Youth Make Art, Bring Change to Ramsay Park

Submitted by St. Stephen's Youth Programs JCITs, with Bella Vervain, Abby Thompson.

On Tuesday May 1, the ninth grader leaders of St. Stephen's Youth Programs, known as the JCITs (Junior Counselors in Training), unveiled a community art piece in the park.

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South Enders gather for the Gardens

Submitted by Friends of the Public Garden

On Friday, April 27, 2018, Boston's most anticipated springtime gala, the Friends of the Public Garden's Green and White Ball, raised $675,000 for the care of the Boston Common, Public Garden and Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

Nearly 300 guests enjoyed the event.

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Flowers, harmony at Mayor's SE coffee

By Michele D. Maniscalco

After two contentious years in which hot-button issues dominated the annual Mayor's Coffee Hour in the South End, this year's event, which took place on Tuesday, May 1, was a welcome change of pace. The event was held at the South End Branch Library and was attended by approximately 100 residents who heard the thoughts and ideas of the Mayor.

Christopher Cook was on hand to talk to neighbors. Cook was joined by his director of external affairs, Ryan Woods, and other BPED employees, including the Mayor's staff, who provided updates on the status of various projects.

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Youth

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Ramsey Park near their Leons Street program location.

The teams of JCIT’s were inspired by gallery walks and videos that depicted politically-changed installation artworks by artists such as Ai Wei Wei and Jean Michel Basquiat. The students decided they wanted to create their own work that would make viewers stop and think.

Adult staff from St. Stephen’s Youth Program, along with a Tufts Tisch Scholar, and a Leesley University graduate art therapy interns worked alongside the students to make the art installation happen.

The young people debated and then determined that their artwork would address gun violence around Leons Street. “You don’t hear anything about gun violence unless it happens on Mars. I think if more people knew how much it happened they would be more encouraged to make changes,” said JCIT Evelyn Pimentel, who attends Cathedral High School.

Another artist, JCIT Brianna Rodriguez, stated, “I don’t hear about it in the news. I only hear it from the people around here. My friend’s brother was shot and the next day the window was fixed and you never even knew it happened.”

The student group used flagging tape, as the main medium of their artwork, weaving it into an isolated chain link fence to create an image in Ramsey Park. Flagging tape is a material typically used to mark off borders and boundaries, to, the image read, “Change Will Come,” a phrase the young artists adapted from a speech they heard on gun violence. In the speech, President Barack Obama said, “If Americans of every background stand up and say, ‘Enough! We have suffered too much pain, and care too much about our children to allow this to continue!’ Then, change will come.”

All of the student artists were to write their hopes, dreams, experiences, lyrics, and hashtags on pieces of the flagging tape and added each to the fence in order to contribute to the larger whole image of words.

Ramsey Park, where the art is installed, is a Leons Leonsbury- South End Park where positive change is coming. The progress is quite visible, thanks to the efforts of SSYP, other Leons area groups, and the City of Boston’s Parks and Recreation Department.

In the summer of 2015, a coalition of organizers brought its positive programming to Ramsey Park, including a basketball league, tennis lessons, mural painting, and flower-planting. This led to a commitment from the City of Boston to improve the park.

At the State of the City in January 2016, Mayor Marty Walsh announced $2.4 million toward a full renovation of the park.

The JCIT’s of St. Stephen’s Youth Programs continue to create positive change, this time with art—Community members—children and families—gathered in Ramsey Park to celebrate the art installation with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

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**Youth**  
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Two JCITs spoke movingly about their creative experience and the purpose of the artwork. Then, all the JCITs encouraged community members to participate in the process of creating art by adding their own thoughts on neighborhood violence to the installation.

Under sunny skies, people enjoyed the springtime weather; children played and a neighbor hugged. Passersby stopped to inquire about the bold and black words, “Change Will Come.” The JCITs wanted their art installation to create joy and inspire conversations. They achieved their goals and felt empowered and seen in the process.

As with all installation art, the JCITs were aware that their artwork was temporary.

Still, they were surprised that it took only two days for workers from the City of Boston to cart away the art. A JCIT staff member asked one worker what was happening.

With regret, he said, “I knew the artwork was something good but I had to do what I was told.” The conversation took place next to a pile of hypodermic needles that have yet to be removed.

