

2020 Annual Report

# Riverside Park Conservancy

Working side by side





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## From the President & CEO

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Dear Neighbors and Friends of Riverside Park:

While the past year has presented major challenges, Riverside Park Conservancy ensured that the Park continued to thrive.

We understand the critical role that public space plays for our mental and physical health, and that is even more true in the midst of a global pandemic. That is why I am so proud that in 2020, we did more for the Park than any year in our 34-year history, saw a record number of donors, and redoubled our efforts to support the historically-underserved areas north of 120th Street.

Thanks to private donors, we provided professional horticultural care for six miles of parkland; completed paving projects at 95th and 139th Streets in record time; renovated crumbling step ramps between 110th and 114th Streets; bought and installed new backboards at the 76th Street basketball courts; fixed the fencing on Joan of Arc Island; inoculated our majestic elm trees; and hired temporary staff to help with field work and trash pickup when it became necessary.

As the world went virtual, so did the Conservancy. We pivoted our popular Summer on the Hudson programming online, and hosted 112 virtual programs — including a virtual Fireside Chat with CNN's Fareed Zakaria and *The New Yorker's* Adam Gopnik. We trained brand new volunteers on Zoom, and supported existing volunteers, many of whom continued without interruption this year. We are all so thankful for their extraordinary efforts — always, but particularly this year.

We also created a campaign for our North Park Initiative — which brought in over 500 new donors to the area north of 120th Street. And in 2020, we opened the John-Carlo Monti Bike Education Center at 158th Street and brought \$2.3 million in new funds from the city for North Park infrastructure. A great effort, and yet there is still so much more to do.

Thank you for standing by our side when we needed you most. I hope that Riverside Park has brought you some comfort in this unprecedented and unpredictable year.

With sincere gratitude,

Daniel R. Garodnick  
President & CEO



## From the Board Chair

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Dear Neighbors:

This year has reminded all of us of the importance of green spaces like Riverside Park to the lives of New Yorkers.

In 2020, with a world-wide pandemic raging, New Yorkers came to Riverside Park for fresh air, socially-distanced activities, to run, to relax, and to just escape the concrete jungle, even for just a few moments.

More than ever, I was honored to be at the helm of Riverside Park Conservancy's Board of Trustees, and to see the impact of our work. Even with the challenges that the year brought for us — and in no small part in response to those challenges — the Conservancy accomplished a great deal, thanks to the hard work of our team and to generous gifts from our supporters.

We completed the 102nd Street Field House, repaired step ramps between 110th to 114th Streets, did major repaving between 95th to 97th Streets and at 139th Street near Jenny's Garden, and provided horticultural care for the entire length of the Park. And rather than hold a traditional gala, we launched a fundraising drive specifically focused on delivering improvements for the northern section of the Park, where too many needs have gone too long unattended — our North Park Initiative. We have a lot of work to do, but I am proud of the progress we made this year.

Of course, the Conservancy would not be what it is today without the steadfast and continued support of our volunteers. Their commitment to Riverside Park really shined this year, as they continued to work — even under new safety protocols, and without interruption — to help keep the Park beautiful and clean.

I'd like to personally thank everyone for the unwavering support through this difficult year. Riverside Park could not be the cherished gem that it is without the support of our neighbors and friends.

Sincerely,

Micah C. Lasher  
Chair, Board of Trustees



## From the City

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Our parks have always been essential for New Yorkers, but this year's unprecedented pandemic has made it even clearer that they are a critical part of our city's infrastructure. During the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, public spaces have been refuges for those seeking physical and mental health benefits, and our partnership with the Riverside Park Conservancy has been vital to ensuring that New Yorkers could enjoy some of our city's most treasured parks.

Throughout this difficult year, the Riverside Park Conservancy has continued caring for Riverside Park, Riverside Park South, Sakura Park, Fort Washington Park, and West Harlem Piers. Staff stepped up to the challenge of keeping these outstanding green spaces accessible and safe, providing regular maintenance and infrastructure support, continuing to engage volunteers under new health and safety guidelines, and offering a robust virtual programming series.

