who want to improve their English, basic education, digital literacy, and world language skills.

Employment: [The Welcoming Center](#) helps those who seek meaningful employment, want to start or grow a business, or become socially and civically engaged.

Human Services: While major refugee resettlement agencies coordinate comprehensive services, other organizations offer specialized help. [Granny Peace Brigade Philadelphia](#) volunteers meet asylum-seekers at the buses to offer food and supplies. Also, *Services to Older Refugees* are provided by the major refugee resettlement agencies as well as the New World Association. (See below.)

Targeted Support Services for Growing Ethnic Communities:
Ukrainians: As [Ukrainians arrived](#), they settled in neighborhoods like Northern Liberties, Fairmount, Northeast Philadelphia, and later the suburbs. [JEVS Human Services' Center for New Americans](#) at their Northeast Philadelphia site helps Ukrainians. NSC combines with other agencies like Catholic Social Services to sponsor a [Ukrainian Support Program](#), which runs a regional

Newcomer Hotline at (215) 608-1966. The [New World Association](#) focuses on serving the large Russian/Ukrainian refugee/immigrant community in greater Northeast Philadelphia.

Hispanic communities now comprise [15.2 percent of the city's population](#). They've blossomed [along SEPTA's route 47 bus line](#), from the growing Mexican community in South Philadelphia to the large Puerto Rican and Dominican communities in the north, and Central Americans scattered throughout both areas. The SEPTA line connects newer, growing Mexican and other Latin American communities in South Philadelphia to more established Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican and Dominican communities in North Philadelphia. North Philadelphia is the center of the [Hispanic community](#) and social services. Notably, the [Garces Foundation](#) targets a mostly Hispanic South Philadelphia community and offers ESL, a food pantry serving 800 families weekly, free medical and low-cost dental care, and GED prep in Spanish.

Asian Americans: The [Greater Philadelphia Asian Social Service Center](#) (GPASS) in the Olney/Logan area of North Philadelphia provides aid and counseling in their native languages citywide to residents of Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Cambodian heritage. (The Olney section has historically served as the city's Koreatown.) The [Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation](#) (PCDC) provides housing, youth, and healthcare services to Chinatown residents. Under PCDC's umbrella, the [Chinese Immigrant Family Wellness Initiative](#) offers mental-health support services for the city's 22,100 Asian immigrants. This link gives more information on the [history of the Asian American community](#) in Philadelphia, as does this [video](#).

Afghan Community: Since their country fell to the Taliban in 2021, 800 Afghan asylum-seekers have been admitted to the Philadelphia area (most in the Northeast) under "humanitarian parole" (only temporary permission to enter the U.S.). Their [situation](#) has reached crisis proportions, according to HIAS PA and other organizations providing support services.

As a final note, the most recent [U.S. Census indicates](#) that foreign-born persons in Philadelphia have increased by 14.3 percent from 2017 to 2021. Northeast Philadelphia saw the highest increase in residents who are Black, Asian, and/or Hispanic. Specifically, in the 19149 zip code, the share of these populations rose by 18 percentage points to make up 68 percent of residents there. The 19149 zip code also saw the highest increase in residents born outside the U.S. Increases in residents who speak a language other than English at home were mostly concentrated in the northeast, but parts of southwest, greater Center City, and South Philadelphia also had increases.

HIAS Pennsylvania needs volunteer interpreters and translators for these languages: Dari, Pashto, Creole, Spanish, French, Urdu, Ukrainian, Russian, Swahili, and Tigrinya. Also, they are in urgent need of men's and women's winter coats. Contact community@hiaspa.org or call 215-832-0900.

NSC needs volunteers in other areas, including teaching ESL, tutoring students with their homework, and delivering donations to families. Notably, for teaching ESL online or in person, there is no need for prior teaching experience, nor to speak a second language. In-person ESL classes are held at their Center City office at 1216 Arch Street. For information about all ongoing volunteer opportunities: <https://nscphila.org/how-help/volunteer-opportunities>

Martin Brown, Principal of Greenfield Elementary for 23 years, Remembered Fondly by Former Students

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

After Martin K. Brown died in August, at 97, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* published a beautiful [obituary](#), lauding him as “the longtime principal of the Albert M. Greenfield School, a devoted community volunteer, travel consultant, Center City neighborhood pillar, and Army veteran,” and included tributes from his family, teachers, former students, and neighbors.

