

Newsletter of the Center City Residents' Association

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Center City Spotlight

Fitler Square's Renowned Birdhouse Collection

By Margie Wiener



More than two dozen birdhouses adorn this beloved home in Fitler Square.

You can't miss the "birdhouse house" located on 23rd Street just north of Fitler Square. Twenty-eight birdhouses decorate the side of the house. Owners Susan Harner and her husband, Chris Dawson, are committed to keeping alive the legacy of a spectacular birdhouse collection, which was started by Susan's mother, Pat, more than 20 years ago.

Noticing that birds were perching on the vines on the corner of the house, Pat decided to put up birdhouses. Neighbors were quickly attracted to them and even began donating more birdhouses. Not only did the installation draw neighborhood interest, but it also prompted a Japanese film crew to produce a documentary about the birdhouses and the history behind them.

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“Everyone stops and comments on it; they bring kids’ groups by here, school groups by here. It’s universally loved by the neighborhood,” said Susan. “It sort of became this organic, living, growing work of art.”

Two additions will soon give the collection a more contemporary look. “They’re more us,” said Susan. “A lot of these are sort of standard, old-school, exactly what you would think of when you picture a birdhouse ... these are more modern.”

So go visit. You won’t be disappointed. For more details, see https://www.fitterfocus.com/p/meet-the-family-behind-fitter-squares?mc_cid=5b8efc05d5&mc_eid=31ce1efc34



Chris Dawson and Susan Harner are dedicated to keeping alive the legacy of the birdhouse collection, which was started by her mother, Mrs. Pat Harner, more than 20 years ago.

CCCulture

Philly’s Art Scene Experiencing Uneven Post-Pandemic Recovery

By Margie Wiener

Philly’s arts sector is having a bumpy post-pandemic recovery, according to a new statewide report called *CultureCheck*, which was issued in January. It shows that recovery has been uneven across the sector. It is hoped that federal COVID recovery funds of \$6 million soon to come to Philly will address this problem.

While the arts sector in the Philadelphia region has seen cumulative recovery since the pandemic, it’s still not what it used to be. The [Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance](#) (GPCA) and [PA Humanities](#) released the following data from the preliminary findings of *CultureCheck*’s economic report.

Only one-third of respondents indicated that their audience engagement has returned to pre-pandemic levels; another 13 percent expect to reach those levels this year. However, recovery depends on the type of institution. Museums, history and science institutions, and service organizations have shown a more powerful recovery than performing arts, which lag at just 15 percent recovery.

About 25 percent of survey respondents indicated that they are still operating at diminished capacity. This is 10 percent fewer than last year. Another 17 percent said that they’re operating at “modified capacity,” or have adapted the way that they operate.

This is a key factor, said Patricia Wilson Aden, president and CEO of the GPCA, because “pre-pandemic levels” are not necessarily the standard anymore.

“Clearly, they are not looking at returning to the way things were, using those same business models and those same strategies,” Aden said. “They are adjusting to this — I hate this term — this ‘new normal’ — recognizing that the environment has changed, and we don’t have control over all of the factors that have changed [it].”

Some legacy, mainstay cultural institutions have shown a return to what they had been in 2019, such as the Philadelphia Ballet’s winter production of *The Nutcracker*, which broke records.

Other cultural groups are reimagining their presentations. For example, for its New Year’s Eve show, theater company [Tiny Dynamite](#) introduced a casual event with pop-up performances, food, and drinks, which ended early in the evening. The 5:30 and 8 pm shows were designed to allow attendees to “continue to a dinner, a party, or their PJs,” according to WHYY’s article about Philadelphia’s arts pandemic recovery.

The January release of the full *CultureCheck* report coincided with the release of a national report on the health of the cultural sector, the Americans for the Arts’ “Arts and Economic Prosperity” report (AEP6). Normally released every five years, the report was delayed due to the pandemic. The last AEP report was released in 2017.

“This recovery is an incremental but progressive process,” Aden said. “A lot of organizations have anticipated a cliff. By providing this information, our philanthropic community, our donors and other stakeholders, and our elected officials can understand that progression and ensure that cliff is mitigated.”

For further information, see https://why.org/articles/philadelphia-arts-pandemic-recovery/?mc_cid=6ba749d24f&mc_eid=31ce1efc34



CCRA is pleased to welcome InterAct Theatre Company to its growing list of Merchant Partners. InterAct is one of a number of arts organizations cited in the link above.

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President's Letter

The Art(s) of Center City Living

By Rick Gross, CCRA President

While you are reading this, it is still too early to know if our optimism over the Parker administration and our new City Council members has borne fruit. I remain hopeful based on early returns ... but the proof is the pudding, as they say, and it's still early. So I wanted to write about an entirely different topic ... the cultural richness of Center City West.

When we moved here a dozen years ago, people talked about Center City as the "Sixth Borough" of New York. Plenty of restaurants, great places to visit and live — and all at less than half the cost of Manhattan. That was true for us then ... and it still is.



Indeed, the restaurant revival is remarkable after the pandemic, and two of the 50 best new restaurants in America (according to the *New York Times*) are located in the heart of our neighborhood, with a third just across Broad Street! My Loup and Friday Saturday Sunday are indeed wonderful, and you should sample them (with reservations running a month in advance).

The Rittenhouse Row Skyplane Plan, initiated by CCRA's Remapping Taskforce, and enacted into law with our vigorous political activism, is working to limit the built environment (from 19th Street east to the Delaware River along Chestnut, Sansom, and Walnut Streets) to a human scale, preserving one of the most iconic neighborhoods on the East Coast, while allowing for reasonable upgrades and development. And Rittenhouse Square is in the midst of a multi-year plan to upgrade the lawns for everyone to enjoy.

This is all to the good, but great restaurants and walkable streets and beautiful parks are not enough to make a rich urban environment by themselves. Center City West is blessed with a richness of cultural institutions found nowhere else on the East Coast except at Lincoln Center and on Broadway.

The Kimmel Cultural Campus (now renamed as Ensemble Arts Philly) contains the finest orchestra in the world in Verizon Hall (the Philadelphia Orchestra) and three additional stages (the Perelman Theater, the Miller Theater, and the Academy of Music), which host world-class opera (Opera Philadelphia), dance (the Philadelphia Ballet) and musical theater throughout the year.

The Philadelphia Theatre Company at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre produces original productions that have gone on to win nationwide recognition with a host of Tonys and other awards. The Plays and Players Theatre hosts uproarious comedy from 1812 Productions, as well as new and classic work (with one of the best productions of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* to ever appear outside of Broadway). And the Drake hosts Azuka, Inis Nua, PlayPenn, and Simpatico theater companies all under one roof, presenting new and cutting-edge theater.

The Academy of Vocal Arts trains the finest opera singers in the United States, and their graduates populate opera houses around the world. The Curtis Institute, a leading institution for young musicians, who attend for free, offers a broad range of concerts, and its graduates populate the world's leading performance stages and orchestras. What a rich array within walking distance in our neighborhood.

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That's the good news. The less-good news is that subscribers have not returned to these institutions in anything like their pre-pandemic numbers. The Orchestra subscription rate is off dramatically ... and the other institutions report similar results.

In response, CCRA has formed relationships with the Kimmel Center institutions and The Philadelphia Theatre Company, a first for us after 75 years. Our members get discount benefits to selected performances at all of their venues. (Consult our website for details.) And we are hosting Family Fun Day at the Kimmel on April 14 to (re)introduce our members to the venue, offer a great Garces-curated boxed lunch, face painting and balloons for kids, and discounts for all performances that day.

Ever since our sold-out 75th Anniversary Gala honoring the irrepressible Yannick Nézet-Séguin as the Center City Citizen of the Decade, I have been convinced of the value of broadening our mission to engage with the cultural institutions that enrich our neighborhood.

Making the sidewalks more welcoming, improving the designs of new towers to better fit our environment, and greening the neighborhood are all critical parts of CCRA's mission.

But it's not enough. My message to all who read this is to take up the challenge, resubscribe to the venues that mean the most to you and fully reengage with that part of our city that contributes to making us the special place we are. You'll be glad you did.

Rick Gross

Living History

Philadelphia's "Mischievous" Morris Sisters

By *Margie Wiener*

Making her way through the narrow rows of wheat with her net, knife, magnifying glass, and containers, Margaretta Hare Morris was on a mission. Her neighbor's field showed signs of a fly infestation.

"Prompted by no other motive than a love of study," she later recalled, "this, to me, new insect was an object of peculiar interest." She wanted to observe the fly with her own eyes, to study its behavior, to collect specimens, and, most importantly, to devise a strategy to stop its spread.

Cutting off sections of infested wheat, she carried the bundle home to place under bell jars in the library she and her sister had created on their third floor. She hoped to watch the flies mature and transform. As she was fond of saying, "An evil investigated and understood is half-remedied."