The words of the art installation took on even more meaning and urgency in the presence of this seeming contradiction. How could beauty be removed while danger remained? Nevertheless, the JCITs believe that even ephemeral art has the power to influence viewers and may still bring change to a neighborhood. The creative process certainly brought transformation for the young artists.
Harmony
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his seat, emergency medicine physician Jen Santiago, District 2 city counselor Ed Flynn, District 7 counselor Ken Jayson, and at large city councilor Annissa Essaibi George.

This year’s event marked a return to the customarily social tone of the coffee hour. Last year’s coffee hour, which occurred in July rather than the usual early-May date, was held in conjunction with the reopening of the newly-renovated Monsignor Reynolds Playground.

Mayor Walsh, then running for reelection, was met by approximately 400 residents, mostly from the area near Massachusetts Avenue and the so-called “Menlo Park Mile,” who detailed their concerns and dismay with rising theft, car break-ins, and overflowing public trash cans. A resident speaking up and the proliferation of needles. Many spoke with palpable frustration, some saying they were trying to sell their homes and move.

The May 2016 Mayor’s Coffee Hour in Peters Park was met with a resident protest, the young people carrying signs and chanting for the removal of the Boston Public Schools and elsewhere in light of racially-charged incidents that led to the resignation of the BPS headmaster. In contrast, the mood of the crowd was light and the Mayor’s message was well-received at this year’s Coffee Hour.

(Top) Mayor Walsh speaks with residents. (Center Left) Community Service Officer Richard Liotta. (Center Right) Sam Chambers, Marc Leon. (Bottom Left) Jean Gibrion, left; BPFD commissioner Chris Cook, right. All photos by Michele Mansasco.
Gardens

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Friends' largest fundraiser of the year, which was led by Co-Chairs Tamra Pfeffer (Beacon Hill), Jackie McCabe (Beacon Hill) and Jennifer Schrader (Beacon Hill). Blossoming at a new venue, Four Seasons Hotel Boston, the event’s new partners Marc Hall Design, Post Productions and FBAK Event Services, delighted guests with a stunning design deeply rooted in the history of the park.

The Ball honored Honorary Co-Chair John and Ronald Draper, and The Draper Company. LTD was a generous Underwriter sponsor of the event. Participants included the Young Friends of the Public Garden, donated fashion-forward floral arrangements and dapper teddy bears and enjoyed a lively cocktail reception, a three-course dinner and dancing with the Board Night Out.

Over the past 21 years, the Green and White Ball has resulted over $6 million to renew, care and advocate for the Boston Common, Public Garden and Commonwealth Avenue Mall, which has been the mission of the Friends since its inception 48 years ago.

Proceeds from the event have provided critical funds for annual care and maintenance in the parks, including the care of 1,200 trees and 42 pieces of public art. For more information about the Friends of the Public Garden and its work, visit www.friendsofthepublicgarden.org.

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Friends of the South End Library

SUBMITTED BY MARLENA NORMAN, NICK ALTSCHELKE

Acclaimed writer, Allegro Goodman, will read from her recent novel The Chalk Artist, on Tuesday, May 22nd, at 6:30 PM for South End Writers. Her earlier novels include Enchantment, The Cookbook Collector, Paradise Falls, and Suckerfish Falls, which was a National Book Award finalist. Her fiction has appeared in numerous literary magazines, including a recent one in The New Yorker, called FAQ's. In an interview about the story, Goodman explained it is part of a larger project about a multigenerational family called the Rubinstein.

"The first story I wrote about the Rubins was called Apple Cake and was published in The New Yorker a few years ago. Since that time, I've been writing about different members of the family and their relationships. Each character interests me, and each stage of life interests me, but what fascinates me the most is the way the characters and stages rub off on each other," she said.


The planned renovation of Library Park is back on track for late spring/early summer, according to Boston Parks Commissioner Christopher Cook and project manager Lauren Bryant. The bids by contractors for the job are due around this time. The selection process and the scheduling will take place after that. The bulk of the work will be on infrastructure, including whatever ancient oil tanks, brick walls, skeletons or refrigerators may be hidden underneath the surface, as the site appears to have been properly excavated.

Depending on the weather, it may only take a few months. The job includes trimming the trees, and making sure their roots remain protected. Stay tuned. For further details, www.friendsouthendlibrary.org.

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