The Conservancy also helped to advance our mission to build a more equitable park system in 2020. Under the leadership of President Dan Garodnick, the Conservancy leaned into its North Park Initiative to raise funds specifically to address the needs of historically underinvested areas in the parks they maintain. This effort will focus significant resources on addressing the needs of these spaces, including improved entrances, pathways, gardens, athletic fields, and playgrounds that better serve the surrounding communities.

While so much in our city has changed this past year, the consistent support of the Riverside Park Conservancy has never wavered. We remain grateful for the dedication of the Conservancy and the staff that care for our parks every day and look forward to a bright new year of serving New Yorkers together.

Bill de Blasio  
Mayor

Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Hon. ASLA  
Commissioner  
NYC Parks



## Riverside Park Conservancy Impact

# Working side by Riverside



Conservancy staff admires the lush slope by the 135th Street Bike Path.

Restoring, maintaining, and improving this unique 400-acre stretch of parkland is only possible when conservancy, city, and community work side by side. A park alongside the Hudson River presents special challenges, such as storm damage, ecological vulnerabilities, and erosion. Not to mention the additional stresses of having a highway and a railroad running through it — and this year, a global pandemic.

Not only do we support Riverside Park, but also Fort Washington Park, West Harlem Piers Park, Sakura Park, and Riverside Park South. While our name is Riverside Park Conservancy, we care for six miles of parkland from 59th Street to the George Washington Bridge.

We work side by side with the New York City Parks Department. While our daily tasks may differ, our goal is the same — to provide you with a better, safer, more enjoyable park experience. Throughout all four seasons, we work with a volunteer corps of loyal partners. Last year alone, our dedicated volunteers logged more than 20,000 hours of weeding, pruning, planting, painting, and picking up. We need you by our side. Private donations make up nearly 50% of the Park's yearly operating costs. Thanks to the generosity of neighbors and Park lovers like you, we remain true to our mission.



Conservancy Gardeners pruning the trees along the river over the summer.



Conservancy President Dan Garodnick interviews a 2021 Summer Intern candidate.

# Year in Review

Despite the challenges faced by a global pandemic, Riverside Park Conservancy was able to make significant improvements in 2020. Though our gardening staff was sidelined for a period of time due to state health mandates, we successfully avoided a single layoff or furlough. When they returned, we quickly attacked the areas of most significant need. We took our Summer on the Hudson program, made it virtual, and continued to make more physical improvements to the Park than we ever have before.

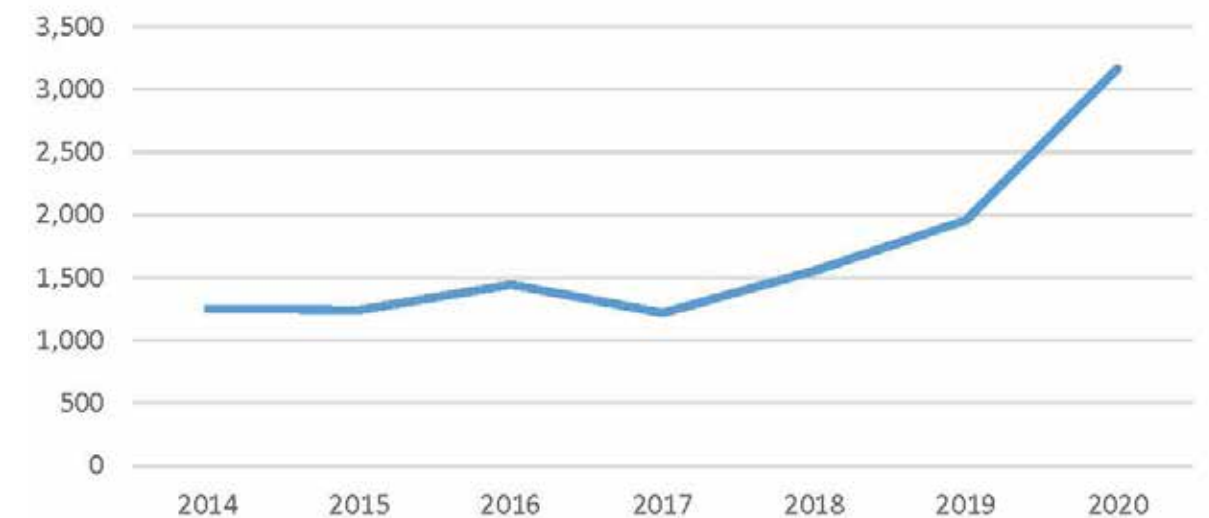
We redoubled our efforts to promote our North Park Initiative, which improves the areas north of 120th Street. Our campaign, called Bridging the Gap, generated hundreds of new donors for the North Park. It allowed us to open the John-Carlo Monti Community Bike Education Center on 158th Street, and will bring new free public programming and playground equipment in that area. It also yielded \$2.3 million from the City for infrastructure improvements in the North Park, and a partnership with Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs to help us study the specific needs of the area.