Margaretta Hare Morris and Elizabeth Carrington Morris were two women who transformed American science in the nineteenth century. Famous for her work with cicada flies (a.k.a. Hessian flies), Margaretta was an entomologist whose discoveries of insects and their impacts on farms and orchards led to her becoming one of the first women elected to both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

Margaretta's older sister, Elizabeth, was a botanist who preferred anonymity to acclaim. Even so, she became an expert on Philadelphia's flora who supplied the country's leading botanists with plants, while also illustrating scientific books and articles, and authoring articles in popular science journals. Despite the important roles they played in their fields, despite being trailblazers, both Margaretta and Elizabeth have been forgotten.

American women have been scientists since before the sciences were even an established profession, but this

history has largely been forgotten. Though the Morris sisters would come to win acclaim for their discoveries, they faced an uphill battle to be taken seriously by their male peers.

The sisters communicated with the leading scientists of their day: Charles Darwin, Asa Gray, Louis Agassiz, and others who benefited from their discoveries. The path to that hard-won recognition began with those tiny wheat flies.

Margaretta realized that something was amiss in the summer of 1836, when she noticed that her neighbor's field was not the only one suffering. Newspapers and a few agricultural journals began reporting how Hessian fly larvae were gorging themselves on young wheat plants. Margaretta noted that the fly was appearing around Philadelphia in "appalling numbers" that had not been seen for a generation. The Hessian fly, or *Cecidomyia destructor*, was capable of devastating wheat yields, creating severe consequences for farmers and consumers alike in a culture dependent on flour and bread.

At the front lines in the fight to stave off the pests were American farmers, who for decades disagreed about the behavior of these flies and the best methods for protecting their crops. In a primarily rural country, farmers spanned social classes and political parties. They filled local newspapers with descriptions of infestations and tips on how to handle the problem: planting wheat after certain dates or planting certain kinds of wheat, burning stubble, and even seeking out and destroying the countless eggs by hand. Some overwhelmed farmers admitted that nothing they did seemed to help.

Agricultural journals — which supplied farmers with the latest information to support their work — provided a forum to debate wheat fly behavior and how they might be able to get a handle on the problem.

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These journals had begun publishing articles by a few entomologists specializing in such pests. Some farmers appreciated this, while others balked at the prospect of men who often lived in cities and were not farmers themselves presuming to instruct them in ways that countered their own observations.

While some embraced “book farming,” as it was often called, as a way to apply scientific methods to their fields, others mocked it as an unnecessary intrusion. Emotions ran high in these journals when the subject of wheat flies came up, not only because people’s experiences across regions differed, but because it invoked a cultural clash between academic expertise and lived experience. So much was at stake, including farmers’ livelihoods, particularly since wheat was the primary grain crop in the United States.

Today, entomologists recognize just how little they know about flies in the *Cecidomyia* family. Only a fraction of them have been identified, described, and named — and, by some estimates, there are close to two million species of the insect worldwide. In the early nineteenth century, however, most publications on North American pests listed just three or four *Cecidomyia*, at best. Agricultural science had not yet advanced to a point where entomologists and farmers could readily distinguish among various species of wheat flies.

Though she had never seen one before she went looking for them, Margaretta had substantial knowledge about these flies. Hessian flies had devastated American wheat fields to varying degrees from the 1780s onward, flitting around the leaves, and laying eggs that matured into ravenous larvae. Seemingly fragile and resembling mosquitos, these tiny flies wrought havoc on an enormous scale.

In her library, Margaretta read her tutor Thomas Say’s description of the Hessian fly. He wrote the kind of brief descriptions typical of entomological studies of that period. It was Say’s vague description of the fly’s behavior, though, that bothered her.

Perhaps Say had been mistaken. Or else this was not the same fly. By avoiding specifics, he had “left room for these doubts.” However, Say had died a premature death less than two years earlier, and his old friends had honored him as the founder of American entomology and zoology ever since. He was practically a scientific saint. Contradicting him would ruffle more than a few feathers.

As Margaretta looked at her bell jar full of larvae and wheat stalks, she was about to wade into this turbulent landscape of active discovery and rampant contradiction. She was neither a farmer, nor a man of science, and she found it hard to prove to either of those groups that she was qualified to speak as an expert. But that did not restrain her.

She submitted several years’ worth of findings to the American Philosophical Society and the Academy of Natural Sciences, along with specimens that had been described in articles geared toward farmers in agricultural journals. She undoubtedly raised hackles along the way, and when she

determined that she had discovered a previously unknown wheat fly, she was frustrated to find that few believed her.

Despite her training or even her close connections with other naturalists, simply being “Miss Morris” hurt her credibility and made her the object of intense criticism and even mockery. The specimens she painstakingly collected and shared were neglected until they were ruined, and knowledge of the fly she discovered — *Cecidomyia culmicola* (Morris) — vanished over time.

While Margaretta could have withdrawn because of the disrespect she faced, she instead sharpened her strategies and stepped more confidently into the public arena with each subsequent discovery she made. As she put it, “This formidable opposition roused me to renewed exertion.” The pushback she received from critics did not silence her. Instead, it served to fuel her determination.

These two brave Philadelphia pioneers defied the odds and deserve recognition.

For further information on these fascinating trailblazers, here are several sources: <https://www.amphilsoc.org/events/mischievous-creatures>
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-woman-who-solved-a-cicada-mystery-but-got-no-recognition/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaretta_Morris
<https://www.americanheritage.com/mischievous-morris-sisters>



A daguerreotype of entomologist Margaretta Hare Morris from the 1840s. Credit: Margaretta Hare Morris. MSS 449, Littell family papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

What Came Before the Laurel There Was a Fire 30 Years Ago

Text and photos by Bill West



Walnut Street on a tough day.

"On the morning of Dec. 14, 1994, a fire broke out at 1913 Walnut Street. Before it was over, six alarms had been sounded, the building — a pleasant 1897 brownstone with several commercial tenants — had been destroyed, and the neighboring buildings, including the Eric Theater, had been damaged."

That's from an article I wrote that appeared in the January 25, 1995, edition of the *Welcomat* (pp. 31-32). The *Welcomat* later became the *Philadelphia Weekly*. The switch was the right thing to do, but a tiny part of me misses that marvelously idiosyncratic name.

Most of the article is a critique of the coverage provided by the *Inquirer* and the *Daily News*, and I confess that I probably hadn't given a thought to it for several decades. Then, one day last year, I was looking at old 35-millimeter slides — digitizing some of my Kodachromes is, by this point, a multiyear project — and I picked up yet another little yellow box. On this one I had written "december 1994 walnut street fire." What fire, I thought.

As I went through the slides in the box, it slowly came back to me, and I also remembered the *Welcomat* story. It took me a while to find it. (It was mouldering in the basement.)

The images have never been published. I think they tell the story. Great art? No. But decent documentary work, in my opinion.

The photo at the beginning of this article was as close as I could get to the fire on Walnut Street. The fire department had very properly closed off the block, and I didn't have press credentials. You can see the Eric Rittenhouse sign on the right. I'm standing on Walnut just west of 19th Street.

Here's another shot of Walnut, from the 20th Street side. The firefighters are spraying into 1913 Walnut, the source of the fire. Note the firefighter on the roof. The movie theater is the white building to the right of 1913.



The firefighters used a lot of water. In the following photo (next page), you can see where all that water comes from — first a hydrant, then a pumper. This pumper is on Walnut just west of 20th, with the back of the Rittenhouse building visible across the parking lot just behind the Church of the Holy Trinity.

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(There are two steam vents in the sidewalk here. I think the white cloud is just steam. Steam clouds on the sidewalk used to be fairly common.)

Here's another pumper, on 20th just south of Moravian.



Much of the firefighting actually took place on the Sansom Street side, with equipment marshaled in the large parking lot at 20th and Sansom. This lot is now occupied by a relatively low-rise building that is part of the Laurel complex.

On a good day, the commanders at the fire scene coordinate the various vectors of approach so the firefighters don't, for instance, squirt too much water on one another. Not every day is excellent, but then that's one of the reasons firefighters wear raincoats.



Below is a shot down Moravian, looking west from 19th.



And yes, there was a lot of smoke. Going over these slides, I regularly found myself getting disoriented. I can only imagine what it's like to stand in thick smoke on the roof of a burning building.



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I think maintaining situational awareness in a situation like this must be very difficult.



And above all remembering to make sure you know where your comrades are. This is dangerous, difficult work.



In the picture below we are in Rittenhouse Square — note the Church of the Holy Trinity in the background.



Why are these men smiling? They have been in peril, and now they're out of it, and they're elated.

So that's the back story for the enormous, and may I say very attractive building that has finally succeeded the Eric Rittenhouse, 1913 Walnut, the parking lot, and a bunch of other parcels of land on this block. Personally, I am very happy about the Laurel. It's big, but they've done a lot to try to keep an intimate feel at the street level, and by and large I think they've succeeded. As the construction barriers have come down, I have felt better and better. I'm not sure why it took 30 years, but at this point, why quibble?

Town Square

CCRA President Rick Gross Gets It Done!