In December, his former students at Greenfield, and its predecessor, City Center School, posted tributes to him on Facebook.

[Rob Stevens](#): “I attended Greenfield for five years in the late 1970s. Martin Brown felt like some idealized version of what a grade school principal should and could be. He almost made it feel like the school was his house and everyone in it was his special house guest. Greenfield, at the time, seemed like a community event that Martin Brown was expertly hosting. Back then, this was a school he ran that just appeared to work smoothly on every level. I never heard a parent complain about the school. I never heard teachers complain about their boss, Martin Brown. Brown knew everyone’s name; when I first started at the school in second grade, I was a bit intimidated by the relative size of the school. Martin Brown promised my mother he would keep an eye on me and I felt he did that with me for the next five years. Martin walked the school constantly to let people know he was there and to talk to kids and parents and teachers as perhaps a way to keep connecting. When you saw this principal, there was no fear or worry. You wanted to see him and get that smile from him that would always come.... With Martin Brown you simply couldn’t imagine him wanting to do any other job. And maybe that’s why he kept that job for so long. It was the perfect job for a gem of a man.”

[Annie Leonard](#): “Mr. Brown made every kid feel like they were the only one. I went to City Center and I was in the last class before it became Greenfield. He was kind, loving, giving and had a huge heart. I will miss him forever.”

[Melissa Stern](#): “Mr. Brown was a very kind and thoughtful man. He simply loved what he did and loved children. He changed the lives of everyone who met him.”

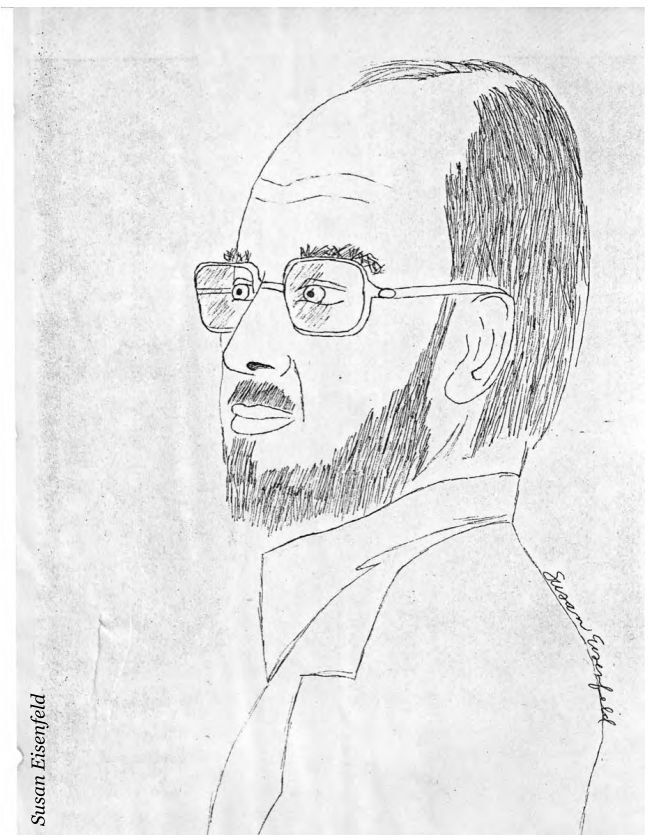
Another neighbor and former student wrote: “He was the heart of the school as well as a presence in the neighborhood. We would see him in the grocery store and around town. He genuinely cared about the students. I spoke with his daughter at his funeral and she mentioned that he chose to move to Center City to be closer to his students. He had a positive effect on generations of students. Decades later, many in my class gathered to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our 6th grade graduation. What a thrill it was for us to acknowledge Mr. Brown as adults and let him know how much he meant to us.”