In 2020, we had more individual donors to Riverside Park Conservancy than at any point in our 34-year history. Because of the generosity of our neighbors, we were able to keep the Park in good shape — even in such a difficult year. Not only did we provide professional horticultural care across six miles of parkland and support for our extraordinary volunteers, but we also led efforts for greater funding for parks citywide. We could not have done any of it without you. Onward to 2021. We have lots more to do, and look forward to building on this success.



SOCIAL MEDIA GROWTH	2019	2020	% increase since 2019
E-mail	25,322	36,041	42%
Facebook	2,863	3,278	14%
Instagram	8,747	11,600	33%
Twitter	2,372	3,319	40%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,304</b>	<b>54,238</b>	<b>38%</b>

GIFT COUNT 2014 - 2020







# COVID-19 Impact



Governor Cuomo's August 12 state-wide Coronavirus Update email included a picture of Conservancy's social distancing signage as their "Photo of the Day".

In 2020, *The Wall Street Journal* and *New York Daily News* reported the 'perfect storm' of challenges that the COVID-19 crisis would have on parks — and they were right.

Riverside Park was not exempt from the pandemic's impacts. For us, the perfect storm manifested itself through a dramatic increase in park use coupled with a significant cut in seasonal staff from the Parks Department that impacted basic maintenance, particularly

during the summer. It also required us to sideline our own staff for a period of time due to health mandates from the state, to cancel our sports camp, and it sharply limited our ability to hold volunteer events — which are fundamental to our efforts to care for the Park.

Of course, it also required us to postpone our annual fundraising Gala in the spring, and the grand opening of the Riverside Park Field House. All of our playgrounds and tennis courts were closed for many months, and our Summer on the Hudson programs pivoted to an all-virtual experience.

In response, the Conservancy took active steps to promote social distancing, using our distinct voice, on both social media and signage in the Park. And when our staff returned, our gardeners quickly got to work to make up for lost time. The Conservancy brought on its own seasonal gardeners to supplement the work of our full time staff, hired a crew from the Goddard Riverside Green Keepers to help us keep up with trash piling up, and new volunteers further ramped up trash removal efforts in every area of the Park. Importantly, our ParkTenders, who volunteer in specific areas of the Park throughout the year, continued their work throughout the pandemic, mostly unabated.

On a positive note, the COVID-19 crisis has brought more attention to the fact that Riverside Park is a life-saver to so many New Yorkers, and we are grateful to all of our neighbors who stepped up to support us during this difficult time.

# In the Press

**Patch**  
Community Center

### Riverside Park Launches Fundraiser For Areas Above 120th Street

The fundraising drive will send resources to the areas of the park bordering West Harlem and Washington Heights from 120th to 181st street.

By [Lisa DeStefano](#), Patch Staff  
Oct 20, 2019 10:57 am ET Updated: Oct 20, 2019 10:57 am ET



**Patch**  
Community Center

### Riverside Conservancy Will 'Make The Park Virtual' This Summer

Online virtual programs almost every day in June will replace the usual "Summer on the Hudson" programs in Riverside Park this year.

