

The Parkside Journal

Volume 3, Issue 9

Spring Edition 2020, Celebrating Five Years Serving the Parkside Community

New Please Touch Museum Exhibit Gives Visitors “The Centennial Experience of 1876”

by Jim Brown

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What if today's youth could go back in time to experience firsthand the American Centennial period of the 1870's AND see how this crucial historical period continues to impact their lives? By thinking 'outside the box', the Please Touch Museum has risen to the challenge and created or simulated such an experience with its novel new exhibit (CENTENNIAL INNOVATIONS) on the very site of the first Parks Commission or World's Fair which was held in Philadelphia in 1876 with Morton McMichael as its first Parks Commissioner. The elementary school which bears his name is located in the nearby Mantua section of West Philadelphia

Recently this newspaper interviewed the Please Touch Museum's CEO Trish Wellenbach about the passion, purpose, and vision behind its "New Centennial" Exhibit which is due to open next month (April, 2020). She expressed her strong interest in and appreciation of this crucial period of American history. Wellenbach noted in particular the outreach initiatives that are specifically directed towards children.

They reflect the museum's mission statement that reads in part "We Build Brains"....by developing learning through play. She emphasized that "we have a half million (500,000) visits a year, and of that visitorship about a quarter of the visitors come through our commitment that children will have access to a museum experience.

So there are 110,000 children who come for free or the \$2.00 admission on every Wednesday of the month". Wellenbach also noted that the museum will add three free community days this year that will be linked to a variety of programs and initiatives that the Please Touch Museum is promoting. The upcoming CENTENNIAL INNOVATIONS exhibit seeks to greatly expand on Please Touch Museum programs that teach our children " how the past connects to and informs us about the future".



Photo courtesy of Please Touch Museum

““We've been working on this exhibit for about four (4) years,” explained an enthusiastic Wellenbach. “We spent an entire year doing research and working with focus groups and general visitors, educators, Parkside community members and they've all had a voice on how this exhibit came together and we've continued to engage those communities in the process along the way.”

“This was part of the museum that was woefully underused and we wanted to really bring it to life,” explained CEO Wellenbach. “

The Centennial Exhibition of 1876 was held in Philadelphia and called the World's Fair. It lasted from May 10th through November 10th to celebrate the 100th year anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

This building was previously called Memorial Hall and it was designed by Herman J. Schwarzmann. Philadelphia was a very popular destination site for tourists from around the country and the world.

It was officially named International Exhibition of Arts Manufactures, and Products of the Soil & Mine. It attracted at least 10 million visitors from 35 countries with about 14,420 businesses participating in the fair. Important inventions of this time period included the typewriter, sewing machine, and the telephone.

“I'm confident that we're going to get a wonderful reception when this exhibit opens on Friday, April 3, 2020 at 10:00 am.,” said CEO Wellenbach. “I think it has tremendous potential for the museum, for children and for the Parkside community. And we hope that people will come and experience the exhibit.”

Ongoing Development In East Parkside

by Stewart Savage

One of the best-kept secrets in the city is the Parkside neighborhood of West Philadelphia. The beauty and splendor of Fairmount Park have no equal. In recent years there has been a change in the neighborhood, as investors buy properties and convert whole houses into apartments for rent in the East Parkside Community. The Parkside Centennial Association is working to preserve the homeownership of the residents already living in the area.

Bordered by Belmont Avenue and Parkside Avenue and Girard Avenue and the Amtrak railroad tracks on the other, there are many residents who own homes in this beautiful neighborhood. However there are some residents whose homes have become difficult to manage and keep up with the maintenance of the properties.

In recent years there has been a change in the neighborhood, as investors come in and buy properties and convert whole houses into apartments for rent.

In this neighborhood, the Centennial Parkside CDC is working to preserve the homeownership of the residents already living here.

There are still many residents who own their homes in this beautiful neighborhood; however, some residents are finding it difficult to manage and keep up with the maintenance of their properties. Some of our elderly residents whose income has changed or, due to the high cost of living are finding it difficult to maintain a home. The results of this tends to be empty houses, displaced residents and blight.

Help has arrived, thanks to Centennial Parkside and its persistent efforts, to help residents keep their homes. One of their initiatives helped bring the Rebuilding Together program to Parkside. Rebuilding Together is a nonprofit organization that is currently helping residents with rebuilding, maintaining and repairing of their Residential Properties.

Joyce Smith spoke to me at length about Rebuilding Together. "After many years of advocating for the Parkside East neighborhood and being in constant contact with Rebuilding Together, they are in our neighborhood". The hard work and advocacy has paid off with joy in her voice she exclaimed, "Finally they've gotten around to us".