[Susan Segal](#): My parents were part of the group that helped make Greenfield possible. I moved to Greenfield when it first opened and have so many amazing memories from my years there. My mom was the PTA president for many years and we all became very good friends after I graduated. He was so much more than a principal... to many of us, he was family!”

[LuLi Lisa](#): “Amazing man...best years of my life.”

[Dana Olita-Ogden](#): “He was a very kind and wise man...I vividly remember trick-or-treating at his house and being amazed that he knew every single kid that walked to the door and addressed every kid and parent by their names.”

Patty Weiner Fox: “I went to City Center School till 4th grade... and I lived around the corner from Martin Brown. He was so wonderful with his big smile and his warm and caring attitude. He did truly care about all the kids. Later in life, I’d visit him and Rita. I always called him Mr. Brown even though for years he said to call him Martin. He was forever Mr. Brown to me!” (The Weiner family owned the late great popular General Store on 20th Street.)



During a busy day as principal, Mr. Brown found time to sit for a portrait by one of his students, Susan Eisenfeld, c.1982.

A Refreshed Focus on DEIB and Art at Greene Towne

By Nicole Leapheart

When Greene Towne Montessori School opened near Logan Square in the fall of 1966, the founding families were dedicated not only to alternative education in the city, but also to have that space reflect the city around them. The founding families wanted to grow a “racially, religiously, and economically integrated school.” Along with the Montessori education model, this has been a major tenet of Greene Towne’s philosophy.

Making pivots in the organizational structure in the past few years due to COVID and last year’s flood, which devastated the school’s West Campus, Greene Towne has new initiatives in place—a refresh of the Art program and a new Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) program.

Diana Mousetis is the Art Coordinator for Greene Towne, and is a familiar face to families in the All Day Montessori program. Mousetis moved from her role as Assistant Teacher with All Day Montessori to become the full-time Art Teacher this school year.

“When an opportunity arose for me to reimagine the art program here at Greene Towne, I jumped at the chance to take this on!” she says. In addition to helping the Primary-aged children create artwork for Greene Towne’s Annual Auction, Mousetis has created a year-long curriculum filled with Montessori-inspired activities and the study of a diverse group of artists.

“Each month, an artist is introduced to each Primary classroom,” she says. “I provide an art-based work that is themed to this artist on the art shelf in each of our five Primary classrooms, for children to work with during their open work cycle. These works also incorporate different elements of art such as color, line, shape, and texture. Books about the artist are also available for each classroom’s circle times.”

Bringing art into each classroom allows for enrichment of the program by broadening the children’s choices for learning and exploring within their regular school schedule, while also minimizing transitions during their day.

“A hallmark of the Montessori approach is to build children’s focus, concentration, and self-directed learning through an extended work cycle,” says Head of School Sarah Sweeney-Denham. “We work hard to protect children’s uninterrupted time for in-depth learning and exploration in the classroom. Bringing ‘specials’ to them, rather than bringing them to the specials, enriches their experience.”

Before Greene Towne’s Parent Association (GPA) became the active and engaged group it is today, it started as a Diversity

subcommittee of the Board of Trustees. Through parent engagement and growth, the subcommittee grew into the GPA, which has had a Diversity subcommittee from the beginning. Allison Weidman (they/them) holds a formal position as DEIB Coordinator for Greene Towne, and this work extends to many areas of the school—professional development, coordination with the GPA subcommittee, and finally, with the children. Also a familiar face to families, Weidman is ready to tackle a new challenge.

“I’ve been a part of the Greene Towne community for eight years now and I am so excited for the opportunity to serve Greene Towne even further in my new role as DEIB Coordinator,” they say. “One of the ways we’ve begun to incorporate DEIB work into the classrooms on a regular basis is by having monthly projects that relate to specific holidays and/or cultural highlights that are occurring during a given month. This fits in with our goals of raising global citizens who have care, curiosity, and empathy for all the human beings in our world and to see the beauty in differences instead of fearing the unknown or experiencing confusion.”

Greene Towne moved into its new home at 55 N. 22nd Street in February, which is perfect timing to highlight these refreshed initiatives that have been part of the fabric of the school from its founding 56 years ago.