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

For several months, pedestrians walking by the city trash can at 20th and Locust would see litter, dog waste bags, and other debris on the sidewalk around the trash can. Residents reported it to Philly 311, and Ultimo Coffee Shop staff would eventually clean it up, but it would recur the next day. Finally, I contacted Rick Gross, President of CCRA. He said he would contact the appropriate people in the Sanitation Department.

Apartment dwellers who have no place to store their trash in between trash pickup days often throw household trash into city trash cans. Still, I thought there must be another reason. I checked to see if the metal drawer would open. It was stuck! People could not throw trash in. I reported this problem to Rick Gross. It took only one day for him to get the trash can fixed!

Gross urges people who encounter similar problems to call 311 or email Philly311@phila.gov, but “if that doesn't work, CCRA is ready, willing and able to step in. That's how we see our job.”



The offending trash can at 20th & Locust, before it was fixed.

A Vital Piece of Local History How a Slot Machine and Childhood Memories Inspired Gaming-Based Art at Philly's Rex at the Royal

By Margie Wiener

Li Sumpter is a newcomer to the creation of immersive art installations, but she quickly fell in love with the concept. Her latest work, *Time Bandit of the 7th Ward*, debuted in December at the Rex at the Royal near Broad and South Streets. Sumpter designed the work as a story-based gaming and immersive art experience. The 7th Ward was once home to 15,000 Black Philadelphians, including Octavius V. Catto and W.E.B. DuBois, and played a crucial role as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

"I decided to lean into my own practice as an artist and thought about ways that I could deepen my engagement through installations that would actually seem immersive," said Sumpter. "When you create installations it kind of gives you the opportunity to walk into that environment, even if it no longer exists."

It's the second installation in the "[Legacy Reclaimed](#)" series, a new public-private initiative that aims to revive the deep-rooted history of the city's 7th Ward for a new generation. The project honors the cultural contributions, religious institutions, and civic activism of the majority-Black voting ward.

The title "Time Bandit of the 7th Ward" comes from a childhood memory with her father. She used to hang out with her dad at

a bar he often visited. The bar was a place where many artists would collaborate and mingle.

"We would hang out and play the pinball machines and the slot machines and get really hyped up on sugar," said Sumpter. "My dad would give us endless quarters and nickels to play and would say, 'The one-armed bandit is taking all of your money.'"

One-armed bandit is a colloquial term for a slot machine. Sumpter always loved the idea of maps and time travel and felt that the name "bandit" made sense.

The art installation featured work from Sumpter's latest chapter of the transmedia narrative *Graffiti in the Grass, Illadelph Dreams: 2045*. The artifact is a fully functioning 1910 Mills bell vintage slot machine that takes nickels. It features century-old machinery but includes six new symbols on the dials.

Sumpter comes from a family of artists and educators and wants to be a key part of their legacy. "In a world that is dark and scary, it's important to provide stories of hope and light and possibility. It's really important for me to share these stories, especially for Black and brown people."

Sumpter also draws inspiration for the "Time Bandit" from her father, Phil Sumpter, an artist and sculptor who lived and worked in the 7th Ward for decades. His love for the neighborhood was apparent.

"My dad loved where he lived. He walked everywhere; he knew everybody on every block. Philly is definitely part of his blood and history."

Throughout Sumpter's installations, her father's ideas and concepts shone through. Also, he shared his photographs from the 7th Ward that are featured throughout her artwork.

"It's a blessing," Sumpter said, "to be able to offer this as a seed that can begin the idea of creating a legacy for my family."

If you plan to visit The Rex at 1524 South Street or go to [the 7th Ward website](#), you can scan a QR code to complete a brief survey that will enable you to enter a contest to win a prize.

Prize drawings are announced live at various on-site activities at The Rex, on social media, and during special Legacy Reclaimed guided tours. Those who enter the contest don't need to be present to win a prize.

Although the "Time Bandit" closed in February, expect to see additional creative installations by Li Sumpter in the future. Her works capture a vital part of local history.

For further information, see [the 7th Ward website](#), the "[Legacy Reclaimed](#)" series, and https://billypenn.com/2023/12/07/sumpter-gaming-art-rex-at-the-royal/?mc_cid=5dae8c4632&mc_eid=-31ce1efc34



Li Sumpter's *Time Bandit of the 7th Ward*, an immersive experience displayed this past winter, was the second installation in the "Legacy Reclaimed" series.

Benches in the Square

By June Armstrong

There are many things to love about Rittenhouse Square, in all weather and in all seasons. At the Friends of Rittenhouse Square, we work hard to create a space where everyone can make special and long-lasting memories. We do this, every day, for the people who love the park, and we take pride in maintaining a public square that's meant to be truly enjoyed — not simply utilized — by those who visit.

This approach and focus make the Square stand apart from other public spaces in Philadelphia. It serves as a grand urban living room for the whole city. And a living room needs comfortable places to sit.

Seating in Rittenhouse Square has changed quite dramatically over the years. In his 1922 book *Rittenhouse Square, Past and Present*, Charles J. Cohen reminisces about his childhood in the 1850s and 60s, when short stools were provided for seating.

One of the earliest photos taken in Rittenhouse Square, from about 1880, shows a group of nannies with baby carriages sitting on short, gracefully curved benches, quite similar to those found in the Square today.

Changes in Seating

These were replaced sometime in the early 20th century with a simpler design, made of cast iron legs and simple wooden slats. Their light weight and construction unfortunately made them easy targets for theft, so starting around 1935, these were then replaced by concrete-arm benches that can still be found in some areas of Fairmount Park.

Since its earliest days, Rittenhouse Square's strongest support has come from the community of Center City neighbors who live closest to it, and every generation plays an important role in caring for the individual parts that comprise the whole. The Square is in a constant process of refinement: as soon as one challenge is completed, another seems to arise.



A city worker in Fairmount Park, carrying an old bench and showing off the new ones, 1935. Credit: <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p15037coll3/id/11634/rec/2>

The Friends of Rittenhouse Square began purchasing the six-foot “Hyde Park”-style benches in the 1990s, to replace the concrete ones. Ultimately the organization purchased 145 benches, which were installed primarily between 1996 and 1997. These new wooden benches faithfully served their purpose for decades, becoming iconic in their own right.

The all-teak construction of Hyde Park benches, however, became their biggest drawback. After more than a quarter century of intense use, the all-wood construction began to fail in predictable ways. The benches were difficult to repair and still prone to further issues. A break in one part of a bench often meant another would soon follow. By 2018, it was evident that something comprehensive had to be done.

The subsequent replacement of the benches has been one of the most important and visible improvement projects for the Square in the 21st century — another example of the careful and continual refinement that makes this beloved park so special. Starting in 2019, the Friends of Rittenhouse Square brought on world-renowned landscape architect Laurie Olin, a leading expert in park furniture and urban seating, who worked with us to create an exceedingly comfortable and sensitive design suitable for a park as exceptional as Rittenhouse Square.

An Antidote to Covid

No one knew how dramatically the world would change in 2020. Rittenhouse Square became a refuge during the early days of the Covid pandemic, when lockdowns and social distancing made parks an especially important place for meeting friends and socializing. Although the increase in visitors enlivened the Square with a much-needed respite from isolation, the Friends of Rittenhouse had to adapt to the increased wear and tear that came with the uptick in activity.

Continued on p.11



Autumn 2010.

Continued from p.10

The Friends continued to work with Olin and his team to refine our initial design, and, during the latter half of 2021, finally got the benches into production with nearby manufacturer Design Provisions. The new benches are made of highly durable ipe (pronounced “e-pay”) wood slats attached to a sturdy cast aluminum frame. The benches are not only comfortable and beautiful, but their design also allows us to easily replace parts with spares on hand should they become damaged.

When it finally came time to install the new benches, the process lasted just a few short weeks over Spring 2022. Each day, as new benches were installed, old benches were removed and inspected, but nearly all were too damaged to rehome or repurpose.

The few benches in acceptable condition were donated to the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to provide some nostalgic seating for visitors at the Flower Show. I’m told (thanks to their light use) they continue to provide a place for people to sit and watch the show go by.

A Place of Honor

Our final challenge was to appropriately honor the donors from the 90s who participated in the bench-plaque program. We knew this was something important from the outset — not only for donors, of course, but also for friends and neighbors who have spent countless moments walking through the Square and reading the creative messages inscribed on them.

While removing the teak benches, we saved every plaque we could; though some were, sadly, too damaged to be preserved. Some were made of black or gold plastic, others brass; all were important parts of Rittenhouse Square history. To honor these stories and memories, a memorial wall was suggested as a place for these plaques to be displayed going forward.

In preparation for the future memorial, I had disassembled a few of the teak benches as we removed them, and saved the pieces that were still in good condition. I made numerous sketches and worked to refine the final design to what appears today in the Square. The panel is made of reclaimed teak, and serves as an elegant backdrop that showcases the variety of plaques and messages that have graced the Square.