Joyce revealed the persistent and consistent effort it took to get the Rebuilding Together to come to East Parkside. " Every time I would see the executive director(Stephanie Seldin), I would ask her when were they coming to East Parkside". As a result, work has begun and there will be a Rebuilding Together volunteer day on April 3rd and 4th in East Parkside thanks to Centennial Parkside.

The time will be from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in East Parkside. Rebuilding Together is a nonprofit organization that repairs homes and revitalizes communities. Rebuilding Together works with organized blocks that have at least 10 homeowners who need repairs. Currently, the service has helped many people throughout the country. Their mission is; "Rebuilding homes, revitalizing communities, and rebuilding lives. Rebuilding Together envisions safe homes and communities for every person. From providing minor accessibility modifications for older adults to age in, to rebuilding roofs for low-income owners in need.

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Ongoing Development In East Parkside

by Stewart Savage
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" We aim to service our clients in a meaningful sustainable way." Their programs address eight principles of safe and healthy housing: dry, clean, pest- free, safe, contaminant-free, ventilated, maintained and thermally controlled. Each year Rebuilding Together teams up with sponsors, volunteers and partners to complete Community revitalization projects and key impact zones around the country. Rebuilding days focus on impacting neighborhoods and its residents by addressing critical home repairs, Green Space, neighborhood safety, street beautification and more.

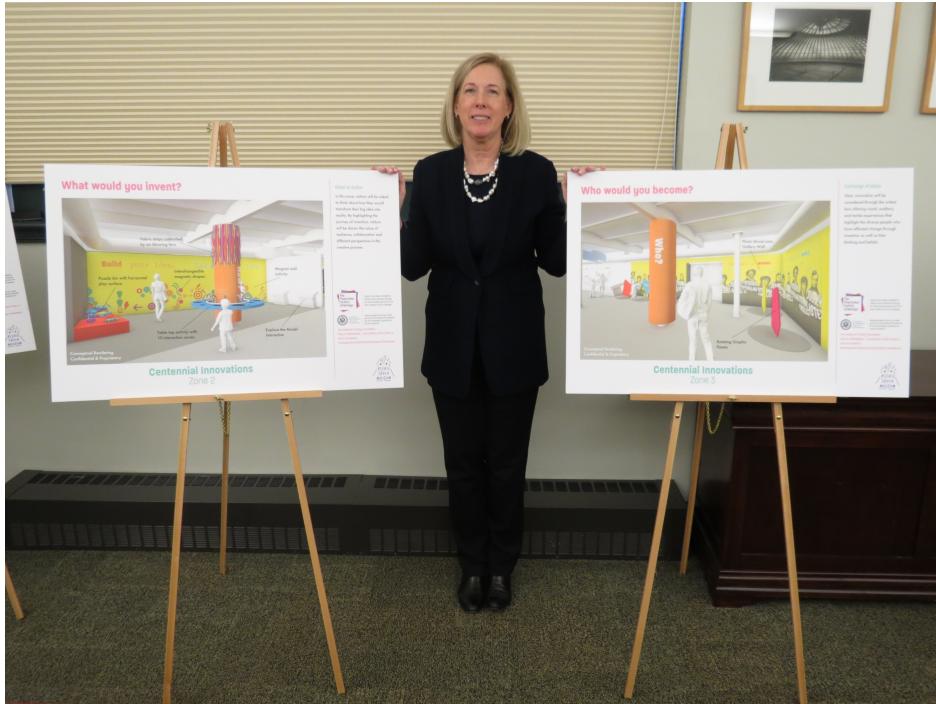
Rebuilding Together commits to target neighborhoods for 2- 3 years at a time. Some of those that they serve include; veterans, older adults, and those with disabilities. In 2019 Rebuilding Together had 20 volunteer days completed, 448 volunteers, 3 Community Center serve, 11 Veterans projects completed, 12 Community revitalization projects completed, 576 household with elderly or disabled, and 718 residential homes receive services. To volunteer, donate, educate or Advocate go to: rebuildingtogether.org For more information go to: www.rebuildingphilly.org/get-repairs

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by Jim Brown

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Please Touch Museum's CEO Trish Wellenbach displaying renderings of the new Centennial Innovations exhibit.

The space in the basement of The Please Touch Museum where the Centennial Innovations Exhibit was created is 5,000 square feet of gallery and museum officials thought long and hard about how to bring that underused space to life and use it in the most effective and creative way possible.

