

Armenian Heritage Park's Virtual Programs: Staying Connected, Coming Together

September 3, 2020



(Photo; Peter Vanderwarker)

Keeping people connected and coming together virtually during these unusual times have been the focus of the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park Planning Team, an extraordinary group of committed individuals providing key leadership in developing and implementing public programs.

These programs are inspired by Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway, Boston and its key design features—“*public art that feels alive... gem of the Greenway...*,” states The Boston Globe’s Joanna Weiss.

Armenian Heritage Park reflects the values and importance of public art to “engage public interaction, prompt awareness and reflect how our lives are interconnected.” These are key

points highlighted in a report of the Americans for the Arts, a national non-profit comprised of a network of organizations and individuals who support the arts in America. “Public art is a reflection of how we see the world...the artists’ response to our time and place combined with our own sense of who we are,” the report continues. “Activities need to be planned and the space needs to be well-cared for and maintained.” Both goals are being achieved at the Park.

“Public Art is the way we express ourselves as a community. It’s the way we tell our story,” comments Karin Goodfellow, Director of Public Art, City of Boston.

Jane Whitehead writes in *Forget Me Not in ArchitectureBoston*, the publication of the Boston Society of Architects, “Luckily, the project had a designer, Don Tellalian, AIA...who was sensitive to the imperatives of civic space...the design uses abstract, geometric forms...it evokes the broader historic struggles of all immigrants...offers multivalent possibilities for interpretation shaped by visitors’ own histories...”



Abstract Sculpture, 2015 (Photo: Matt Conti)



2012, Abstract Sculpture. (Photo: Peter Vanderwarker)

“Public Art employs a unique position within the art world...adds meaning to our cities...reflects who we are...the Abstract Sculpture and all its surrounding elements are a perfect example...,” shares Lucas Cowan, Public Art Curator, Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy on the occasion of Celebrate Public Art! during ArtWeek at the Park.

For many, walking the Park’s Labyrinth, symbolic of life’s journey, has become a respite, especially during these unusual times. Many are enjoying a quiet moment on one of the Park’s benches that surround the Labyrinth and the Abstract Sculpture. Some visit the Park each day, a place of comfort. Passersby, they share, often pause to read the Inscription on the Reflecting Pool, upon which the Abstract Sculpture sits, that states its dedication to “lives lost in the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 and all genocides that followed.”

Many pause to read the words – Art. Service. Science. Commerce. – etched around the Labyrinth’s Circle in tribute to contributions made to American life and culture.

All on-site programs have been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic including the **Annual Reconfiguration of the Abstract Sculpture**, a split rhomboid dodecahedron. The annual reconfiguration is symbolic of all who pulled away, or were forced to pull away, from their country of origin and came to these Massachusetts shores, establishing themselves in new and different ways. In early spring, a crane lifts and pulls apart the two halves of the split rhomboid dodecahedron, made of stainless steel and aluminum, to create a new sculptural shape.

The annual reconfiguration takes place under the direction of A&A Industries and founders Anahid and Aurelian Mardiros, who fabricated the Abstract Sculpture, their very generous gift in kind. They are joined by William Martin who oversees the Park’s ongoing care and maintenance, and Don Tellalian, AIA. The annual reconfiguration is funded by the Park’s Charles and Doreen Bilezikian Endowed Fund.

On April 24 this year, the **Genocide Remembrance** was held virtually, a fitting tribute planned by the Massachusetts Armenian Genocide Committee.

Several programs are being adapted to be offered virtually to keep people connected, coming together while expanding reach and building collaborations.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) is the newest collaborator to join the festive Welcome Reception for New Citizens at the Park following their Naturalization Ceremony at Faneuil Hall annually held in September. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Welcome Reception will not take place. Next year, the BSO will be joining the Armenian Museum of America, The Bostonian Society, Faneuil Hall Marketplace, The Greenway Conservancy and Museum of Fine Arts at the Welcome Reception offering gifts to our newest citizens. The Welcome Reception is funded by the Park’s Anna and Noubar Afeyan Endowed Fund for Public Programs.

Geometry as Public Art: Telling A Story, the innovative curriculum inspired by the Park’s design and geometric features has been developed in partnership with and piloted at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School, Boston Public School in the North End.

Now, adapted for remote learning, the curriculum sparks awareness of geometric shapes in our everyday lives and their creative expression of ideas and thoughts, and engages students in

sharing their own, their families' or ancestors' immigrant experience and in doing so, celebrating what unites and connects us.

“This curriculum is an exciting and engaging way for students to learn more about their family heritage and reflect on the American immigration experience...and a wonderful way for teachers to learn about and better understand their students and for the students to learn about one another,” comments Brianna Greene, a fourth grade teacher at The Eliot K-8 Innovation School. An impressive team of educators from the Friends of Heritage Park and The Eliot School has developed this curriculum now available to all schools in Boston and beyond.

The Celebrating What Unites Us series has also been adapted virtually. The two-part program was launched three years ago to build community and cross-cultural understanding while promoting healthy and active living. Each month highlighted the ethnic heritage of many living in the City of Boston and beyond. For two years, all first met at the Park where a community leader shared his/her immigrant experience. Many walked the labyrinth. Then all walked to The KITCHEN (now permanently closed) at the Boston Public Market where a guest chef shared a signature dish for all to enjoy for lunch and conversation. The series was offered in collaboration with City of Boston Age-Friendly and The KITCHEN and funded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Planning is underway to continue the series once all are again out and about.



Walking the Labyrinth/Andrea Burns

Celebrating What Unites Us is now a virtual cooking series with each program featuring a guest chef demonstrating signature ethnic dishes. The series is offered in collaboration with City of Boston Age-Friendly and OLDWAYS, a “food and nutrition non-profit helping people live healthier, happier lives”.

Labyrinth Walking Wellness series was initially planned to be held at the Park to introduce the benefits of walking the labyrinth, as part of the 2020 Greenway Fitness program. Now, the three-part introductory virtual series is offered in collaboration with the City of Boston Age-Friendly, Boston Public Health Commission, The Greenway Conservancy and YMCA of Greater Boston.

Friends of Armenian Heritage Park Programs Planning Team, the exceptional team of volunteers providing the key leadership and professional expertise to develop and implement these programs include Kristin Asadourian, Jason Behrens, Andrea Burns, Susan Deranian, Tom Dow, Manneh Ghazarians, Martha Mensoian, Catherine Minassian, Dr. Armineh Mirzabegian, Katrina Piehler, Tsoleen Sarian, Barbara Tellalian, Arlette Yegumians, Chiara Megighian Zenati and Zareh Zurabyan.

Friends of Armenian Heritage Park is an initiative of Armenian Heritage Foundation. The Foundation Board, comprised of representatives from parishes and organizations within the Armenian-American community of Massachusetts, is responsible for proper governance and fiduciary oversight, as well as for the Park’s ongoing care and maintenance.

When all are once again out and about and when it’s safe to do so, let’s all come together at the Park. Benefactors, supporters, friends, collaborators and so many more to continue to celebrate together this extraordinary gift to the City of Boston and Commonwealth, and to our children and grandchildren, a gift in tribute to our parents, grandparents and ancestors so that we may come together, engaging all on common ground.

To stay connected and informed, join us on social media. To receive the Park’s e-news and announcements, please email hello@ArmenianHeritagePark.org