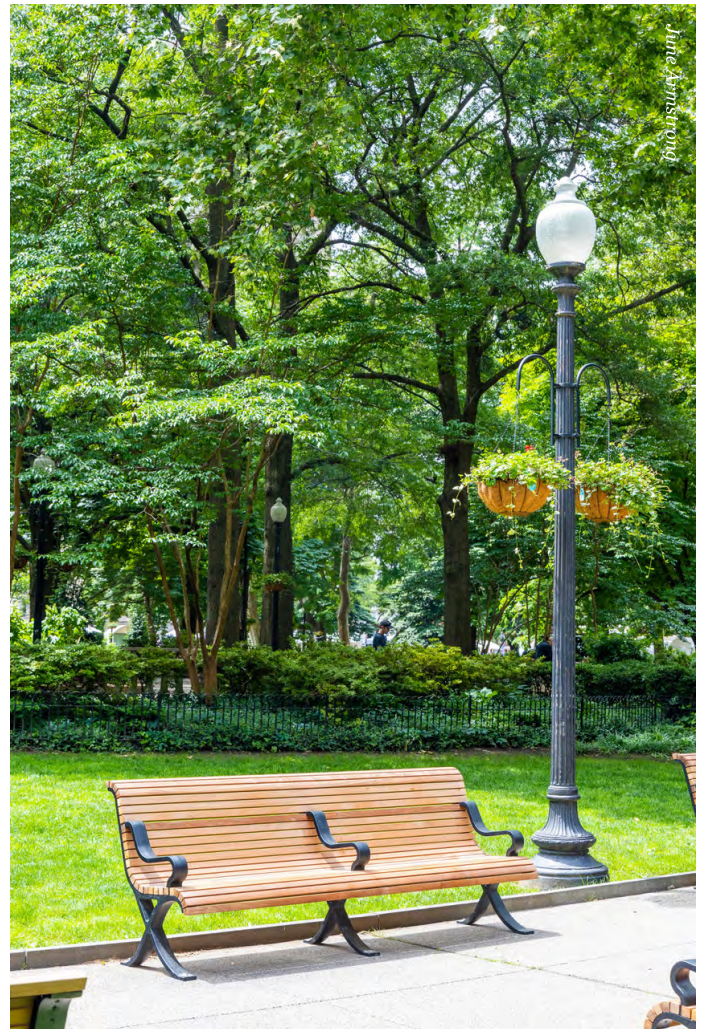
The new memorial plaque wall.

I reattached as many of the old plaques as we had, and worked to refabricate damaged plaques so that they too could be included on the wall. The memorial is now mounted on the north side of the gardener’s shed — a testament to these donors, and all Friends of Rittenhouse Square, past and present.

Today, our 165 new benches offer even more places for people to sit and make fond memories. Adopting a bench in Rittenhouse Square helps fund our ongoing operations, keeping the Square clean, green, and beautiful throughout the year. Donors can create a custom-engraved brass plaque that is then flush-mounted to the bench to better protect it from vandalism and weathering. The deep, computer-controlled engraving on these new plaques also helps ensure that their message will be preserved for decades for all who come to enjoy a rest on the bench.

Besides, what would Rittenhouse Square even be without a good place to sit?

June Armstrong is Director of Operations for the Friends of Rittenhouse Square. She and Board VP of Landscaping Doug Blonsky recently [spoke with the Philadelphia Citizen](#) about their work in the Square. For information on membership, or to adopt a bench of your own, please visit <https://www.friendsofrittenhouse.org/>, email info@friendsofrittenhouse.org, or call 267-586-5675.



Freshly installed benches in the Summer of 2022.

Meet Terry Frishman, Abstract Photographer with *Pareidolia* Images

Interviewed by Margie Wiener

Imagine my surprise when I learned that my new neighbor, Terry Frishman, is an abstract fine-art photographer whose exquisite work amazed me, made me laugh, and introduced me to a new way of seeing. Her body of work captures the everyday in a way that can shift how we see the world. I hope you'll agree!

What motivates you to photograph?

I've always been passionate about art and appreciative of the beauty in what often goes unnoticed. Photography allows me to be more present, capturing and telling stories that amuse and engage me while intending to provide different perspectives on what we see.

Why do you photograph what you photograph?

I've always cared about the underdog. Hence my work is a metaphor for the overlooked. Each abstract photo celebrates what we often walk past or step on.

As a food-business consultant, educator, and brainstormer, I love thinking out of the box, questioning assumptions, and providing alternate viewpoints.

My photographic body of work illustrates how perspective and imagination can broaden our observations and understanding of reality. How might we view urban elements and decay while considering broader themes of visibility, recognizability, and the relationship between seeing and knowing?

How do you see interesting images of waste and debris?

Through pareidolia [par-i-DOH-lee-a], a natural way we find patterns and meaning in the random — like in cloud formations — my imagination goes wild! In random textures, I feel emotions and discover people, birds, otherworldly landscapes, fantastical creatures, kissers, dancers, and more. They appear like paintings before me on textured tree trunks, sidewalks, and street curbs.



Possessed. Source: Street. Elements: Latex House Paint, Asphalt, Leaves.



Artist Terry Frishman.

Please tell me a bit more about your process of finding your images.

There are different ways I see things around me. Sometimes the subject jumps out and makes me smile or laugh. Other times, I rely on my gut to direct me. An interesting texture can draw me in before I realize what I want to express.

You mentioned you loved my photo *Sidewalk Kiss*. While walking on the sidewalk, I looked down to avoid tripping. The sealant, granite, and cement looked like two fish kissing. As I zoomed in with my camera lens, I noticed more. A band-aid on one figure's nose. Lips made from a stick. A tender hand rises from below. I then cropped the image accordingly.

How do you come up with your titles?

Since *Sidewalk Kiss*, I've been shifting towards more abstract titles that express something I feel. I don't want to tell viewers what to see. However, I like including my perspective as an artist with optional clues: Title, Source, and Elements. These are intended to open our eyes and minds to different ways of thinking and seeing, preferably after viewers have their first impressions.

You mentioned that you started to share your photographs during the pandemic. What's happened since you started this new path?

Embracing being an artist has been an incredible journey so far, with lots of learning about myself, photography, and the art world. I love my new industry friends and being part of a dynamic artist community. I can't believe my photos already have earned awards, been shown overseas, and are wanted in people's homes and galleries. It's very exciting and humbling.

Continued on p.13

You told me that people react to you when you're photographing. How is that?

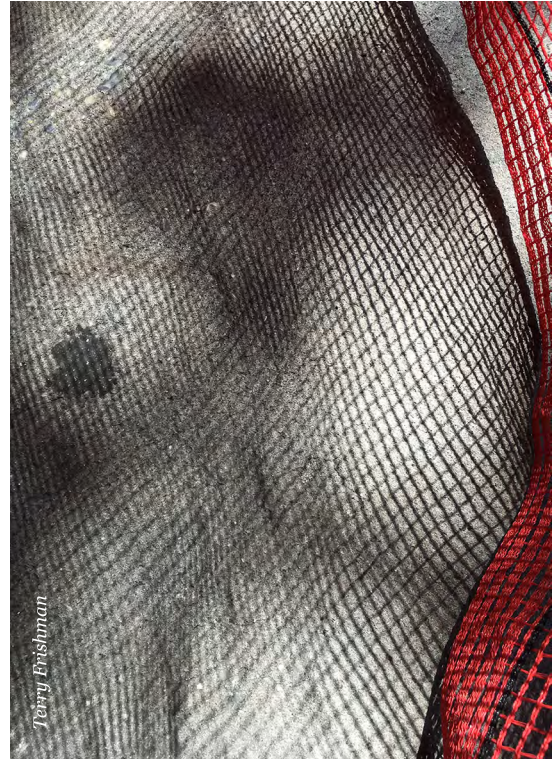
There are three types of reactions: curiosity, compassion, and fear.

1. Most people like to know what's going on — so they're curious to see what I'm looking at. Like when I was photographing *Dorian Gray*, a woman quietly approached and only engaged me after seeing what I saw. She pulled out her phone to copy the image and said, "I can't believe I live on this block, walked past this thousands of times, and never noticed it."
2. While photographing, my body might be seen sprawled on the ground, leaning over a car, or stretching up to an overhang. Sometimes, people think something's wrong, like I have lost a contact lens, and offer to help.
3. The third reaction concerns me the most. When I'm photographing in a garage, or near a residential or corporate building, sometimes I'm approached by workers with foreign accents. They will angrily ask out of fear: "Why are you here? Are you from the government? Are you from corporate? Let me see your ID." Immediately, I try to reassure them that I'm a photographer and that they have nothing to worry about. Once they look at my photos, they typically invite me to stay.

Recent work

Most recently, Frishman's photos sold in Miami during Art Basel Week. Also, they were shown in Barcelona, where they received Honorable Mention for both the Julia Margaret Cameron and the Pollux awards.

To see more of Frishman's work, please check out her [website TerryFrishman.com](http://www.TerryFrishman.com) and engage with her on [instagram @TerryFrishman_Photographer](https://www.instagram.com/TerryFrishman_Photographer). If you're visiting NYC before March 15, you can see her photos at The Fulton Center, 200 Broadway. You can reach out to her at Terry@TerryFrishman.com.



Burlesque. Source: Construction Site Netting.
Elements: Fibers, Shadows, Concrete.