Greene Towne Montessori School serves children 18 months old through Kindergarten and is the only Montessori school in Philadelphia that is accredited by the American Montessori Society and the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools. Greene Towne holds a four-star rating through the Pennsylvania STARS program. Now enrolling. Please visit www.gtms.org to learn more.



Art Coordinator Diana Mousetis explains the Color Wheel.

Remember Horn & Hardart?

By Margie Wiener

QUESTION: What was the first automat to open in the United States? ANSWER: Horn & Hardart.

Philadelphia's Joseph Horn (1861–1941) and German-born, New Orleans transplant Frank Hardart (1850–1918) are credited with opening Philadelphia's first automat at 818 Chestnut Street in 1902.

Philadelphia automats, the “granddaddy” of American automats, were also known as “automatics” or “waiter-less restaurants.” Inspired by the widespread use of the assembly line, the automat removed the process of ordering food through professional waitstaff and allowed customers a speedier dining experience via coin-operated vending machines.

Devised to streamline dining out while offering a wide choice of freshly prepared menu items, automats were key features of greater Philadelphia's restaurant scene from the early 1900s through the mid-1960s. (In today's terms, think of an automat as a self-service diner, or server-less, coin-operated cafeteria.)

Joe Horn and Frank Hardart had operated luncheonettes and bakeries in Center City since partnering in 1888. They imported their automat technology from Quisiana, a Berlin-based manufacturer. While European automats were small, using unreliable machines, the American version pioneered by Horn & Hardart was larger and grander, with Art Deco accents, chrome paneling, stained glass windows, vaulted ceilings, and improved mechanics.

Their first Automat proved an immediate success. After it debuted, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* observed that Horn & Hardart had solved the city's “rapid transit luncheon problem” of feeding people on the move. Their official slogan, “less work for mother,” advanced their goal for easily accessible restaurant service.

Customers enjoyed diverse food choices at relatively low cost. For less than 50 cents, diners could eat three meals a day. With breakfast, lunch, and dinner items in climate-controlled glass cases that could be quickly reached, the automat not only appealed to the urban masses, but with its speed and consistency, marked the rise of the fast-food industry in the U.S. Horn & Hardart opened their second automat in 1905 at 101 South Juniper Street, the third in 1907 at 909 Market Street, and the fourth in 1912 at 21 South 11th Street.

In 1932, with more than 40 restaurants (of which 20 were automats) in the Greater Philadelphia area and many more in New York, the company was flourishing. Horn & Hardart Automats were particularly popular during the Depression era, when their macaroni and cheese, baked beans, and creamed spinach were staple items. A menu from 1940 featured these two options: a choice of juice, fruit cup or cereal, as well as eggs prepared any style, and griddlecakes; or eggs with bacon, home fries, and toast—for 25 cents. A complete breakfast special was 15 cents. French-drip coffee, Horn & Hardart's most popular offering, cost only a nickel until 1950. By 1940, including the company's New York locations (the first appearing in 1912), Horn & Hardart fed 700,000 people daily.

After World War II, Horn & Hardart struggled to keep up with modern times. Changing tastes, reliance on cars, and the escape to the suburbs slowed business. In 1981, the company filed for bankruptcy. In 1990, its last location closed in the Philadelphia area, which ended the company's nearly 90-year history.

Some interesting additional facts:

- The word “automat” comes from the Greek *automatos*, meaning “self-acting.” But automats weren't really automatic. They were heavily staffed. As customers removed a compartment's contents, behind-the-machine humans quickly slipped another sandwich, salad, or piece of pie into the vacated chamber. Horn & Hardart's automat was truly a marvel of efficiency that revolutionized the American food-service industry.
- Most Philadelphia Horn & Hardarts featured leaded glass windows, distinctive signage, and displays made of marble, glass, chrome, and porcelain.
- The original 818 Chestnut Street automat was remodeled and expanded in the 1930s. When it closed in 1968, a 35-foot section of its Art Deco interior was donated to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History for display.

The widely acclaimed documentary *The Automat* (2021) is available on HBO Max, Prime Video, Vudu, or Apple TV.



