

# THE RIVERTOWNS Enterprise

[> SUBSCRIBE TODAY!](#)

[HOME](#) | [SUBSCRIBE](#) | [ADVERTISE](#) | [ARCHIVES](#) | [NEWSROOM](#)

DECEMBER 18, 2015

## Untermyer's Persian Garden dazzles in the dark

BY JACKIE LUPO

YONKERS — There's no shortage of dazzling light displays in the Rivertowns around the holidays, but this year Untermyer Gardens on Broadway in North Yonkers has upped the ante.

Last Friday, Dec. 11, the Untermyer Gardens Conservancy and the City of Yonkers hosted about 1,000 people for the opening of the "Grand Holiday Illumination," and it was grand indeed. The walled Persian Garden's impressive architectural features, its columned temple, statues, trees and rhythmic arrangements of shrubs twinkled with over 40,000 lights in shades of white, blue and violet. At the intersection of the garden's four water canals stood a grand Christmas tree, donated by East Yonkers resident Bill Pisano from his own property. Classical music, performed live by the "Encore" string quartet, played over the newly installed sound system as visitors enjoyed cocoa and snacks next to a towering Hanukkah menorah installed in the Temple of the Sky.

The lighted Persian Garden, which is the first element of the 43-acre Untermyer Gardens to be restored, will be open for free every evening, from 5:30 to 8, through Jan. 3. Strains of recorded Christian, Jewish and Middle Eastern music will fill the air, and on weekends, volunteers from local organizations will serve free refreshments.

The Untermyer Gardens, which were originally part of a much larger estate belonging to attorney Samuel Untermyer, are owned by the City of Yonkers. Their restoration has been ongoing since 2011, under the auspices of the Conservancy.

"For five years, we have dreamed about doing a grand holiday illumination to show what this garden, with its great architectural bones, could look like in the off-season," said the Conservancy's chairman,



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE





The Persian Garden during the opening ceremony on Dec. 11.



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

The Temple of the Sky (left) and the amphitheater (right).

### [ARCHIVES](#)

-  [SPOTLIGHT NEWS](#)
-  [SPECIAL SECTIONS](#)
-  [PHOTOS & SLIDESHOWS](#)
-  [FRONT PAGE GALLERY](#)

### [NEWSSTAND LOCATIONS](#)

The Rivertowns Enterprise is available from our office at 95 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, and at these locations:  
*Locations updated 12/6/13*

#### **Ardsey**

- Ardsey Market Fresh
- DeCicco's
- Foodland
- Madaba Deli
- Stars Bagels

#### **Hastings**

- Farragut Stationery
- Hastings Station Cafe
- Hastings Stationery
- K's Cards
- Madaba Deli

#### **Dobbs Ferry**

- Battaglia Brothers
- Brothers Market
- Dobbs Ferry Cafe
- Getty Station
- Jay's Stationery
- NY Bagel Authority
- Nonna's Parkside Deli
- Venice Deli
- Waterfront Express
- Willoughby's

#### **Irvington**

- Geordanes
- La Familia
- Shell Station
- Zarrilli's Deli

#### **Tarrytown**

- Tappan Zee Stationery

SINGLE COPIES 75¢

**For convenient home  
delivery, subscribe today.**

Stephen Byrns. He said the display cost "many tens of thousands of dollars," and thanked the gardening staff for their efforts. He also thanked Conservancy board members Richard and Beth Fitzgerald of North Yonkers for donating the sound system for the display. Richard Fitzgerald owns Yonkers-based Sound Associates, which provides sound systems for Broadway shows and special events like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The musicians appeared courtesy of the Untermyer Performing Arts Council.

The Persian Garden provides an unparalleled backdrop for such a holiday light display, Byrns said in a Dec. 10 interview. He explained that the electrical service was recently expanded throughout the walled garden and the ability to illuminate it will not be limited to holiday time. "What's great is that the architectural bones of the spaces are so magnificent that, summer or winter, this will be a way to show off the wonderful architecture."

Byrns explained that the illumination was based on the idea of the winter solstice — the beginning of daylight coming back and increasing every day. "Many different cultures and religions celebrate that," he noted. With this in mind, the Conservancy combined Christian, Jewish, Persian and Zoroastrian music on its mix tape. Christian selections include the "Gloria" from the Bach Christmas Oratorio. Several Jewish songs are related to Hanukkah, and some of those were composed by Yonkers residents Gerald Cohen and Elliot Levine. The selections also include secular music from the Middle East set to poems by classical Persian poets.

On the weekends, local organizations such as the Garden Club of Dobbs Ferry and a Boy Scout troop from Bronxville will serve refreshments. On the night of Christmas Day — when Christians will be unavailable because of the holiday, and Jews will be unable to serve because it's the Sabbath — members of the Mayor's Muslim American Council, a citizens' volunteer group connected with the City of Yonkers, will serve the refreshments. "The symbolism of a Muslim group serving on Christmas night is a wonderful thing," said Byrns, who noted that this group also served the refreshments at the illumination opening.

The Conservancy extended its restoration work beyond the walled garden this year. A total renovation of the Temple of Love and its complex underground waterworks, which operate tiers of waterfalls cascading into ornamental ponds. The Temple itself will probably be dismantled and reconstructed in 2016 because the cast stone columns and beams may need replacement, and the wrought-iron dome has not been repainted in decades. The Conservancy will also install security lights and cameras to discourage partying teenagers from using the Temple as a hangout.

Byrns estimated that the Temple of Love project would cost about \$600,000. "The restoration has been largely made possible by a generous donation by [former Yonkers Mayor] Angelo Martinelli, in memory of his wife, Carol, who died a year ago," Byrns said. "They were married for 65 years and they had six sons." Martinelli is on the board of the Conservancy.

Another major project underwritten by a memorial donation is the restoration of "The Vista," the stairs descending toward the river. More than 100 Japanese cedar trees were planted along the allée this year to recreate the original look of this feature. Irrigation, plantings, safety railings, stabilization of the steps and removal of graffiti will return The Vista to its former appearance, which is meant to remind visitors of the stairs at the Villa d'Este on Lake Como in Italy. The columns at the bottom of the stairs, framing the view of the Hudson, are ancient Roman columns made of cipollino marble.

"That project has largely been made possible by a gift from Nortrud Spero," Byrns said. "She is on the board and lives in Yonkers, and is a big environmentalist. Her husband, Monroe Spero, died last year and she decided to make this gift in memory of him."

Byrns said the Conservancy hopes to dedicate the Temple of Love in the spring of 2016 and The Vista later in the year. Meanwhile, once the warmer weather returns, there will be more ornamental plantings. "Now that the deer fence is in, we'll be able to plant [outside the walled garden], which is a whole new world," Byrns said. But that doesn't mean the planting will be finished next year: in the gardens' heyday, there were numerous ornamental gardens that have yet to be unearthed.

"We've got decades of work ahead of us," Byrns said.

**Read more local coverage of your hometown in this week's issue of the Rivertowns Enterprise. Newsstand copies are available at several locations listed above, or [subscribe](#) today for convenient home delivery.**

**Subscribe**

The Rivertowns Enterprise is mailed to your home every Friday for only \$29.00 per year. [Click here](#) to subscribe or give as a great gift.

**Advertise**

- View our Media Kit for deadlines, specs and circulation information.
- Special Sections
- Contact your Ad Representative, [Marilyn Petrosa](#)

**Take part**

Submit story ideas, announcements, press releases, letters to the editor, photos, and guest columns.

**Followers & fans**

- [Like us!](#)
- [Rivertowns Enterprise store](#)
- [Story reprints](#)

