

The Boston Globe

AS I SEE IT | STAN GROSSFELD

Finding the center

“As I See It,” a weekly photo column by Pulitzer Prize winner Stan Grossfeld, brings the stories of New England to Globe readers. This week, Grossfeld helps guide us through the labyrinth at the Armenian Heritage Park.

By Stan Grossfeld Globe Staff. October 31, 2023



A visitor completed the journey to the center of the labyrinth at the Armenian Heritage Park on The Greenway

Gazing down from the 26th floor of the Custom House tower, you'll find the labyrinth is perhaps the most striking geometric landmark on the Rose Kennedy Greenway. It looks like a maze, but it's just the opposite. "A maze is filled with dead ends," said Barbara Tellalian of the Friends of Armenian Heritage Park. "With a labyrinth, there's one path leading to the center and the same path leading out."

Physicians and psychiatrists have hailed the meditative powers of labyrinths to quiet the mind, she said.

What's so interesting is you start, and you find yourself going toward the center, and then all of a sudden, you find yourself — by virtue of where the path takes you — all the way on the other side of the labyrinth," said Tellalian. The idea for the labyrinth came from her husband, an architect who wasn't content to just have a regular park on the site that once held the elevated Central Artery. "I knew that if we just planted grass and a few trees and put some benches around and called it a park, that didn't necessarily mean that anybody would go there and hang out," said Don Tellalian.

"So, I figured we needed a gimmick that would resonate with us all. And," he said, "I thought that labyrinth could also be symbolic of the journey of life."

The park serves a particularly important purpose in these times of conflict, resentment, and hostility. It includes an abstract sculpture, which changes annually and a reflecting pool to honor the 1.5 million victims of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923)

"May it serve in remembrance of all genocides that have followed, and celebrate the diversity of communities that have re-formed in the safety of these shores," reads the inscription on the reflecting pool.

The water from the pool flows under the labyrinth and resurfaces as a single fountain in its center to symbolize hope and rebirth.

"Keep in mind that while the park was financed by the Armenians, it was built to honor the experience of all new immigrants and ethnic groups coming in to Boston," said retired Globe journalist, Steve Kurkjian, a Pulitzer-Prize recipient who has written about his Armenian heritage. The Friends group also hosts a reception party at the park to welcome new citizens after naturalization ceremonies at nearby Faneuil Hall.

Fourth-grade teachers at the Eliot School have developed a game called "One Step Forward" in which students walk the different paths and arrive in the center at the same time.

Visitors from near and far find themselves making their way through the labyrinth. Recently Tristran, a Boise State student who declined to give his last name, said his stroll through the labyrinth was relaxing and mind-clearing. "It was peaceful standing in the middle of it," he said. "It can apply to your life, too. You have a path, and if you just follow it, and don't give up, then in the end you'll be rewarded by seeing how everything kind of comes together." It's fun and free to observe the labyrinth from the spectacular Custom House Observation Deck. (It's now a Marriott property.) The 2 to 2:30 p.m. tour, every day but Friday, must be reserved at 617-310-6300 ext. 4.