Gone but not forgotten: The empty octagonal space is where signage formerly displayed the Horn & Hardart name, more than 120 years after Horn & Hardart opened in 1902 at 818 Chestnut Street.

Post-Valentine's Day Memories: The Whitman's Story

By Margie Wiener

One of the largest and oldest brands of boxed chocolates in the U.S., Whitman's has produced confections for more than 175 years, originally by Stephen F. Whitman in Philadelphia and currently by Kansas City, Missouri-based Russell Stover Candies.

The story of Whitman's Chocolates is one of innovation. In 1842, Stephen F. Whitman, a 19-year-old Quaker, opened a "confectionery and fruiterer shoppe" at 3rd and Market Streets near the Philadelphia waterfront. Introducing a pioneering line of gourmet chocolates composed of ingredients brought by ships from abroad, Whitman was hoping to compete with the finer European candymakers of the era.

Sailors were regular customers and helped popularize Whitman's product through their travels along the Eastern seaboard. The enterprising candymaker added to his success by marketing his products in newspapers and magazines (a pioneering move among his peers) before the Civil War.

By 1866, Whitman had moved his facility to 12th and Market Streets, and began supplying wholesale products to local merchants. His son Horace F. Whitman assumed leadership of the company as president in 1869 and improved production methods while developing new products. After a fire in 1880, Whitman's Candies moved to the 600 block of Cherry Street and, in 1906, to 5th and Race Streets. By the turn of the 20th century, Whitman's Candies were on the shelves of drugstores across the region and beyond.

The Whitman's Sampler, a box of assorted chocolates, debuted in 1912. Its classic yellow box features a cross-stitching motif along the edges, a unique design inspired by traditional cross-stitching samplers. Whitman's major innovations in the Sampler were to pack assorted candies in a box along with a key helping customers identify each type of candy, and to use cellophane as a see-through window on the lid. A built-in sales tool, the novel material kept its contents fresh while presenting the chocolates as the Samplers sat on display. Whitman's was the first in its industry to use cellophane to wrap its boxes.

Whitman's was also pioneering in its advertising. At the forefront of newspaper advertising, Whitman's expanded its reach internationally. An ad in a wartime newspaper printed in France, circa 1918, said, "In peace times a pleasant luxury; in war times a fighting food—Whitman's Chocolates."

Notably, the company has maintained a longstanding tradition of supporting American servicemen and women during wartime. During World War I, millions of tins of chocolates were shipped to American soldiers worldwide. In World War II, between 1942 and 1945, more than six million pounds of chocolate were shipped to soldiers overseas. Women on Whitman's production line secretly slipped handwritten notes of encouragement into candy boxes to help ease soldiers' homesickness. And in 2001, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the tradition of sending Whitman's Samplers to servicemen and women continued.

In 1961, Whitman's was purchased by Pet, Inc., (a manufacturer of evaporated milk) as part of the company's attempt to become a food products conglomerate. In 1993, Pet sold the Whitman's brand to Russell Stover Candies, the largest supplier of boxed chocolates in the United States.

More interesting facts:

- Whitman's reports that today, one Sampler is sold every 2.5 seconds, and estimates that more than one billion Samplers have been devoured since 1912.
- In 1929, Whitman's retail store at 1626 Chestnut Street (now the site of Men's Wearhouse) was recognized as the finest building erected on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.
- In the 1950s, Whitman's struck deals with popular film stars to endorse the candy in ads for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Actors like Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, and Elizabeth Taylor were depicted with Whitman's Samplers in hand. In exchange, the ads would plug whatever current movie the star wanted to promote.
- Whitman's Samplers are traditionally given as gifts from the U.S. President to guests who visit the White House and who travel on Air Force One.
- In the early 1990s, the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., acquired the Whitman's Chocolates Collection of print advertisements and company artifacts (including old Sampler boxes) to help the public better understand how Americans lived in the 19th and 20th centuries.



A Whitman's ad, from a WWI wartime newspaper, printed in France, circa 1918. Published in *The Stars and Stripes* (Paris, France), October 25, 1918.

1721 Chestnut Street Kura Sushi

By Leo Levinson—*The Center City Foodie*

A man walked into a sushi bar, and the hostess, named Bee, showed him to a table. He said, “wasabi?” Haha!