The Drawing Room

Cartoon by Richard Vaughn



"I'm afraid you've caught me in a good mood."

Make Your Day: Spend an Hour at a Small Museum or Gallery

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Here is a selection of small museums and galleries located in our neighborhood, within walking distance, or a short bus ride away. Check websites for current exhibitions and hours. Admission is free for many of these exhibitions.

Center for Emerging Visual Artists (CFEVA) fosters experimentation and innovation by Philadelphia's professional artists. The organization sponsors exhibitions, fellowships, residencies, educational programs, and citywide events including the annual Philadelphia Open Studio Tours (POST) each fall.

The Barclay, 237 South 18th Street, Suite 3A
 Tuesday to Saturday, 12 – 6 pm
 Closed on certain holidays.
<https://www.cfeva.org/cfeva-gallery>

Philadelphia Art Alliance at University of the Arts exhibits experimental, original, inventive, and imaginative artwork. Founded by playwright Christine Wetherill Stevenson in 1915 and located in the former Wetherill Mansion, the Philadelphia Art Alliance merged with University of the Arts in 2018, uniting two century-old institutions. The mansion itself is worth a visit.

251 South 18th Street
 Wednesday to Friday, 10 am – 5 pm
 Saturday, 12 – 5 pm
artalliance@uarts.edu

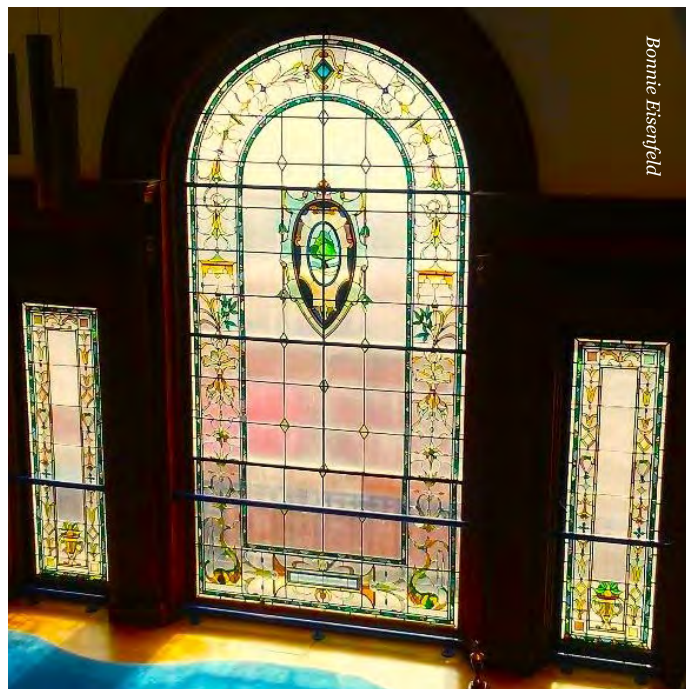
The Print Center, a nonprofit gallery, offers exhibitions of photography and printmaking as well as publications and

educational programs. Founded in 1915 as The Print Club, it was one of the first venues in this country dedicated to the appreciation of prints. In 1942, The Print Center donated its collection of prints to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

1614 Latimer Street
 Tuesday to Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm
<https://printcenter.org/>

Fabric Workshop and Museum has a collection of over 5,000 objects, including large-scale installations and sculptures, drawings and paintings, and hand-screen-printed garments and textiles.

1214 Arch Street
 Wednesday to Friday, 12 – 6 pm
 Saturday and Sunday, 12 – 5 pm
<https://fabricworkshopandmuseum.org/>



Stained glass windows at top of staircase in the Philadelphia Art Alliance at the University of the Arts, 251 S. 18th St.



Po Shun Leong and Bob Stocksdale, *Time Standing Still*, 2002, unidentified wood and metal, 64" x 42" x 13". The Museum for Art in Wood Collection, donated by the artists.

Continued on p.15

Science History Institute preserves and exhibits collections of historical materials related to scientific achievements from around the world.

315 Chestnut Street
Wednesday to Saturday, 10 am – 5 pm
<https://www.sciencehistory.org/>

Museum for Art in Wood has a collection of 1,200 contemporary objects in wood including turned objects, sculpture, and furniture. Organized by brothers Albert and Alan LeCoff, the museum opened in 1986. It offers changing exhibitions, workshops, and the Windgate Art Residency Program in Wood.

141 North 3rd Street
Wednesday to Sunday, 12 – 5 pm
<https://museumforartinwood.org/about/>

Curtis Building Lobby has one huge exhibit, “The Dream Garden,” a historic glass mosaic mural created by Maxfield Parrish in collaboration with Louis Comfort Tiffany, installed in 1916, now owned by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

6th and Walnut Streets
Monday to Friday, 7 am – 6 pm

Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens is a building and outdoor space completely covered with mosaics. The creator, Isaiah Zagar, used

handmade tiles, bottles, bicycle wheels, mirrors, and international folk art to chronicle his life and influences.

1020 South Street
Wednesday to Monday, 11 am – 6 pm
<https://www.phillymagicgardens.org/about-philadelphias-magic-gardens/>

Da Vinci Art Alliance, founded in 1931, exhibits artworks by all types of creative people, all ages, immigrants, the queer community, disabled people, and individuals with low income. The Alliance provides workshops, a fellowship and residency program, STEAM workshops for youth, Memory Care art workshops, and an annual sustainability-centered arts and science festival.

704 Catharine Street
Wednesday to Sunday 11 am – 5 pm
<https://davinciartalliance.org/history>

Arthur Ross Gallery at the University of Pennsylvania exhibits rarely seen art and artifacts from a diverse range of time periods, media, and cultures.

Housed in the Fisher Fine Arts Library
220 South 34th Street
Tuesday to Friday, 10 am – 5 pm
Saturday and Sunday, 12 – 5 pm
<https://arthurrossgallery.org/>

CCStreetwise

Community Connections

Photos by Margo Villanova

Work in progress on new the Park at Penn's Landing, which will cap I-95. <https://www.parkatpennslanding.com/>
Demolition of Walnut Street pedestrian bridge, December 2023, at right.



National Liberty Museum CEO Seeks More Municipal Investment in Philadelphia Museums and Cultural Institutions

By Margie Wiener

Alaine Arnott, CEO of the National Liberty Museum, called on Philadelphia’s new mayor, Cherelle Parker, to set as a priority investment in museums. She wrote a memo to Mayor Parker saying, “Philadelphia, the cradle of American democracy, has long stood as a symbol of liberty. It’s a quality we at the [National Liberty Museum](#) hold dear, defining liberty as the freedom to think and act as you choose, while respecting others’ right to do the same... It’s imperative that the city’s leadership prioritize an often overlooked, yet crucial driver of liberty: museums.”

Civic participation and liberty

The [beauty of democracy](#) is that it can evolve. What better place for this evolution to happen than in the cradle of American democracy itself?

Civic participation includes volunteering, voting, self-education, and engagement in civil dialogue. Museums and cultural institutions can play a vital role in facilitating this connection. The National Liberty Museum designs exhibitions and programs that not only inform but also foster a sense of community, inspiring residents to actively participate in various aspects of civic life.

Cultural spaces as forums for democracy

As the leader of the National Liberty Museum, Arnott firmly believes that museums serve a role far beyond being mere repositories for art, history, or science; they are an essential foundation of a thriving democratic society, crucial for fostering civic engagement and education. In an era where trust in major U.S. institutions is at an all-time low — with many crucial institutions [measuring well below 30 percent](#) — public confidence in museums remains high at [73.3 percent](#).

Museums not only inspire conversations about history, the arts, and culture but also cultivate discussions on shared values and ethics, all of which are crucial components of liberty. Consequently, they should be central to the city’s future planning.

At the National Liberty Museum, this mission guides their initiatives. They endeavor to create a welcoming space that actively encourages a broad range of perspectives. To further this mission, they create exhibitions and programs that concentrate on civic engagement, pluralism, and diversity of thought. The museum functions as a “living lab,” where visitors from all walks of life can explore the practical applications of liberty in everyday life. The museum facilitates nuanced dialogue on complicated issues that matter, from privacy rights and freedom of speech to the roles and responsibilities within communities.

Arnott’s ultimate goal is to foster open minds and a balanced understanding — key principles on which the concept of liberty

rests. By nurturing a culture of openness and dialogue, the museum affirms its alignment with the democratic values that are central to Philadelphia’s identity.

Historically, Philadelphia’s museums have struggled with inadequate City funding, a challenge that has hit smaller organizations like the National Liberty Museum particularly hard. These smaller museums often find themselves overshadowed by larger, more well-resourced museums.

However, smaller institutions have unique strengths: They can act quickly, experiment with new ideas, and engage the community in a more immediate and impactful way. This imbalance in funding and recognition could shift if Mayor Parker and the municipal government understand and value the symbiotic relationship between well-supported museums and a thriving, educated citizenry.