Spending \$1.75 million dollars on this transformation of the basement gallery space and completing the project on time and on budget was a great accomplishment for the museum and its staff who are now ready to show it off to the community.

CEO Trish Wellenbach was visibly excited when discussing the various things that visitors can be expect to see and experience.

“And now that this space (The new Centennial Innovations Exhibit) has been completed, it will be enriching and add to the museum’s appeal to our neighbors of the Parkside community,” said CEO Wellenbach. “And we hope to engage students up to fourth (4th) grade. There will be a series of exhibits, elements and levels of engagement with children and families.”

“I think we’re going to have about 450,000 to 600,000 visitors a year,” adds CEO Wellenbach. “It is kind of our core number. But, the genesis of the exhibit is not to just increase visitorship ; it’s really to increase engagement or the quality of the visitor experience.”

Getting families from the community of Parkside, other areas of Philadelphia, and the surrounding counties to enjoy a day or weekend on the west side of Fairmount Park at 4231 Avenue of the Republic across from 42nd & Parkside Avenue will be the one of the measures of the judging success of this new exhibit.

This new exhibit is a great opportunity to highlight another hidden treasure found only in Parkside. We hope this exhibit will be worth all the hard work Wellenbach and her staff have committed to bring this exhibit to our community.

Many African-Americans visiting the museum and those in the Parkside community have wondered and pondered the question of how diverse the exhibit will be and how the black experience during this post slavery time period will be reflected in the exhibit.

“This is not a one and done for us,” says CEO Wellenbach. “Since I came here in 2015, we have been focusing on being a mirror to the city where we reside and the communities that we welcome everyday. Every child that walks in here, gets to see their family, their personal experiences reflected. And it is here and we seek to foster inclusion.”

“We have a tremendous amount of visitorship that represents lots of diversity, culturally, religiously, ethnically and socially,” declared CEO Wellenbach. “Even from the perspective of physical special needs and handicapped persons. And I think that this exhibit will continue to build on to the good work that we have done”.

There will be African-Americans and their contributions as part of the Centennial Innovations Exhibit as CEO Wellenbach has shown in one of the four models displayed during our interview on the exhibit. Abolitionist Frederick Douglas was said to have attended the Centennial Exhibition in 1876 but was not allowed to speak. Other contributions from prominent black contributors are Madam C.J. Walker, George Washington Carver, sculptor Edmonia Lewis and Mae Jemison.

The following are some basic historical facts about The Please Touch Museum and the Memorial Hall :

The Please Touch Museum originally was created in 1976 and was part of the Natural Academy of the Science. Then it was moved to 21st Street near Cherry Street in 1983. And finally it was moved to the Memorial Hall site in 2008.

Memorial Hall subsequently housed the Pennsylvania Museum of Industrial Arts (now called the Philadelphia Museum of Arts) and the building is part of the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, A National Historic Landmark and part of the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

The neighborhood houses key entertainment and educational venues like Shofuso Japanese House and Garden, The Mann Music Center, The West Park Arts Festival, and the Philadelphia Zoo.

Johnson-Harrell Pleads Guilty to Theft from Charity

by Alexandra E. McFadden



Movita Johnson-Harrell

For the second time in a year, residents of the 190th representative district have been rocked by the conviction of their state representative. Movita Johnson-Harrell, who was elected via special primary in March 2019, pled guilty to charges relating to the theft of \$500,000 from her charity Motivations Education and Consulting Associates (MECA).

Privately, in 2005, Johnson-Harrell purchased three adjacent rowhomes in Powelton, then rented the properties to MECA to operate a personal care home for people struggling with poverty, addiction, and disabilities. MECA in turn paid Johnson-Harrell rent for use of her properties—rent that cost the amount of the mortgage payments—funded through payments by residents from Medicaid and Social Security disability benefits. After the state cited MECA for poor living conditions for residents, MECA evicted residents, though the charity continued paying Johnson-Harrell rent for the vacant building.

State prosecutors allege that Johnson-Harrell made direct transfers from MECA to her personal bank account and made checks out for cash in order to cover her expenses...as well as fund both her unsuccessful campaign for state representative in 2018 and her successful campaign in 2019.

Johnson-Harrell had been elected with more than two-thirds of the vote during her successful special election campaign for state representative. In March 2019, she became the first Muslim woman elected to the Pennsylvania legislature.

Johnson-Harrell had promised to focus her efforts on gun violence, after having been a prominent advocate against gun violence following the killings of her father, brother, cousin, and son. She resigned on Friday, December 13, 2019 after a little less than nine months in office.