By [Anna Quinn](#), Patch Staff  
May 29, 2020 11:34 am ET



**SPECTRUM NEWS NY**



Riverside Park Conservancy Puts Spotlight on Northern Portion of Park  
By [Roger Clark](#) Manhattan  
PUBLISHED 5:30 AM ET Aug. 17, 2020


With some 400 acres of green space, Riverside Park is not only big, but unique.  
It has multiple levels from Riverside Drive to the Hudson River, with opportunities for a variety of recreation, from active to passive.

**Patch**  
Community Center

### New Section Opened In Riverside Park South: Pictures

The new space goes from West 65th to 68th Streets and includes a playground, volleyball court, and multiple pathways.

By [Lisa DeStefano](#), Patch Staff  
Oct 20, 2019 11:01 am ET Updated: Oct 20, 2019 11:01 am ET



An image of the newly opened area in Riverside Park between West 65th and 68th Streets. (Photo Courtesy of the Riverside Park Conservancy)

**The New York Times**  
NEW YORK TODAY



By [Corey Kilgannon](#)  
Jan. 27, 2020

### And finally: A bald eagle in Manhattan

While it is not uncommon to see hawks and falcons in Manhattan, a bald eagle perched against a backdrop of the borough's high-rises is remarkable.

But one has become a regular visitor on the West Side. It was recently spotted in a tree in Riverside Park by park workers, in a wooded area just north of 110th Street.

They took notice of its brown plumage, its white head and tail and its large, hooked beak. They shot a photo that the Riverside Park Conservancy [posted on its Twitter feed](#).

Birders quickly headed over to get a glimpse of the eagle, which kept returning to the area day after day.

One birder, David Barrett, said that bald eagles are common in Manhattan "if you know where to look," and that they are usually spotted in flight because they favor watery

**Patch**  
Community Center


### Riverside Park To Revamp Neglected Areas In Harlem, Wash Heights

The Riverside Park Conservancy said it would ramp up work on a longstanding project to improve underfunded facilities in Upper Manhattan.

By [Lisa DeStefano](#), Patch Staff  
Oct 20, 2019 10:57 am ET Updated: Oct 20, 2019 10:57 am ET



**Country in the City**  
A bald eagle and coyotes are among the wildlife spotted in Manhattan.  
MANHATTAN/TAG-/META/MANHATTAN / 31 JAN 2020 | 10:54



The bald eagle in Riverside Park. (Photo: Anthony Collins nyc)


Manhattan residents are now sharing their green spaces with coyotes that have been spotted in Central Park and a bald eagle

**Patch**  
Community Center

### Beaten-Up Riverside Park Path Repaved In Harlem

The repaved path to Jenny's Garden at 138th Street was "in dire need of repair" and is part of Riverside Park's new North Park Initiative.

By [Lisa DeStefano](#), Patch Staff  
Oct 20, 2019 10:57 am ET Updated: Oct 20, 2019 10:57 am ET



**West Side Rag**

### New Riverside Skate Park Opens 'Street' Section as Construction Continues on Pool-Style Bowl

Posted on August 14, 2020 at 6:49 pm by [David Kessler](#)



The Riverside Park Conservancy said this week that the steps, rails and low ramps at its new skate park on 108th Street are open. The skate park has been under construction since last year after multi-year planning process. The Parks Department is considering naming it after [Andy Kessler](#), local skating legend.

The city is also constructing a bowl in the park that's 11 feet deep, in the style of the pools made famous by skaters in California.

The Conservancy continues to grow its public profile, and that includes consistent recognition in the press. In 2020, we had great coverage of our North Park Initiative, Community Bike Education Center, virtual Summer on the Hudson series, efforts to advocate for funds for parks in the City budget, and more. We look forward to finding ways to generate increased public interest in Riverside Park Conservancy, and our important work, in 2021.

**Patch**  
Community Center

### Riverside Conservancy Will 'Make The Park Virtual' This Summer

Online virtual programs almost every day in June will replace the usual "Summer on the Hudson" programs in Riverside Park this year.


