

PROPERTY



Left, looking toward Music Island after a restoration project in Prospect Park; above, a crowd on the esplanade between Music Island and the Concert Grove in an 1890s photo; below, work on a new outdoor rink.



Prospect Park Renews Ties With Its History

BY LANA BORTOLOTT

In a case of what's old is new again, Prospect Park on Friday will open the first phase of a \$74 million restoration, a project intended to return the most formal portion of the park to the original vision for its design.

The work in the southeast section of the park restores the scenic Music Island, its lakefront esplanade and parts of the Concert Grove promenade designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux in 1867. The landscape had been demolished in 1960 for the construction of the Wollman ice-skating rink by Robert Moses.

"They just knocked everything over when they did the rink; it was a different sensibility," said Christian Zimmerman, head landscape architect of Prospect Park Alliance, a nonprofit organization that operates the park in partnership with the city.

Now, he said, sensibilities have changed, leading to the restoration effort. "It's a unique project in the sense that it's a historic preservation and an ecological restoration and modern design," Mr. Zimmerman said.

The 26-acre project named Lakeside has included rebuilding the shoreline; the removal of the crumbling skating rink and a parking lot; and the restoration of Music Island, which had been

covered over for 50 years by the old rink. The reconstruction reclaims five acres of lake and three acres of green space for public use.

The Lakeside project, which broke ground in 2009, will eventually include two year-round rinks with triple the capacity as the old rink, and a water playground, part of a recreational complex still under construction. Designed by Tod Williams Billie Tsien Architects, the complex, begun in 2010, is scheduled to

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open in the fall of 2013.

Officials initially had planned to open the rinks in January 2013, but lack of funding delayed construction. An alliance spokesman said since receiving a funding infusion last June, the construction has been on schedule.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg will lead the dedication ceremony Friday, with park officials and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz. The alliance is managing the restoration, but has sought city approvals for all work in the park, which is a des-

ignated landmark.

Apart from the physical improvements, Emily Lloyd, president of the 25-year-old park alliance, said the restoration marks a return to Olmsted's vision for an egalitarian gathering spot.

"It's really not just preservation for preservation's sake: It's because the [original] design just worked really well for drawing people to the waterfront and encouraging them to linger together here," she said. "It was a real building block of democracy."

Central Park is the older and larger Olmsted-Vaux New York creation, but it is in the less-urban Prospect Park where the designers wanted visitors to have a more organic relationship with nature.

"There's something deep and powerful about the landscape in Prospect Park—it touches everyone," said Adrian Benepe, until recently the city's parks commissioner and now director of city park development for the Trust for Public Land. "You have a real sense of being in the country and in a different landscape."

The promenade separating the upper and lower terraces of the grove has also received a facelift, but its eclectic ornamentation is in various stages of repair. Six new urns along the wall have been redesigned and cast from original photographs at a cost of



Turf supervisor Karen LeFriche, right, and intern Hamet Blouf dig out weeds as part of lake restoration work.

\$244,000. Four more urns unearthed from the rubble and a drinking fountain—its exotic bronze ornamentation missing—are still to be re-created.

The first phase of the park work was a \$10.6 million project primarily funded by the Leon

Levy Foundation. The total restoration is 95% funded, the alliance spokesman said, with money also coming from the other private donors, the city, as well as state and federal sources.

"It brings back the formal heart of the park in the way the

restoration of Bethesda Fountain and terrace in the '70s brought back the design heart of Central Park," said Mr. Benepe. "But the restoration of Prospect Park is even more profound—this landscape has been changed and not for the better."