



Men dressed as an Egyptian attendant and Roman guards flank nonoree Barbara Israel.

TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Untermeyer celebrates four years of renaissance

By Jackie Lupo

YONKERS — Celebrities from the gardening world mixed with local dignitaries and supporters on June 16 for the Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy's third "Summer Solstice Soirée," a fundraiser for the ongoing restoration of the ornamental garden on North Broadway.

The sun appeared on schedule after a day of rain, allowing more than 200 guests to mingle in the renovated Walled Garden. Gardeners reinvent its color schemes for the passing seasons, and the 9,000 yellow and magenta tulips that bloomed in April have given way to a motif of deep purple, lime green and yellow plantings lining the crisscrossing waterways representing the "rivers of life" in the Garden of Eden, a feature

common to Persian gardens. Vivid orange koi in the pool in front of the classical amphitheatre darted among purple and green water lilies and purple irises growing from submerged planters arranged around bubbling fountains.

The gardens have undergone a miraculous transformation in a short time, driven by the vision and fundraising acumen of the conservancy's chairman, New York architect Stephen Byrns. A former member of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Committee and director at Wave Hill in the Bronx, Byrns, back in 2010, surveyed the ruins of what was once one of America's most spectacular landscapes and decided to form a nonprofit to revive them.

The gardens, located on a 43-acre tract of what was once "Greystone," the

150-acre estate of millionaire attorney and garden aficionado Samuel Untermeyer, is now a public park owned by the City of Yonkers. Byrns convinced Marco Polo Stufano, founding director of horticulture at Wave Hill, to come out of retirement and supervise the redesign of the gardens in the spirit of Beaux Arts architect Welles Bosworth, who designed the original layout for Untermeyer 100 years ago.

Last month, the Foundation for Landscape Studies presented its Place Maker award to Byrns in a ceremony at the Boathouse in Central Park. The annual award is given to an individual who "has used design imagination and horticultural skill to create a garden or park of exceptional beauty."

"Each day I am inspired by the great

work being done here," Byrns said. "I call it miraculous." Byrns said 100 percent of the funds raised for the restoration have come from the private sector. In 2011, the conservancy raised \$100,000; last year, donations totaled \$500,000, and, Byrns added, "This year, we may raise a million." He said the conservancy spent only \$1,800 last year on administration, which was limited to sundry office expenses.

The conservancy has two full-time gardeners, Timothy Tilghman and Jessica Norman, and three seasonal gardeners, whose salaries are paid by the City of Yonkers, but funded by the conservancy. They work with landscape staff from the City of Yonkers. Funds raised in 2014

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enabled the conservancy to install a deer fence, which will free the staff to expand their planting efforts from 3 acres in the Walled Garden to 30 acres.

A donation of \$250,000 from Scenic Hudson, an organization devoted to protecting and restoring the Hudson River and its landscape, will be used to reline and replumb the waterworks in the Walled Garden's canals. The donation is being made in the memory of Kathryn Wasserman Davis of Tarrytown, who died in 2013 at the age of 106 and was a longtime supporter of Scenic Hudson's work in Westchester.

"These are magnificent gardens with historical importance," said Ned Sullivan, president of Scenic Hudson. "We have a long history of partnership with the City of Yonkers, mostly along the waterfront, and we wanted to build on that to assist with this important initiative."

With a donation from Nortrud Spero of Yonkers, The Vista, a grand staircase with a view of the Hudson framed by antique Roman columns, is being restored with the planting of 100 cryptomeria to resemble the cypresses flanking the stairs at the Villa D'Este leading to Lake Como in Italy. The Temple of Love, a wrought-iron-domed, columned gazebo perched on rocks that form a man-made waterfall, will be restored with the help of a donation from former Yonkers Mayor Angelo Martinelli, in memory of his wife, Carol.

Last month, "On Mother's Day," 6,000 people swarmed into the garden," said Byrns, who noted that many of those visitors originally came from far-away lands. "It seems that people from many nations can find themselves in the

garden. Now women in saris and hijabs are strolling through."