By [Anna Quinn](#), Patch Staff  
May 29, 2020 11:34 am ET



**ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT (ARTS-ENTERTAINMENT)**

### Majestic Bald Eagle And Red-Tailed Hawk Face-Off In NYC

By [David Barrett](#), Manhattan  
Aug. 17, 2020 6:30 PM • 10 COMMENTS




Bald Eagles are not terribly uncommon in New York City (<https://gothamist.com/tags/bald-eagles>), ever since a remarkable comeback in the 1970s ([https://www.audubon.org/news/first-nesting-bald-eagle-pair-](https://www.audubon.org/news/first-nesting-bald-eagle-pair-1970s)

**Patch**  
Community Center

### Bike Education Center Opens In Riverside Park

The Riverside Park Conservancy said it will build new playground equipment, offer free programming and improve local infrastructure.

By [Payton Prober](#), Patch Staff  
Oct 20, 2019 10:26 am ET Updated: Oct 20, 2019 11:24 am ET





## Park Projects

# Field House



The basketball courts in front of the Field House were completed in 2020.

While COVID-19 required us to postpone the scheduled grand opening of the Riverside Park Field House on April 25, 2020, the structure is now complete, and the outdoor spaces and public restroom are already in use.

We are certain you will agree that this is a major improvement for the Park.

The building, which was completed in 1937 and renovated in 1964, was gutted by fire in the 1970s and sat empty for more than forty years. We look forward to a grand opening when public health rules allow for such gatherings.

When the Field House officially opens to the public, it will provide Riverside Park with a large indoor space that will serve as a central location for public recreational and athletic activities. The Conservancy plans to offer a variety of cultural, educational, and health and fitness programming in the Field House throughout the year. The building will also enhance the use of existing facilities, such as the athletic fields, jogging trails, and the bicycle and pedestrian Greenway.

# Greenway Slope Restoration



Conservancy staff has taken great care of this area, to create a lush slope, while also dealing with erosion issues.



The Conservancy planted these beautiful asters on the Slope to serve as "living mulch".

We continue to make significant progress in restoring the sloped areas between 72nd and 79th Streets.

In 2020, we worked to protect the health of our initial 2019 plantings with hand watering and other measures to bring water to the slope; to remove invasives and to plant from 72nd to 79th Streets; and to plan for and address the area with the most significant problem with erosion.

An important goal of this year was to address the bare ground conditions, where water flows forcefully, removing soil and everything else in its path on the southern end of the slope.

However, the steep section of slope at 72nd Street, where water enters the park from the highway above, remained problematic and our standard approaches to erosion control (coir logs, coir matting, and natural wood to slow runoff) were not solving the issue. Instead of using erosion control fabric or wood chips, we used asters that were already surviving on the slope — and added even more of them — to serve as a "living mulch." This method gave our other planting initiatives more time to establish and was extremely successful in covering the slope.

Despite our success with plantings and efforts to prevent erosion, we still have certain problem areas where we have not gotten erosion under control. We are working on site-specific erosion control plans to address this ongoing issue.

# Joan of Arc Island



The new, sleek fencing protects the lawn from foot traffic.

The all-volunteer Joan of Arc Statue Committee successfully advocated for City Council discretionary support for monument restoration that was completed in fall 2019. The plaza surrounding the statue now has new benches and is ADA compliant, the 93rd Street steps are rebuilt, a new paved pathway connects the plaza to a much safer new Park entrance at 92nd Street, and the pathways at the northern end of the Island are resurfaced. Ultimately, all of this improves access and the overall Park experience.

Once that capital work finished, we started custom casting for a new pipe rail fence north of the monument in early 2020. While the COVID-19 pandemic put a halt to all projects in March, when that moratorium was lifted in summer 2020, we started — and quickly completed — the work.



# Skate Park



The street style section of the Skate Park at 108th Street in Riverside Park opened in July 2020.



Skaters are thrilled with all of the features at the new Skate Park.

The new street-style portion of the Riverside Park Skate Park at 108th Street opened, and is already full of committed skaters. The NYC Parks Department — which funded and has managed this project — plans to add an 11' deep bowl as the next phase of this project. This is already being touted as one of the very best spots (if not the very best) for skaters in all of New York City.