[Study after study has demonstrated](#) the profound positive impact cultural spaces can have, from enhancing children’s cognitive abilities to increasing adults’ engagement with their community. By funding museums adequately, Philadelphia can become a city where exhibitions, programs, and events are as diverse and dynamic as its people. Wouldn’t a pay-as-you-wish model be wonderful — where the city’s rich cultural tapestry is accessible to all, regardless of income?

It’s time for the city’s museums, galleries, and cultural centers, big and small, to unite as one voice, not just to air grievances — but to propose solutions. Arnott is ready and willing to collaborate with Philadelphia’s cultural institutions and the city’s new leadership to tackle societal issues, from educational reform to homelessness to safety, within the confines of our educational spaces.

The promise of a better Philadelphia

Investing in cultural institutions is not just an investment in art or history; it’s an investment in the very fabric of our democracy. Through targeted funding, collaborative solutions, and a focus on civic dialogue, Philadelphia can educate and engage its citizens, embodying the principles of liberty that our city holds dear.

“Our strength lies in our unity,” Arnott concluded, “and the essence of that unity is a shared commitment to liberty and cultural enrichment.” She urges Mayor Parker to take this to heart and invest in a brighter, more harmonious future for the City of Brotherly Love. We are stronger together as one voice, championing a Philadelphia where liberty and culture flourish side by side.

For further information, see <https://thephiladelphiacitizen.org/memo-to-madam-mayor-strengthen-bonds-among-museums/>

PAFA, a Flagship Cultural Institution, Sees Major Changes Ahead

By Margie Wiener

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) is closing its college degree programs at the end of the 2024-2025 academic year due to rising costs and declining enrollment, according to President Eric Pryor, who shared the news [in an open letter](#). PAFA's board had approved the decision after attempts to salvage the college were unsuccessful.

Founded in 1805 by the artists Charles Willson Peale and William Rush, PAFA was the first art school in the United States. Fortunately, the institution's museum will remain open.

"The higher education environment has become increasingly complicated by rising costs, expanding requirements, and dwindling enrollment," Pryor wrote in the letter. "Colleges and universities in our own region and across the country are struggling with these trends. PAFA, unfortunately, is no exception."

Pryor said that the change affects only its degree-granting programs. Other educational programs, such as its continuing education programs and K-12 arts programs, will continue to be offered by the museum. Students who are juniors and seniors in PAFA's bachelor's degree program and on track to graduate will still be able to do so, as well as MFA students.

The college will end classes for freshmen and sophomores unable to graduate by 2025, and has collaborated with other schools to transfer those 37 students to complete their education, including Temple University's Tyler School of Art and Architecture, the University of the Arts, Moore College of Art & Design, Arcadia University, and Pennsylvania College of Art and Design.

"Although we will no longer operate the BFA and MFA programs after 2025, we will continue to pursue the arts education mission at the core of PAFA's 218-year history," Pryor said. In the future, PAFA will focus on the museum, expanding its other educational programs and creating an "arts ecosystem," officials said. "In many ways, the decision to end these degree-granting programs presents PAFA with an opportunity to return to our roots—arts education for the lifestyle of the artist."

In a separate statement, the school said it became impossible to provide all the services of a college—from admissions offices to Title IX—with a student body of less than 300 people. The school will be ending extracurricular activities after this academic year.

To ensure that current degree-program students graduate, the school intends to keep 85 percent of its faculty through 2025, though some will be laid off after June 2024. It was not immediately known how many faculty members would stay on after 2025 to continue with the non-degree educational programs.

"This is a difficult day for our students, faculty, and staff," Pryor wrote. "We left no stone unturned in our efforts to find a different outcome. Key considerations were whether PAFA could continue to offer the high-quality student life experience our students expect and deserve, and whether it was financially sustainable to do so. After deep reflection, the answer to both questions was no."

"PAFA, at its heart, is a community of artists and art lovers," Pryor added, "and we will not waver from our commitment to American art, its creation, appreciation and stewardship."

Much of PAFA's legacy relates to its welcoming treatment of women over its storied history. As early as 1844, women were invited to study at the Academy, and by 1868, they could participate in live nude-model classes. In contrast, the *École des Beaux-Arts* in France did not allow women to attend its classes until 1897.

Notable alumni of PAFA include artists from Impressionist Mary Cassatt to painter Robert Henri. The American Realist painter and photographer Thomas Eakins, also an alumnus, [served as PAFA's director](#) beginning in 1882. Other important alumni include painter Henry Ossawa Tanner, one of the school's first Black students, as well as the sculptors Alexander Milne Calder and his son, Alexander Stirling Calder, and Mother Goose illustrator Jessie Willcox Smith.

Currently, there are approximately 7,000 alumni across the United States and abroad. In 2017, PAFA alumna Njideka Akunyili Crosby of Nigeria was honored with a MacArthur Grant. Her 2013 portrait of Thelma Golden, chief curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem, is in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery.

PAFA's museum was also branded a "pioneer" by [the 2019 Burns Halperin Report](#) for using the proceeds of its \$40.5-million sale of Edward Hopper's *East Wind Over Weehawken* (1934) to buy more works by women and Black artists.

The school set up a website, [PAFAForward](#), that details the future of the institution and how the changes will affect current students. It notes that PAFA could not continue operating with less than 300 students, but currently enrolls only about half of that number. According to [U.S. News & World Report](#), the school had 121 graduates in 2022.

For more on this story, see <https://www.phillyvoice.com/pafa-college-programs-close-philly-arts/>



The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Art's Historic Landmark Building, designed by Frank Furness in 1876, and the Samuel M.V. Hamilton Building, acquired by PAFA in the early 2000s. Lenfest Plaza extends the exhibition space outside, where the 51-foot-high Paint Torch sculpture by Claes Oldenburg was installed in August 2011.

Penn's Village — Not a Place — A Way to Connect, Engage and Thrive

By Sandra Sokol

Much has been written recently about the importance of social interaction for the good of our society, especially the senior population. Research has shown that health and wellbeing, and even longevity, are improved when we are actively involved with others. Individuals who are isolated can suffer physical and cognitive decline at a greater rate than those who enjoy the company of others. As we emerge from the pandemic, the effects of being isolated are still fresh in our minds.

Penn's Village's mission, in accordance with that of the Village to Village Network, is to assist older neighbors to age in place and live independently in their own homes in central Philadelphia. Through a network of volunteers, it delivers caring services and programs that increase social engagement.

The many services, programs and interest groups provide members with varied experiences that can lead to meaningful relationships with other members, give them a sense of purpose, and enrich their lives. Here is a recent example of a group that I belong to and what it means to me.

The post-holiday gathering a few months ago brought us together to discuss a short story, but it was so much more! The Penn's Village Short Story Book Club was having its second face-to-face meeting, after many monthly Zoom meetings over the past couple of years.

Holidays can be difficult for some, and, during the intra-holiday week, it was particularly relaxing and rewarding to sit together and enjoy companionship and social interaction while discussing the short story. Two days after Christmas, five of the group were in a meeting room in the Parkway Central Public Library.

Maggie, a retired English professor, was the amazing volunteer book club leader and organizer. The librarian had thoughtfully delivered from the library shelves a selection of books by the same author we were discussing. We were all prepared for a rich and lively discussion of the short story, and we were not disappointed.

Each of us has our own circumstances, and each recognizes that the book club provides connection and companionship and stimulation as we participate in an enjoyable discussion. One member had traveled over the holidays and was cautiously wearing a mask to protect others. One had to adjust and sometimes stand and walk around to relieve discomfort from a back problem. One was late arriving. One had to leave promptly to get to her next meeting.

We all cherish the time we spend once a month discussing the short story while reconnecting and socializing. The real face-to-face time together that afternoon, under the deft leadership of Maggie, was enriching and restorative for us all.

Reading short stories for the book club is so manageable, no matter what other pulls we have on our time. Meeting monthly, in person, is even richer now that we have that choice, giving us a little structure. Having an achievable goal and purpose of reading and preparing to discuss a short story in a comfortable grouping of Penn's Village members fits so well into our lives. But even more importantly the book club brings together friends for an hour or so of enriching social interaction, which is so important for our wellbeing. I for one, feel very fortunate to have this opportunity.

Penn's Village provides a selection of other special interest groups, led by volunteers, including several book clubs, a foodie group, a support and chat group, a writing group, two walking groups and the oldest group, the men's group. All these groups decisively incorporate social interaction and building connections within their purpose.

For more information on Penn's Village programs and services, and to view the new Welcome videos, visit www.pennsvillage.org.

For an article that highlights some of the recent research and findings on social connectedness and health: [New research shows that social interaction really can be a matter of life and death for older adults - McKnight's Senior Living \(mcknights-seniorliving.com\)](https://www.mcknight.com/news/new-research-shows-that-social-interaction-really-can-be-a-matter-of-life-and-death-for-older-adults-mcknight-senior-living).



Penn's Village friends enjoying the annual garden party together.



Penn's Village Men's Group enjoys camaraderie and conversation.