Under her negotiated plea agreement, Johnson-Harrell was sentenced to 11½-23 months in county jail; if she has no write-ups or misconducts, she will be eligible to leave jail after three months and finish the last 8 ½ months of her sentence under house arrest.

According to her agreement, she began serving her sentence on February 6, 2020. The special election for her successor was held on Tuesday, February 25, 2020, with Roni Green as the Democratic nominee and Wanda Logan as the Republican nominee.

Roni Green won the seat and will hold the position for the next ten months, finishing out the term of Johnson-Harrell.

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WEST PARK ARTS FEST COMING JUNE 13

by Niesha Kennedy



West Park Arts Fest on South Concourse Drive

The 13th annual West Park Arts Fest, presented by West Park Cultural Center, Fairmount Park Conservancy, and Mural Arts Philadelphia, will bring South Concourse Drive in West Fairmount Park alive. From 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm.

Funkfest will rock on the music stage, the dance stage will have continuous performances, and all ages can participate in art-making and many other engaging activities. Conveniently located, West Park Arts Fest runs adjacent to the Centennial Commons along Parkside Avenue "new park within a park," a project of Fairmount Park Conservancy as part of Philadelphia's Reimagining the Civic Commons initiative.

"When West Park Cultural Center started the West Park Arts Fest in 2008, we had no idea how much it would grow. The original vision became a reality, and gradually, more came to know and appreciate this special event. The event's success is due in large part to the many arts, cultural, and community partners who have participated with us over the years. Significant advancement happened four years ago when Fairmount Park Conservancy joined us as a co-presenter bringing Arts Fest into West Fairmount Park," says Betty Lindley, founding Executive Director.

Fairmount Park Conservancy and Mural Arts Philadelphia with West Park Cultural Center are realizing the Festival's mission to bring communities together in the park, promote greater awareness of the area's history and heritage while celebrating the arts and cultural diversity of Philadelphia.

Arts Fest engages the young and seasoned in exciting, culturally diverse performances by some of the area's best dancers, musicians, and vocalists across two stages. Attendees will enjoy dance, art-making, and other activities, including narrated historical trolley tours through the Centennial District, starting and ending at the Festival.

Over 70 vendors participate, including a juried Art/Craft Marketplace, direct sellers, food, and corporate vendors providing something for everyone, making the West Park Arts Fest a must-attend event.

For the second year, Funkfest is on the music stage. We are excited to announce that Instant Funk will be our headliner, along with a line-up of outstanding bands. FunkFest will include a dynamic range of funk-inspired music from Jazz-Funk and Fusion, to Rock and Soul. The dance stage will present many dance styles and cultures. A performance by West Park Cultural Center's danceLogic girls featured on "CBS This Morning," CBS Philly, and in the Philly Inquirer & Daily News, will showcase their unique combination of dance and computer coding.

West Park Arts Fest partners include The Franklin Institute, Mann Center for the Performing Arts, Please Touch Museum, Shofuso Japanese Cultural Center, Philadelphia Zoo, African American Museum of Philadelphia, Global Philadelphia, Tree House Books, and many more.

The Festival's home on South Concourse Drive brought in record crowds last year and drew praise from festival-goers of all ages. Be a part of over 5,000 expected to attend. There are Sponsor and Vendor opportunities available.

Visit <https://www.westparkcultural.org/west-park-arts-fest>

Centennial Parkside CDC Youth Advisory Council (YAC) |SUMMER STIPEND PROGRAM

Centennial Parkside CDC is looking for 12 self-motivated, energetic and creative young people between the ages 14 and 16 for our bi- weekly SUMMER STIPEND PROGRAM. This program will be for the purpose of forming an East Parkside Youth Advisory Council (YAC).

Paid workshops will be held every other Wednesday throughout the summer season and will begin with orientation and information for parents + youth on Wednesday evening March 25th, 2020 from 6:00 PM until 7:30 PM. The Summer Stipend Program will end on Wednesday, August 19th 2020.

Space is limited, and the selection process requires an interview. If interested, please call Centennial Parkside CDC **for more information call 484-278-1019.**



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Is Your House Ready For A Spring Makeover?

Spring is around the corner. While it's traditionally the time to put the inside of your home in order, just don't forget to take care of the outside too. Your home's structure needs to be ready for Spring showers. Winter's snow and ice can damage even the sturdiest of exteriors.

Leaks can lead to mold, mildew, and even structural damage. Have you noticed dark water stains on the ceilings around your house?



