Untermyer brightens annual holiday landscape

By Jackie Lupe

YONKERS — The fans of Untermyer Park and Gardens in Yonkers keep much alive as its meticulous restoration, now in its sixth year, moves forward. Proof that those fans are a loyal bunch was the number of people — more than 650, by the count of Untermyer Gardens Conservancy president Stephen Byrns — who turned out despite the frigid temperatures last Friday, Dec. 9, for the opening of the "Grand Holiday Illumination."

To the strains of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Zoroastrian music, guests walked along the dark garden paths, which were illuminated by strips of light. Those hardy souls were joined by City of Yonkers officials as they awaited the "big reveal": the flip of the switches that turned on 81,000 colored lights, outlining the Indio-Persian-inspired Walled Garden’s remarkable architecture, monuments, and trees.

Former Mayor Angelo Martelloni, who donated funds to renovate the Garden’s Temple of Love in memory of his wife, Carol, presided over the illumination, which revealed sections of the site one at a time, each greeted with collective gasps from the bundled-up attendees. The Gardens are the property of the City of Yonkers, and their restoration and upkeep are made possible by a public-private partnership between the City and the Conservancy, a not-for-profit organization supported by assorted donors, from local residents to benefactors from the worlds of New York design and horticulture.

This, the second annual illumination, featured double the number of lights as last year. The lights will shine from dusk to 8 p.m. every evening through Jan. 8. "The illumination is the Gardens’ gift to the City," said Byrns, who reminded the guests that the attraction was "the only great garden in America open free of charge to the public."

For each night of the illumination, there will be multicultural holiday music piped throughout the gardens. Over loudspeakers, and volunteers from local organizations will be on hand with free cups of hot chocolate.

The lights may be the most colorful feature of the project this winter, but for the Conservancy’s gardeners, the work continues indoors. Earlier this year, 10,000 ornamental bulbs were planted. Each year since the Walled Garden was restored, a new batch of bulbs have been put in the ground, each time with a different color scheme. For 2017, "It will be a surprise," Byrns told the Enterprise on Dec. 13. In the meantime, greenhouses near the Hudson River Museum, seedlings for the annual plants...