Free Library and PCI Announce Expanded Hours, Saturdays Included

By Erin Hoopes

Philadelphia City Institute Library at 1905 Locust Street is happy to announce expanded hours. We are now open:

- Mondays and Tuesdays, 11 am – 7 pm
- Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, 10 am – 5 pm

Spring Programs

For Preschoolers

- Toddler Storytime, Tuesdays at 11:15 am
- Toddler Art Studio, select Thursdays at 11:15 am
- Baby Storytime, Fridays at 10:30 am

For School-age Children

- LEAP, PCI's drop-in Literacy Enrichment Afterschool Program, is held every day after school, with special activities offered each day:
 - Mondays, 3:30 – 5:30 pm (Creative Constructing)
 - Tuesdays, 3:30 – 5:30 pm (Sewing Club)
 - Wednesdays, 3:30 – 4:45 pm (STEAM)
 - Thursdays, 3:30 – 4:45 pm (STEAM)
 - Fridays, 3:30 – 4:45 pm (Game Day)
- Children and families, please join us for a special concert by [Ants on a Log](#) Saturday, April 6, at 11 am. Ants on a Log's award-winning music centers positivity, social justice, and silliness; this concert will feature songs about climate justice and environmental education. Recommended for ages 4-11.

For Teenagers

- Middle and high school students are invited to join us for Table & Top (TnT), a tabletop roleplay game program (similar to Dungeons & Dragons). We meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays each month at 4 pm. We are very friendly to new folk! You don't have to know anything about pen and paper RPGs and you don't have to join every single game. Bring your dice, bring your own characters, or bring nothing at all. TnT Folk adventure together!

For Adults

- Movie Matinees every Wednesday at 2 pm in the meeting room, mostly new releases. Stop by the [library](#) or call 215-685-6621 to find out titles!
- English language learners, please join us on Tuesdays at 12 pm for our English Conversation group program, which is geared toward Intermediate-level speakers.
- State Representative Ben Waxman's office is holding Mobile Office Hours at PCI every third Tuesday of the month, 11 am – 2 pm. Stop by for assistance with state-government-related programs and services.
- Frequent author talks and lectures, including these upcoming programs:
 - Monday, March 4, at 5:30 pm: John Randolph, *Schuylkill River Revival*
 - Tuesday March 19, at 5:30 pm: Sharrona Pearl, *Do I Know You? From Face Blindness to Super Recognition*
 - Tuesday, March 26 at 5:30 pm: Amy Cohen, *Black History in the Philadelphia Landscape*

Town Square

Fun and Fundraising for Bethesda Project May 31

By Alison Houghton

Let's meet up at the Market for another year of good eats and great company! Join Bethesda Project on Friday, May 31, at 7 pm for the 27th Annual Party & Auction. Heading back to Reading Terminal Market for the second year in a row, Bethesda Project celebrates their organization's largest annual fundraiser. Party & Auction is a way to honor their history and the accomplishments we have shared as a community, as well as an opportunity to toast their future. Further details to follow — to stay in the loop, follow Bethesda Project on social media! www.bethesdaproject.org



Endless items available to bid on and delicious dining options await at Bethesda Project's 27th Annual Party & Auction.

Gardening Ideas for 2024

By Travis Oliver

It's that time of year again. The cold weather is receding, and the warm weather will be upon us soon. That means it's time to plan your garden ideas for the growing season.

2024 is trending to be the “Year of Gardening.” Sustainable and tech-savvy gardening has always been a popular hobby for many people. However, as we become more aware of the impact of our actions on the environment, gardening has also become a way to promote sustainability and reduce our carbon footprint. And now, we can expect gardening to be even more tech-savvy and sustainable than ever before.

But...what type of garden do you prefer? Here are some gardening ideas for 2024 that will help you create a sustainable and tech-savvy garden.

Vertical Gardening

With space becoming increasingly scarce in the neighborhood, vertical gardening has become a popular option for those who want to grow their own produce. Vertical gardens can be created on walls, fences, and even in small spaces, making them a great option for those who want to make the most of limited space.

Eco-Gardening

Pollinator gardening is always a fan-favorite for enthusiasts. You can turn your windows, front stoops, or your backyards into a pollinator's dream by adding berry bushes, coneflowers (which are native to PA), and edible plants (see *Edible Landscaping*, below).

Composting

Composting is an important aspect of sustainable gardening, and in 2024, we can expect more people to embrace this practice. Composting helps to reduce waste and provides a nutrient-rich soil amendment for plants. With advances in technology, composting will become even easier and more efficient.

Solar-Powered Garden Lights

Solar-powered garden lights are a great way to add ambiance to your garden while reducing your energy consumption. In 2024, we can expect these lights to become even more efficient and affordable, making them a great option for those who want to reduce their carbon footprint.

Edible Landscaping

Edible landscaping is a trend that has been gaining popularity in recent years, and in 2024, we can expect it to become even more mainstream. This involves incorporating edible plants into your landscaping, such as fruit trees, berry bushes, and herbs. This not only provides fresh produce, but also adds beauty to your garden.

In conclusion, gardening in 2024 will be all about sustainability and technology. By embracing these gardening ideas, you can create a beautiful and productive garden that reduces your carbon footprint and helps to promote a more sustainable future.



Planting a pollinator garden is an environmentally sustainable way to attract native pollinator species—like bees, butterflies, and even hummingbirds!



A Year in the Life of The Young Friends of CCRA

By Michele Ettinger

It is a beautiful thing to witness a vision become a reality.

In the spring of 2023, CCRA held two focus groups for the under-40 demographic. They were very successful, as we learned what this population would like to see happen in the city, and how they can best use their volunteer time. Shortly after, The Young Friends of CCRA was born, with Kimberly Bowers and Maddie Sweitzer launching the group.

We applied for and received a generous grant from State Representative Ben Waxman's office, in the amount of \$9,000, to attract young people for "give-back" opportunities with a shared investment in the city. The Open Hearts Cafe at the Church of the Holy Trinity is where our younger group first chose to volunteer. They helped purchase supplies most needed such as clothing, shoes, and personal items; sponsored and managed a clean-your-closet drive; and volunteered in person to help sort and assemble customized clothing packages at the clothes closet.

Next, the Young Friends volunteered and sponsored the planting and irrigation system for the first native pollinator garden in our area during Love Your Park Day. They spent a beautiful autumn Saturday creating this urban oasis with the Friends of Schuylkill River Park, students from Drexel University and The Philadelphia School, and Fidler Square young families. The garden is located right next to the Markward Playground. This spring you will see the garden come to life — think beautiful flowers, birds, bees, and hummingbirds!



Young Friends of CCRA planting the first native pollinator garden in our area.

Finally, the Young Friends of CCRA and the Young Friends of Rittenhouse Square partnered and sponsored a community food drive for Philabundance during the winter holidays. They volunteered to collect and manage donated canned food items; helped purchase food and giveaways; and worked the tables during the Christmas-tree and menorah-lighting ceremonies in Rittenhouse Square. There was such an outpouring of support from the community that Philabundance needed to bring a van to pick up all the donated food!



Christmas tree lighting at table with giveaways and the Young Friends serving hot chocolate and cookies.

We thank Ben Waxman's office for the funds that provided the Young Friends of CCRA with various opportunities to embrace the spirit of community service and make a difference. It has been a rewarding year for this newly formed cohort, and we look forward to their next chapters. If you would like to join the Young Friends of CCRA, and/or help in the upcoming year of planning meaningful volunteer opportunities and fun social events, please contact Travis Oliver (centercity@centercityresidents.org).



Volunteer event at the Open Hearts Cafe, attended by State Rep. Ben Waxman, second from right.

Dining Scene

1636 Chancellor Street ALMYRA

By Leo Levinson — *The Center City Foodie*

Whoever coined the phrase, “It’s all Greek to me,” did not dine at the new restaurant Almyra. Because Almyra is unlike what most of us think of as “all Greek restaurants,” whatever that characterization might conjure in your head.

Almyra is sleek, sophisticated, bright, airy, elegant, and vibrant. It makes you feel cool and upbeat just walking in the door. Kudos to whoever did the design and the flowers because Almyra feels like the kind of chic destination restaurant you’d seek out in other big cities, and yet Philadelphia’s got it and it’s right across from the Warwick in our own CCRA district.

But Almyra’s stylish vibe is only the beginning. Its food is exciting because it brings a creative fusion of cuisine cultures, all tied together by Greek inspiration. For example, Almyra’s riff on spanakopita places the delicious feta-cheesy spinach into an Asian fried-dumpling wrapping that you dip into a tasty, tangy tzatziki sauce. One of their sushi rolls is wrapped in grape leaves instead of seaweed. Even my martini came with feta cheese-stuffed olives, instead of the predictable bleu cheese. It’s fun, right?

One of the dishes that keeps bringing us back is the saganaki, a lightly fried kefalograviera cheese covered in an ouzo-honey emulsion that they serve by dramatically lighting the dish on fire. Its warm, salty, creamy, gooey flavor is complemented by the sweet honey and anise-scented ouzo sauce. Unforgettable. Another standout is the mussels dish, served in a buttery, tomatoey broth that is perked up with ouzo and feta.