Any black spots on your walls or ceilings? These are likely an indicator of mold or mildew due to excess moisture within your home. Your roof is a key area of your home that may not be getting enough attention. Inspect roof surface flashing, eaves, and soffits. Check flashings around all surface projections and sidewalls.

Leaves and debris build up over time in your gutters. Clogged gutters and downspouts are actually one of the most common causes of leaks in your roof. Clean out and reattach any loose gutters that have pulled away from the house.

Brick repointing is required to avoid water infiltration or premature deterioration of the veneer. Check that the mortar in the joints has not disappeared, wore thin and that no bricks are loose.

Check foundation walls, floors, concrete, and masonry for cracking, heaving, or deterioration. Look to see if a significant number of bricks are losing their mortar or if you can slide a nickel into a crack in your concrete floor, slab or foundation.

Don't wait until it's too late. This spring, the best way to ensure that your home's exterior is as safe as possible is to have it inspected by a licensed professional. Regular inspections, along with repairs and maintenance, extend the lifetime of your home. If you're thinking of starting a spring home project give Mr. Contractor a call. See our ad on this page.

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A Summer of Youth Opportunity in Parkside and Beyond

by Jasmine Bullock



Students at Camp Ginko in Parkside

As summer approaches and the weather gets warmer, youth have many options to occupy their time and embark on new experiences. From WesGold Fellows program to Centennial Parkside CDC's Youth Advisory Council, the options are limitless.

One signature summer program in the area is the WesGold Fellows sponsored by West Philadelphia Financial Services. Over the last 12 years, the WesGold Fellows program has serviced youth in the area with paid opportunities to learn about finance, entrepreneurship, and real estate.

The summer of 2020 will bring some dramatic changes to the WesGold Fellows program. For the first time in its twelve-year history, the program has a full time program director, Samantha Lyons. Over the last ten months Samantha has worked diligently to expand the program. This summer, the WesGold Fellows will double in capacity, accepting 30 students in the eight-week program.

Using a student recruiter who is also an alumnus of the program, Fellows, typically rising 10th and 11th graders, will be recruited from high schools from all over the city but there will be an emphasis on local schools such as Overbrook High School and Mastery Charter School. They will also accept students referred by local community organizations such as the PEACE organization.

During programming, WesGold Fellows are emerged in extensive workshops for 8 weeks. Each week, the fellows engage in workshops that meet the four focus areas of the program, guest speakers, trips out of state and college visits and student presentations.

Centennial Parkside CDC is also working to begin a Youth Advisory Council that will launch in late March. The Youth Advisory Council will provide a safe space for 12 of Parkside's youth to convene to learn about leadership and to engage with the Board of Directors to offer suggestions to enhance the neighborhood. Young people will receive a stipend to participate in leadership, literacy and health and wellness workshops.

As the program continues to grow, youth will become an integral part of the community, sharing their thoughts and ideas on how to improve living in the Parkside area. Orientation for the Youth Advisory Council will be on March 25, 2020.

Both WesGold Fellows and the Youth Advisory Council have incentives for young people. Centennial Parkside CDC is offering stipends for attendance and participation in their bi-weekly workshops. The WesGold Fellows will open savings accounts and will have the opportunity to have their savings matched up to \$2000.00.

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A Summer of Youth Opportunity in Parkside and Beyond

by Jasmine Bullock

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The West Park Cultural Center which is headquartered in Parkside prides itself on offering quality unique youth programming. During the academic year, the West Park Cultural Center offers teen girls a program called danceLogic. This program combines dance and computer programming to encourage young ladies to become interested in computer science while embracing the arts. While there will be no dance class during the summer, current participants of danceLogic will continue their coding classes. DanceLogic will recruit for a new class in the fall.

The Philadelphia Zoo offers the Zoo Crew. This youth force works as volunteers within the zoo with the hopes of being accepted into the second phase of the program Zoo Crew2. New Zoo Crew members engage with guest and teach about how to save wildlife. Zoo Crew 2 members are conservation ambassadors and gain invaluable experiences caring for animals and embarking on both local and international field trips to learn about professions in animal care and conservation of wildlife. Applications for Zoo crew will be accepted March 1st through May 15th.

As summer quickly approaches, youth have several options to stay busy and immersed in the community. To find more information on any of the programs contact:

Centennial Parkside CDC YAC: Tashia Rayon, Program Coordinator
trayon@cenntenialparkside.org.

WesGold Fellows: Samantha Lyons, Program Director samantha@wpfsi.org
Zoo Crew: www.philadelphiazoo.org/volunteer-at-the-zoo/
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