



# ParkNotes

*a semiannual newsletter published by the Lafayette Park Conservancy*

Issue 1

Fall 2007

## Swans Return To the Lake

Samantha and Sophia Swan, aged one year, moved to the Lafayette Park lake from Belleville, Illinois on Friday, October 11th. They are gifts to the park from two of our long term neighbors, Dr. Joe Seria and Diane Davitt, who each named one of them after a niece. Diane and Joe remembered Willie, our most recent resident swan, and decided that it was time to reintroduce swans to the lake. Willie was from Williamsburg, Virginia where he lived at Busch Gardens. He added considerable grace and beauty to the lake until his untimely death several years ago.

Joe is feeding Sophia and Samantha. Sue Pinker-Dodd and Susan Sauer continue to feed the ducks, so all of our aquatic feathered friends are getting plenty to eat. But they can also obtain nourishment from the lake and its surrounding banks. Swans are primarily herbivorous but eat whatever they can find that is to their liking. We know they enjoy poultry pellets, corn, barley, oats and other grains, plus algae, insects, sedge, small fish and frogs that are in the lake. They consider watercress a special treat, so next time you are walking by the lake you might bring some along to welcome these graceful new residents to the neighborhood.



After introducing the new swans to the lake, Joe and Diane's swan breeder suggested that the lake could support as many

as four swans. If two more should happen to join Sophia and Samantha next year, we might find Lafayette Park graced by a bevy of swans!

## Benton Statue Conservation



The Conservancy is working to conserve the Benton Monument, the oldest monument west of the Mississippi River. Restoration of the monument will cost more than \$150,000. The statue, dedicated in 1868 at a park ceremony reportedly attended by more than 30,000 people, honors Senator Thomas Hart Benton, Missouri's first United States Senator and the great-uncle of the well-known artist by the same name.

Harriet Goodhue Hosmer (1830-1908), an early neoclassical American sculptor with close ties to St. Louis, created the colossal bronze statue. A series of events celebrating Hosmer's life and works has

been organized to take place during the summer of 2008, beginning with an exhibition of her work mounted at Washington University in the teaching gallery of the Kemper Art Museum from May 2 to July 31. A symposium will be held at Washington University on Saturday, June 14, at which speakers representing the international art world will discuss the importance of Hosmer's contribution to 19<sup>th</sup> century art and the group of American female sculptors working in Rome of which she was a part. Mercantile Library, located on the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, will host an opening reception for the symposium on Friday evening, June 13<sup>th</sup>. Hosmer's beautiful marble of Beatrice Cenci is on permanent display in the Mercantile Library. Both the reception and the symposium will be ticketed, so please contact anyone in the Conservancy if you are interested in attending. We will provide you with more details as these events draw near.

Also on Saturday, June 14, the public is invited to an afternoon ceremony celebrating Hosmer at the Benton statue in Lafayette Park. Rousing music of the 1860s and a Plein Air quick-paint artist event will add to the fun. On Saturday evening, following the ceremony, Benton Place in historic Lafayette Square will be the site of "Hats Off To Hattie," a gala celebration to raise funds for the statue restoration. Ticketed guests will dine beneath decorated tents on the Benton Place Mall and will be invited to tour Benton Place homes and gardens. Indoor and outdoor music throughout the evening will add to the festive atmosphere and further delight the senses. Paintings from the afternoon Plein Air event will be on display and will be auctioned along with many other intriguing items. Be sure to mark this event on your calendar now, for we are certain you will want to attend.

## From the President...

As newly elected president of the Lafayette Park Conservancy and a Lafayette Square resident for only a year, I feel both very privileged and very humble to be working with so many current and previous residents who have accomplished the nearly unimaginable feat of rebuilding the Lafayette Square neighborhood and Lafayette Park

Much has been accomplished. The Lafayette Square Restoration Committee, with a history dating back forty years to the late 1960s, has literally achieved miracles in urging and supporting the rebuilding of the neighborhood to its current national prominence as one of the most desirable residential areas in the country. The LSRC's well-developed fundraising efforts continue to result in real improvements, not only in the park--witness the recent magnificent restoration of the Park House--but also throughout the neighborhood.