# Paving 95–97th Streets



Before: The pavement in this area was weathered and deteriorating.



After: The Conservancy used hexagon pavers to create a smooth, safe pathway.

The Conservancy repaved the deteriorated sidewalk between 95th and 97th Streets on Riverside Drive, and installed brand new hexagon pavers. This area has a lot of foot traffic and we immediately saw how much pedestrians were enjoying this new improvement. This was finished in only 3 months — record time for fixes like this.

# Step Ramps



The work in progress at the 114th Street step ramp.



The step ramps were completed in the Fall of 2020, and looked beautiful among the foliage.

The steep, sloping hills of Riverside Park's upper promenade can be descended by steps, ramps and meandering walks. With the support of a generous private donor, in 2020, we replaced three historic step ramps between 110th and 114th Streets, giving people safer — and greatly enhanced — access points to the Park.

# Jenny's Garden Path at 139th Street



Breaking up and removing the old pavement on the pathway to Jenny's Garden at 139th Street.



The smooth new path, completed in October 2020.

With the support of a private donor, in less than a week in October 2020, the Conservancy repaved the pathway to Jenny's Garden at 139th Street. This path gets a lot of bicycle and pedestrian traffic and was in a severely deteriorated condition.

We heard from many local residents that this was a priority to get fixed, and we moved fast to address it.

# Tree Inoculations



Our majestic trees begin their inoculations to keep them strong and healthy. It takes about two weeks every spring to inoculate our Elms.

Riverside Park Conservancy began inoculating elm trees against Dutch Elm Disease (DED) in 2008. This program has had enormous impact slowing the spread of the disease and protecting Riverside Park's majestic elms. There remains no cure for DED and the disease persists. The best means of controlling the outbreak continues to be treatment of healthy trees, sanitation pruning, and removal of dead trees in a timely manner.

Our inoculation program has been successful, as we see a decreasing number of trees lost to the disease each year. Since the start of this program, the Conservancy has kept more than one hundred trees inoculated, principally American Elms and many English Elms, the species most vulnerable to DED. Protecting these trees also helps maintain a firewall against further spread of the disease.

# Basketball Court Improvements



The public was thrilled with the fresh new backstops and put them to good use.



The courts were in need of new backstops, and these did not disappoint.

In partnership with the Mo' Motion basketball program, we installed 6 new polycarbonate backstops at the basketball courts at 76th Street in March. We are so appreciative to everyone who chipped in to make this project happen. We hope you agree that the courts are looking better than ever.



We are thankful to Mo'Motion for spearheading this effort.





**Overseers of Olmsted's Vision**

# Zone Gardener Initiative



A Conservancy Gardener clearing away some debris.

The Zone Gardener Program, launched in 2010, serves to expand our horticulture maintenance and care of Riverside Park. While our professional gardeners create and maintain beautiful gardens to enhance the overall Park experience, this is far from their only focus. Zone Gardeners keep ballfields playable, inspect the Park for hazards, respond to storm and snow emergencies, steward healthy habitats, and support tens of thousands of volunteer hours. In doing so, our team brings a unique expertise to care for the Park's health and safety.

2020 provided significant challenges for this program. We were required to sideline our staff for a period of time due to COVID-19 health mandates from the state. Our absence forced us to retreat on some gains we had made in areas we have been improving for years.

Upon their return, our gardeners faced a summer of playing catch-up. The Conservancy hired seasonal staff — for the first time — to attack the Park's various needs. We prioritized areas that were most vulnerable, and quickly got our regular maintenance back on track.