Actually, that’s not quite the way my visit to the new Kura Sushi happened, because I didn’t just arrive and get shown to a table. I had to go back three times over three days to finally get a table. It was that busy! But I persevered, for you, my dear readers.

(Pro-tip: although you can download the Kura Sushi app through the App Store and see how long the wait is at the restaurant, the feature that allows you to put your name into a queue and watch as you advance is not yet working; you have to physically go in and put your name on the screen at the entrance and, once you get notified, you have 15 minutes to get there.)

But my perseverance paid. I had more fun at Kura Sushi than I’ve had at a restaurant in years... and the food is very good, too!

So, after three tries, THIS man walked into the sushi bar, sat down, pressed a couple of buttons on a screen and a cute robot server—yikes, is it inappropriate to call a robot cute?—comes over and brings me the green tea I ordered. Charming! Chestnut Street’s version of Kawaii Culture (Japanese cuteness culture) has arrived!

Although the cuteness is mesmerizing, the little plates of sushi are drawing my attention, zipping by on a conveyor belt at eye level and making me hungry. After a 30-second lesson from the friendly human helper, I pulled my first dish—crispy rice with spicy salmon. Yum! The rice was warm and crispy. The salmon fresh. And the plating attractive.

I pulled a few more courses from the belt, including a very enjoyable Tuna Yukhoe, a delicious contrast in flavors and textures combining tuna and boiled egg yolk with crisp seaweed wrapped around sushi rice, topped with ginger, green onion and sesame drizzled in a sweet Japanese BBQ sauce. I also liked the seared scallop sushi with Japanese mayonnaise, herring roe Kazanoka and Aburi eel with miso cream cheese. I have to say, although not at the tippy top of sushi restaurant mastery in Philadelphia, Kura Sushi’s food, flavors, quality, plating and freshness are well above average and moderately priced.

As much fun as it was to pull plates of sushi off the belt, I found it even more fun and funny to order something from the screen menu. Funny, because you watch the order zip out from the kitchen on the top belt at high speed and stop on a dime, right at your table. I ordered the spicy popcorn shrimp roll, and a minute or two later it whizzed over to me—tasty, crunchy and with just the right amount of spicy zip. I also ordered the spider hand roll, a large hand roll of lightly fried softshell crab over a bit of rice and wrapped in seaweed. It was very tasty, too.

Even disposing of the dirty plates at Kura Sushi is fun. At the end of the table is a special slot where one can just slide empty plates down the chute. Patrons get rewarded for that, too. Each plate gets counted on your app toward your lifetime count; after

each 15 plates, you win a small prize and have a special mini cartoon show on the TV screen at your table.

I could have sat there all day, pulling dishes off the conveyor belts and enjoying them, but alas I had to go. So I ordered a little something mildly sweet, Inari, which is vinegared rice wrapped in a sweet, savory, salty tofu covering cooked in dashi broth. Although this dish can get overly soggy, at Kura Sushi, Inari came out just right.

I had to see that friendly robot again, so I ordered another tea. And before you knew it, there it was, so cute and friendly. I think I overheard the guy at the next table asking for its (serial) number. Haha!

Leo Levinson, our roving food writer, is a board member of Philadelphia’s premier gourmet club, The Chaîne Des Rotisseurs, former chair of the Union League’s Grand Cru Society wine club and accomplished amateur cook. As an active foodie, resident and public relations guru in Center City West, he’ll give us the inside track, from pho to foie gras. Follow Leo on Instagram @theleolevinson.



A dish chute for the disposal of used plates sits in front of a sushi conveyor belt at Kura Sushi.