It's hard to overestimate the importance of Lafayette Park to Lafayette Square, and indeed to the City of St. Louis. A perfect thirty-plus acres in size, completely fenced, it is a walking park rather than a driving park. Originally part of the St. Louis Common where livestock grazed, it has never been under private ownership. Dedicated in 1851 and exquisitely developed over the next few decades, it is the oldest park in St. Louis and perhaps west of the Mississippi. Visitors constantly remark on its beauty, and more than any other park I know it completely defines its neighborhood.

But Lafayette Park needs more than the LSRC alone can provide. Decades of deferred maintenance have tarnished our neighborhood jewel, and it's up to us to restore its shine. To address this issue the Lafayette Park Conservancy was formed in 2001, on the 150th anniversary of the park's dedication. Its mission is to restore, beautify and improve Lafayette Park. As one of its first steps the LPC, together with the LSRC and the City Parks Dept., created a comprehensive Master Plan for the development of Lafayette Park. Approved in 2003, that plan designates the LPC as primary fundraiser for park improvements. To raise the needed funds we really must involve more people. If you agree that restoring the boathouse, music stand, fences, cannons, pathways, and other parts of the park infrastructure can significantly improve the quality of life in Lafayette Square, then please consider becoming a member of the LPC. If you can spare at least a few hours of your time just let me know--volunteers are always needed. Who knows, you might even have fun!

- Bob Bischoff

## New Urns Highlight Grotto Bridge



As you stroll over the grotto bridge be sure to notice how its handsomely restored urns embody the splendor and charm of the Gilded Age. Several years ago John Davidson, a former resident of Lafayette Square living in New York City, donated \$12,000 to the LSRC for a park project. In due time it was decided to use that donation to replicate the urns that had been missing from the grotto bridge for 50 years or so. Local sculptor Jaye Gregory created a model based on old photographs of the missing urns and the first replica, dedicated to Mr. Davidson, was cast and installed on the bridge.

When the Conservancy adopted a 2007 goal of replacing the three remaining urns, generous donors stepped forward to make it happen. Family and friends of the late Roger Russell joined together to contribute one urn in his memory. Carolyn and Jim Willmore contributed another in honor of Maximilian G. Kern, the 19th century superintendent of the park most responsible for its design and development, and tireless landscaper and park lover extraordinaire Wardwell Buckner contributed the third and final urn.

The original bases for the urns had also deteriorated badly over the years, with cracks developing and pieces missing. The bases were restored by Arnette Pattern of Granite City, the company that also cast the urns. A crew from our City Parks Department installed the completed urns and bases on the bridge just in time for October's Gala At The Grotto, where they provided attendees with an elegant backdrop and conversation starter.

## Boathouse To Get Tile Roof

The boathouse will soon have a picturesque and permanent new roof of classic Spanish tile. The existing roof is in very poor condition, especially on the south slope which bears most of the sun. Installing the new roof, together with tuck-pointing exterior walls and chimneys and cleaning up the restroom, will complete the first phase of a three phase project to develop the boathouse into a venue suitable for catered events and educational uses. Phase One, costing approximately \$100,000, will stabilize the existing structure so that we can safely improve and expand it in subsequent phases. We have the original 1908 plans for the boathouse in hand and will be following them closely to ensure an accurate restoration. Bids are now being solicited and we hope to have the roof completed in time for the Lafayette Square house tour in June.

Phase Two, targeted to begin in 2009, will restore the fenestration, the most noticeable part of the facades and perhaps the ugliest in its present incarnation. The boathouse originally had eight "porthole" windows, plus ten large multi-pane window frames installed in the arches that could be removed in the summer to make the structure into an open shelter similar to the Worlds Fair Pavilion in Forest Park. The interior will also be restored in Phase Two to make the boathouse more welcoming for group meetings.

Phase Three, which requires significantly greater funding, will expand the boathouse facility by building another identical structure directly north of the existing one and joined to it via a sky-lit atrium. The combined structure will include additional restrooms, a catering kitchen and expanded storage, plus enough floor space to seat up to 200 people for catered events.