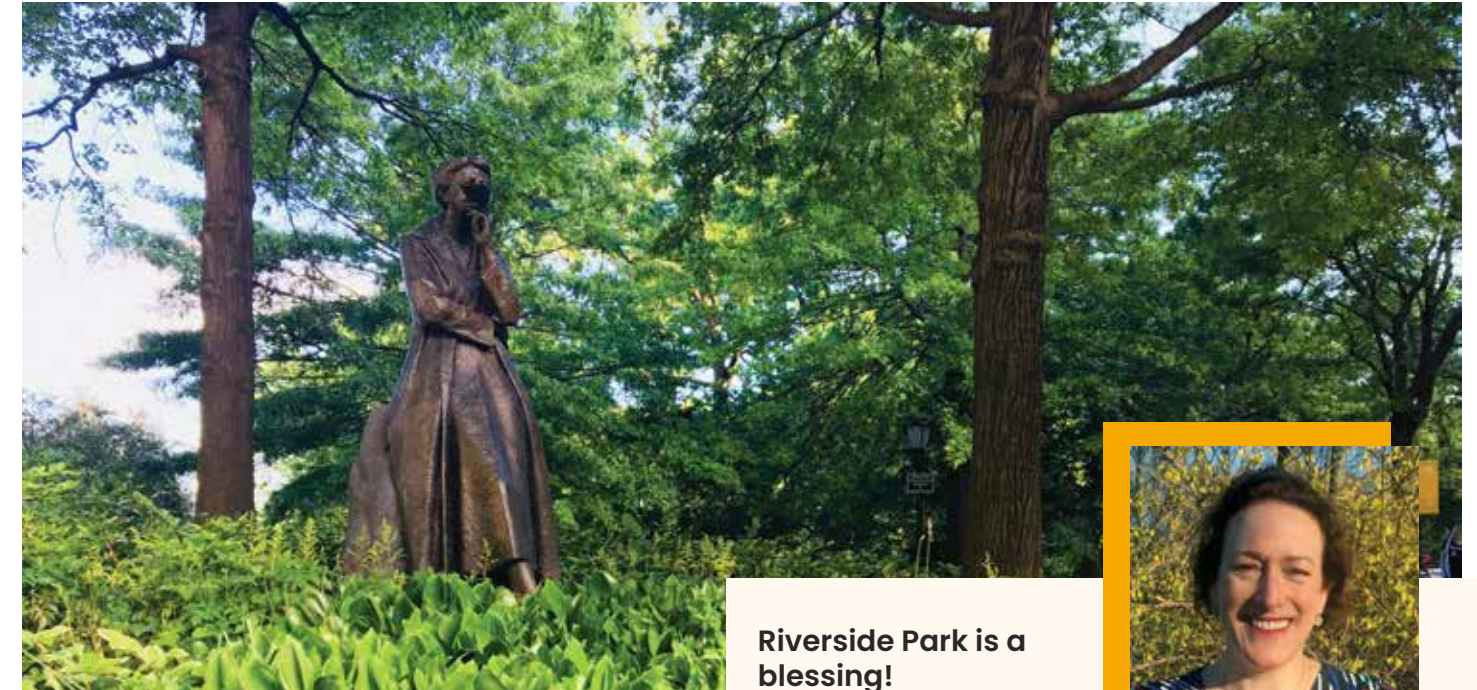
Notably, as a result of the support from our Trustees and neighbors — as well as a forgivable loan from the federal CARES Act — the organization was able to survive the year without layoffs or furloughs. By keeping our staff intact, we were able to recover quickly when it was appropriate to bring the gardeners back to the Park.

Significant challenges remain in 2021, but we are determined to fulfill our mission to support all six miles of parkland under our care.



Gardener Manny Alarcon cares for the northern part of Riverside Park.

# Eleanor Roosevelt Legacy Society



Our regal Eleanor, which the public adorned with a face mask during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Legacy Society, established in 2019, is an honorary group of generous individuals who have included Riverside Park Conservancy in their estate plans through a bequest, retirement plan, life insurance, trust, or other legacy gift.

Planned gifts provide resources that create extraordinary opportunities and preserve our future while also achieving your own financial objectives. Planned gifts are vital to the Conservancy's work by helping us to respond to future challenges while allowing us to continue improving and restoring Riverside Park every day.

## Riverside Park is a blessing!

Particularly during these uncertain times, Riverside Park South is an urban oasis and keeps me energized, inspired, hopeful and grateful.

On my daily walks I am treated to the delights and the soothing power of nature. The Park is a creative muse for my evolving photography projects, a playground for my renewed interest in kite-flying, and a venue for my passion for outdoor, socially-distanced swing dancing with friends and neighbors.