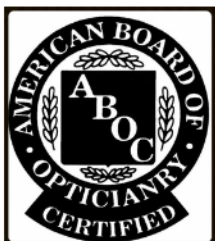


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CCRA Spring Calendar—Sunny Side Up

Philadelphia Flower Show

“The Garden Electric”
Pennsylvania Convention Center
1101 Arch Street
Saturday, March 4 to Sunday, March 12
Open daily 10 am – 7 pm
Open until 8 pm, March 4, 10, and 11
Open until 6 pm, March 12

Philly Theatre Week

Thursday, March 23 to Sunday, April 2
<https://theatrephiladelphia.org/whats-on-stage/2023-philly-theatre-week>

Rising Sun: Artists in an Uncertain America

“Is the sun rising or setting on the experiment of American democracy?”
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts
and The African American Museum
Thursday, March 23 to Sunday, October 8
<https://www.pafa.org/museum/exhibitions/rising-sun-artists-uncertain-america>

African American History & Culture Showcase

Pennsylvania Convention Center
1101 Arch Street
Saturday, April 8 to Sunday, April 9
<https://www.africanamericanhistoryshowcase.org/home.html>

90th Annual South Street Easter Promenade

Parade departs from 5th and South Streets
Costume contest at 2nd and Lombard Streets
Sunday, April 9, 12:30 pm
<https://southstreet.com/events/89th-annual-easter-promenade/>

Subaru Cherry Blossom Festival

Shofuso Japanese Cultural Center
West Fairmount Park
Saturday, April 15 to Sunday, April 16
<https://japanphilly.org/programs/festivals/cherryblossom/>

Penn Relays

Franklin Field, 235 S. 33rd Street
Thursday, April 27 to Saturday, April 29
<https://pennrelays.com/>

The Philadelphia Show

Philadelphia Museum of Art
Friday, April 28 to Sunday, April 30
<https://thephiladelphia.com/>

Blue Cross Broad Street Run

Sunday, April 30
<https://www.broadstreetrun.com/>

Voter Registration Deadline for PA Primary

Monday, May 1
Register online:
<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/pages/VoterRegistrationApplication.aspx>

Fidler Fun Day

Fidler Square, 23rd & Pine Streets
Saturday, May 6, 2 – 7 pm
(Rain date Sunday, May 7)

Rittenhouse Row Spring Festival

Walnut Street from the Avenue of the Arts to Rittenhouse Square
Saturday, May 6
<http://www.rittenhouserow.org/>

Pennsylvania Guild Fine Craft Fair

Rittenhouse Square
Friday, May 12, 11 am – 7 pm
Saturday, May 13, 11 am – 7 pm
Sunday, May 14, 11 am – 5 pm
<https://www.pacrafts.org/fine-craft-fairs/fine-craft-fair-spring-rittenhouse-square>

PA Primary Election

Tuesday, May 16
<https://www.dos.pa.gov/VotingElections/Pages/default.aspx>

Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show

Friday, June 2, 11 am – 6 pm
Saturday, June 3, 11 am – 6 pm
Sunday, June 4, 11 am – 5 pm
<http://www.rittenhousesquareart.com/>

Odunde Festival

2300 South Street (15 city blocks)
Sunday, June 11
<https://www.odundefestival.org/>

The Rosenbach's Bloomsday Festival

The Rosenbach
2008-2010 Delancey Place
A daylong public reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, featuring literati, artists, public figures, and familiar personalities along with musical performances that will bring the novel's tavern songs and arias to life.
Friday, June 16

America's Garden Capital

30+ gardens, arboreta, and historic landscapes within 30 miles
<https://www.discover>
<https://pennrelays.com/phl.com/blog/americas-garden-capital/>

Curtis Institute of Music

Live and online
Student and faculty recitals
1726 Locust Street
<https://www.curtis.edu/performances/>

To get the latest news about events in Center City, sign up for (IN) Center City, the e-newsletter of the Center City District:
<http://www.centercityphila.org/incentercity/signup.php>

To learn about more festivals and events in Philadelphia, go to
<https://www.visitphilly.com/>



Center City Residents' Association

1900 Market Street, 8th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-546-6719
centercity@centercityresidents.org
www.centercityresidents.org

LOOKING AHEAD

March 28, 7 pm — CCRA Zoning Meeting, [via Zoom](#)

April 25, 7 pm — CCRA Zoning Meeting, [via Zoom](#)

May 6, Fitter Fun Day — 2 – 7 pm

Out & About

CCRA Casino Night February 9, 2023

Photos by Ben Zuckerman