## Annual Meeting Held

The Lafayette Park Conservancy held its annual membership meeting Sunday, November 18, at the boathouse. Directors re-elected to the board include Bob Bischoff, David Bridwell, Ward Buckner, Melanie Fathman, Susan Pinker-Dodd, Susan Sauer, Ken Stone, Linda Weiner and Carolyn Willmore. They welcomed newly elected directors Kathy Marks-Petetit, Paul Sauer and Bridgid Simpson. President Tim Gore thanked five retiring members, Cheryl Andrews, Jane Blackwell, Catherine Hamlin, Pete Snyder and Otis Williams, for their service to the Conservancy. Although they are leaving the board, all will continue to participate actively in the LPC.

Secretary Ward Buckner explained that President Gore had declined re-election to the Board because his new position will not allow him to devote the time required. He reminded the membership of Tim's long service on behalf of the park as Co-Chair, Lafayette Park Master Plan Executive Committee, 2003, President of the Conservancy 2004-2007, and current Chairman of the Lafayette Park Implementation Advisory Board. On behalf of the membership the board presented Tim with a framed photograph of the Lafayette Park gates, printed in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat on Dec.

30, 1934, as a token of appreciation for his dedication to the park.



Treasurer Ken Stone stated that the Conservancy was in a sound financial position, with more than \$114,000 in total assets. A little more than \$77,000 of that amount has already been dedicated to specific projects, current and future. The remainder is unrestricted. A budget for 2008 is being prepared..

Several days after the membership meeting it was discovered that a few members had never received a meeting notice in the mail and were thus unaware of the meeting. After checking LPC membership records against financial receipts we discovered that we had somehow failed to record their membership information. For this we deeply apologize. We are reviewing our membership procedures to prevent similar problems in the future..



## Playground Expansion A Hit With Kids

If you live in Lafayette Square you are undoubtedly aware of the playground expansion that was installed this summer. In addition to replacing the previous swings, damaged by a fallen tree, it added more playground space and equipment to accommodate the ever-growing population of neighborhood children. But it also brought controversy. Many long time residents and park-lovers were taken aback by the very bright primary colors of the new equipment. Discussions on how to change the look often became heated, even finding their way into the Greater St. Louis media. While neighborhood groups continue to explore options, the children are mostly oblivious. They just enjoy having a larger space to call their own.

## LPC Membership Form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I'm interested in LPC volunteer opportunities

- Friend - \$35 per person
- Family - \$50
- Botanist - \$75
- Historian - \$150
- Preservationist - \$300
- Benton Society - \$500
- Lafayette Society - \$1000

Memberships are valid for one year. Benefits and premiums increase at each membership level. The Lafayette Park Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. If your contribution is eligible for a matching gift, please include your company's matching form.

Return with your check or money order to:

Lafayette Park Conservancy,  
2023 Lafayette Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri 63104

## Briefly...

- ☀ The third Gala At The Grotto, held in October, was a truly magical event. Formally-attired guests enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres while admiring the beautifully decorated and lit grotto landscaping, and the weather cooperated with delightful temperatures. After a hotly contested silent auction comprising many unique and wonderful items, we capped off the evening by presenting the LPC park award to Ward Buckner for his outstanding work in and on behalf of Lafayette Park.
- ☀ Did you know that the Flora Conservancy of Lafayette Park was established in 2007 as an adjunct volunteer organization for the LPC? Flora Conservancy members are notified by email of special projects such as planting of bulbs, perennials, annuals and shrubs, along with park clean-ups. During the spring, summer and fall seasons volunteer supervisors are available every Saturday and Thursday morning from 9-11am to suggest projects that fall within volunteer-identified interests. In winter, volunteers are needed at the greenhouse in Forest Park to assist with propagation and seedling development. Please contact Linda Weiner at 314-621-7071 or email [Linderweiner@prodigy.net](mailto:Linderweiner@prodigy.net) to volunteer!
- ☀ LSRC President Pete Snyder reports that construction of the gazebo in the area immediately west of the park house has been delayed by revisions needed to satisfy City concerns. These revisions substantially increased the price, triggering a search for additional funds. Undaunted, Pete has vowed to press on and complete the project.

## Board of Directors

Bob Bischoff — President  
 Paul Sauer — 1st Vice-President  
 Linda Weiner — 2nd Vice-President  
 Ward Buckner — Secretary  
 Ken Stone — Treasurer  
 David Bridwell  
 Melanie Fathman  
 Kathy Marks-Petetit  
 Susan Pinker-Dodd  
 Susan Sauer  
 Bridgid Simpson  
 Carolyn Willmore

## Contact Information

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