Almyra’s entrees are Mediterranean inspired, like the whole European seabass, fileted and served simply, with a ladolemono sauce, a Greek lemony garlic caper dressing. Almyra’s herb-marinated lamb chops and the herb-brined chicken are entrée standouts as well. And of course, even a modern Greek restaurant has got to have kebabs. Yet Almyra’s brings a Mexican touch to two of them — and especially, we loved the chicken kofta kabobs with middle eastern za’atar.

Almyra also has a lively, friendly bar (the words *stylish* and *sophisticated* again come to mind) and some interesting cocktails, like the tequila, blood orange and jalapeño one we liked, called Fotia. We’re hoping that Almyra will continue to enhance its wine list, bringing in more premium Greek reds.

As Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “If you do not expect the unexpected you will not find it.” And when it comes to dining at Almyra, expect delight and you will find it.

Leo Levinson, our roving food writer, is a board member of Philadelphia’s premier gourmet club, The Chaine 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



Leo Levinson

Almyra Restaurant beckons at the corner of 17th and Chancellor.



Leo Levinson

A flaming dish of saganaki.

Town Square

Another Philadelphia First Philadelphia Could Become the First U.S. City to Ban Medical Deportations

By Margie Wiener

Philadelphia is on the road to becoming the first city in the U.S. to make medical deportations illegal, according to the immigrant advocacy group [Free Migration Project](#).

In a 14-to-1 vote in December, Philadelphia City Council approved a bill that makes it illegal for a hospital in the city to send noncitizens to their home country without consent.

Claudia Martinez believes that the change is overdue for her uncle. "I'm very happy, very content, very thankful," said Martinez, who is a medical deportation advocate.

These are measures Martinez had hoped existed in 2020 when her uncle was almost medically deported to Guatemala after a car accident.

"They didn't give me an interpreter, so the hospital made that decision about his life themselves while he was unconscious," Martinez said.

With the help of the Free Migration Project, Martinez's uncle was never deported and found care at a Philadelphia clinic, where he continues to recover.

"Now he's alive and it's a real miracle," she continued.

Free Migration Project Deputy Director Adrianna Torres-Garcia said hospitals are paying "up to \$50,000 per flight to get people to another country because they don't want to provide care."

Sending an injured or ill noncitizen patient from the U.S. to another country would still be legal, as long as a caregiver or the patient gives permission, which is known as medical repatriation.

"It's really simple. It's about consent," Torres-Garcia explained.

This ordinance takes effect once new Philadelphia mayor Chelle Parker signs it.

It's Academic

TPS Announces Completion of Phase I Renovations

By Elise Greenberg

The Philadelphia School is thrilled to announce the completion of Phase 1 of the Ours to Shape renovation project, which has transformed the Lombard Yard and multi-purpose room into dynamic, inspiring spaces.

The recently finished renovations have breathed new life into the school's outdoor spaces, providing students with an environment for both play and learning. The Yard now boasts upgraded equipment, native plants, and an inviting outdoor classroom, all designed to encourage exploration and creativity in line with TPS' progressive pedagogy.

The Yard connects seamlessly with The Commons (formerly known as the multi-purpose room), which has been reimagined to foster community interaction and collaboration. Together with the new teaching kitchen, it is now a versatile space that can adapt to a variety of activities, from school gatherings, events, and presentations, to class projects and quiet reflection.

While TPS is celebrating the completion of this transformative first phase, the school is excited to share early plans for Phase Two. Next, the focus will be on renovating the lower level to establish an art room, robotics lab, science room and STEAM Commons, providing students with cutting-edge resources and opportunities to explore these fields in depth. The strategic arrangement directly supports the school's progressive curriculum, allowing for naturally integrated learning, discovery, and experimentation.

The Philadelphia School's commitment to providing an exceptional learning environment remains at the forefront of their mission, and these renovations represent a significant step in that journey. TPS is grateful for the support and enthusiasm of the community as it continues in this exciting chapter of the school's history.



Formerly known as the multi-purpose room, The Commons allows students to work outside the classroom, creates a space for community events, and opens right out to the newly updated Lombard Yard.

OUR SPONSORS

We would like to thank our sponsors for supporting our mission.

Heroes



GOODMAN
P R O P E R T I E S

CCRA Believer



JOIN US FOR THE



Rittenhouse and Fitler Square 61ST ANNUAL HOUSE & GARDEN TOUR

Sunday, June 2, 2024
1 – 5 pm



*Tickets will go on sale on the CCRA website on April 1, 2024.

CCRA Spring Calendar — Abloom with Possibilities

Philadelphia Flower Show

"United by Flowers"

Pennsylvania Convention Center

1101 Arch Street

Saturday, March 2 to Tuesday, March 12

<https://phsonline.org/the-flower-show>

Pi Day

Math enthusiasts recite the infinite digits of Pi, talk about math, and eat pie.

Thursday, March 14

<https://www.piday.org/>

African American History & Culture Showcase

Pennsylvania Convention Center

1101 Arch Street

Saturday, March 30 to Sunday, March 31

<https://www.africanamericanhistoryshowcase.org/>

PA Primary Election Dates

Monday, April 8 – Last day to REGISTER to vote in the primary election

Tuesday, April 16 – Last day to apply for a mail-in or civilian absentee ballot

Tuesday, April 23 – PRIMARY Election

County Boards of Elections must receive voted mail-in and civilian absentee ballots by 8 pm

Find your polling place:

<https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov/Pages/PollingPlaceInfo.aspx>

NEW

The Chef Conference

Friday, April 12 to Monday, April 15

<https://www.thechefconference.com/>

CCRA Kimmel Family Fun Day

Kimmel Center, Broad & Spruce Streets

Garces-curated boxed lunch, face painting and balloons for kids, and discounts for all performances that day

(*Hadestown*, *Philadanco*, and the Philadelphia Orchestra).

Sunday, April 14, 12 – 3 pm

<https://centercityresidents.org/event-5616270>

Penn Relays

Franklin Field, 235 S. 33rd Street

Thursday, April 25 to Saturday, April 27

<https://pennrelays.com/>

The Philadelphia Show

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Collectible antiques, art, and design

Thursday, April 25 to Sunday, April 28

<https://thephiladelphiashow.com/>

NEW

Ballet in the Square

Performances by the Philadelphia Ballet

Rittenhouse Square

Thursday, May 2, 5:30 and 7 pm

<https://www.friendsofrittenhouse.org/event-details/ballet-in-the-square>

Fan Expo

Pennsylvania Convention Center

1101 Arch Street

Sci-fi, horror, anime, and cosplay.

Friday, May 3 to Sunday, May 5

<https://fanexpohq.com/fanexpophiladelphia/>

Blue Cross Broad Street Run

Broad Street below Somerville to Navy Yard

Sunday, May 5, 7:30 am

<https://www.broadstreetrun.com/>

Rose Squared Fine Craft Fair

Rittenhouse Square

Friday, May 10, 11 am – 7 pm

Saturday, May 11, 11 am – 7 pm

Sunday, May 12, 11 am – 5 pm

<https://www.friendsofrittenhouse.org/event-details/2024-spring-rittenhouse-square-fine-craft-show>

"Mary Cassatt at Work"

Philadelphia Museum of Art

American Impressionist paintings, pastels, and prints depicting the lives and occupations of women

Saturday, May 18 to Sunday, September 8

<https://philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/mary-cassatt-at-work>

Bethesda Project's 27th Annual Party & Auction

Reading Terminal Market

Friday, May 31, 7 pm

www.bethesdaproject.org

CCRA Rittenhouse & Fitler Square

61st Annual Home & Garden Tour

Sunday, June 2, 1 – 5 pm

<https://centercityresidents.wildapricot.org/>

Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show

Friday, June 7, 11 am – 6 pm

Saturday, June 8, 11 am – 6 pm

Sunday, June 9, 11 am – 5 pm

<http://www.rittenhousesquareart.com/>

Odunde Festival

2300 South Street (15 city blocks)

Sunday, June 9

<https://www.odundefestival.org/>

The Rosenbach's Bloomsday Festival

The Rosenbach

2008-2010 Delancey Place

A day-long public reading featuring literati, artists, public figures, and familiar personalities along with musical performances that will bring the novel's tavern songs and arias to life.

Sunday, June 16

www.rosenbach.org

Curtis Institute of Music

Student and faculty recitals

1726 Locust Street

<https://www.curtis.edu/performances/>

America's Garden Capital

30+ gardens, arboreta, and historic landscapes within 30 miles

<https://americasgardencapital.org/>



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CCRA KIMMEL FAMILY FUN DAY



SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2024
12 – 3 PM



Garces-curated boxed lunch and face painting for kids.

Click [here](#) to use promo code: CCRA24 to receive discounts for all performances that day.

Type in promo code and hit apply to see list of available shows.

(*Hadestown*, *Philadanco*, and the Philadelphia Orchestra).

To register for event, click [here](#).

EnsembleArts
Philly

The
Philadelphia
Orchestra
Yannick Nézet-Séguin Music Director



Kimmel Center
Broad & Spruce Streets
Philadelphia