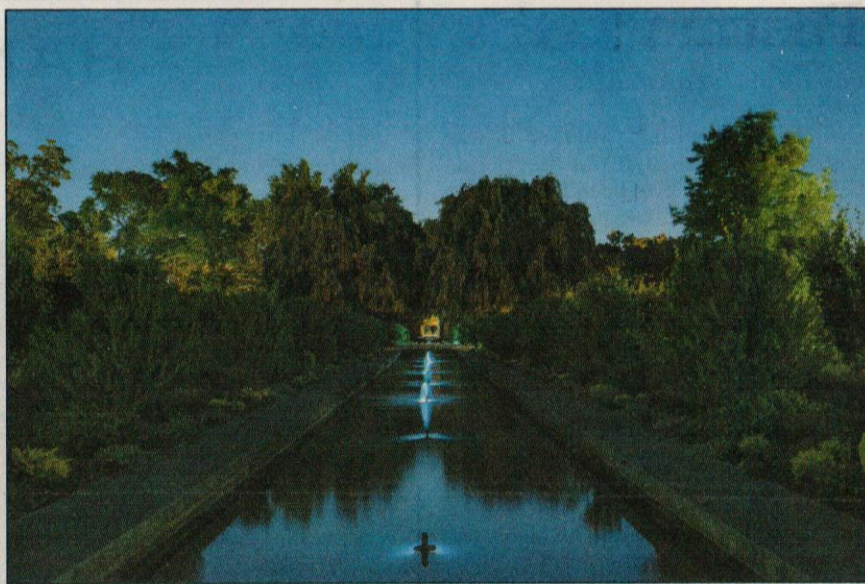
Domestic diva Martha Stewart of Bedford, who featured the garden in a video tour last fall, was the gala's honorary chair. "This is a garden that is historic, meaningful, and a gem in the chaos that is New York," said Stewart, adding that her longtime friend and neighbor Barbara Israel, a conservancy board member and garden benefactor, introduced her to Untermeyer Gardens.

Israel, this year's gala honoree, was, as has become the custom at the Untermeyer galas, introduced to the audience with a theatrical flourish. To the strains of Wagner's "Sailors' Chorus," Israel was escorted through the garden to the amphitheater by two men dressed as Roman guards, and fanned by an "Egyptian" attendant carrying a large red plume.

Israel, who owns Barbara Israel Garden Antiques in Katonah, is one of this country's foremost experts on outdoor statuary and classical garden ornament. She has served as a consultant to the Metropolitan Museum, the Winterthur Museum and the Smithsonian, and is the author of "Antique Garden Ornament: Two Centuries of American Taste," one of the definitive books on the subject.

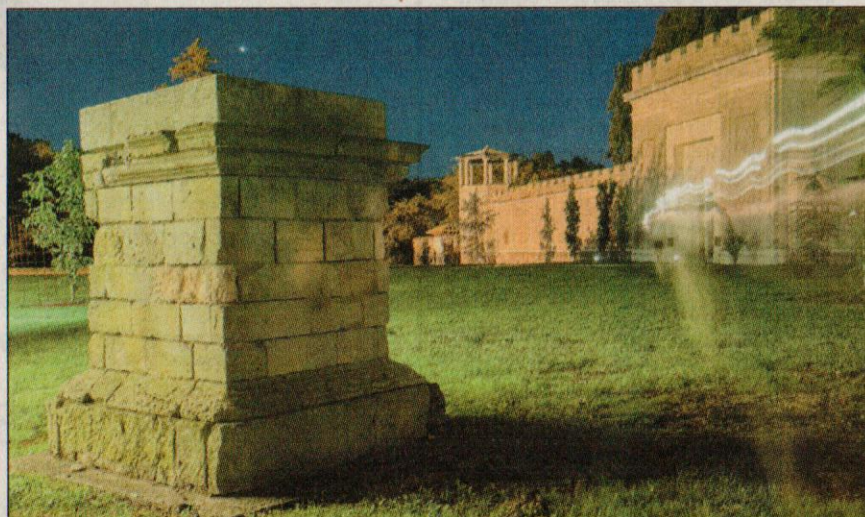
"This garden is part of the groundswell of gardening that took place between 1895 and 1940, the golden age of American gardening," Israel said. "On October 30, 1939, 30,000 people came to visit this garden in one day."

A lively auction capped off the program. Over \$20,000 was raised as bidders vied for such luxuries as a week in a palazzo in Umbria, a stay at the Willys in Palm Springs (once Untermeyer's winter vacation home), and a catered dinner for 20 at Byrns' home in Riverdale. But for those who want a taste of the good life, admission to the Untermeyer Gardens is free.



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Moonlight illuminates the canals, which will be restored thanks to a \$250,000 donation from Scenic Hudson.



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The entrance to the Walled Garden