As a philanthropic strategist for Weill Cornell Medicine, I know the power of creating a personally meaningful legacy. Preserving glorious Riverside Park now and for future generations is important to me and that's why I have designated Riverside Park Conservancy as a beneficiary of my retirement account.

**Lisa Lager**, Riverside Park neighbor

# Goddard Riverside Green Keepers



Goddard Riverside's Green Keeper crew.

In the summer of 2020, we became increasingly concerned about seeing the trash build up in Riverside Park — and in parks throughout the city. We knew the cause: as a result of budget cuts, the Parks Department suddenly had 45 percent fewer staff members to handle tasks like picking up trash and cleaning.

The Parks Department's Riverside Park staff was working twice as hard, and finding it impossible to keep up, especially with Park use heavier than it had ever been.



Parks Department budget cuts and an increase in park usage resulted in trash overflowing throughout city parks.

Riverside Park Conservancy stepped in to help. We retained the Green Keepers, a crew from Goddard Riverside, to help us address the growing problem. The Green Keepers were out in the Park from Monday to Saturday, for several hours a day, bagging and picking up trash — and helped us to keep Riverside Park clean. Almost immediately, we saw a positive impact.

We are grateful to our many neighbors who stepped up with generous gifts to support this important effort. With your support, we will continue it next year.

# Advocacy

## The Parks and Open Space Partners

Riverside Park Conservancy took an active role in a new coalition of groups whose mission is to support parks and open spaces in New York City. The group banded together in March 2020 to share insights and resources in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to raise awareness around the impacts of the crisis on public parks.

The Parks and Open Space Partners (POSP-NYC) coalition met weekly throughout the year. Riverside Park Conservancy took an active leadership role in surveying the groups about COVID-19's impacts on their budgets, drafting and publishing a report, and generating public support for parks groups.

The coalition was successful in raising awareness for the critical role that our city's public spaces have for physical and mental health, for community resilience, and for environmental benefits.

POSP-NYC also worked with foundations to create the NYC Green Relief & Recovery Fund, a multi-year grant program to help support stewardship organizations (like ours) which care for NYC's parks and open spaces. Riverside Park Conservancy was also the beneficiary of a grant from this fund, which helped us to hire seasonal staff to make up for time lost during the COVID-19 pause.



Our city's public spaces play a critical role in the physical and mental health of our communities.



Conservancy staff and volunteers harvest vegetables from Jenny's Garden.

## North Park Initiative

During the COVID-19 crisis, public spaces like Riverside Park have proven their value — for both the mental and physical health of all New Yorkers. Unfortunately, there are serious issues of funding equity which exist in plain view in parks, including ours, where investment in certain areas has been far less than equitable for far too long.

At this important moment — with renewed focus on public health, and racial and social justice — Riverside Park Conservancy decided to cancel its annual spring benefit in favor of a fundraising drive called *Bridging the Gap: Our North Park Initiative*. This effort was part of a multi-year campaign for support, and we sought 400 donors (one for every acre of park we support) to support this effort, at any level, in 2020.

Our North Park Initiative was developed in 2009 to focus advocacy and resources on the part of the Park bordering the neighborhoods of West Harlem and Washington Heights from 120th to 181st Streets; areas which are predominantly



Black or Latinx, with poverty rates three times greater than the Upper West Side.

We have already had success in this effort—but we must do more. A truly equitable park means that we — and the City — need to deliver even more resources to this area to correct years of underinvestment; to enhance our free public programming; to dedicate more staff to the area to ensure its care and upkeep; and to engage the community to demand improvements from all possible sources.

**We were heartened that we far surpassed our goal, and 574 new donors stepped up for the North Park — in only 2 months.**



Conservancy field staff have been enjoying these unique new Yuba bikes, to help transport plants and other items throughout the Park.

**As part of our efforts in 2020, we were able to:**

**Open the John-Carlo Monti Bike Education Center** at 158th Street. The programs — which will be offered on the site by Bike New York — will allow beginning participants of all ages to learn how to ride a bicycle. The first class for adults was held in October.

**Introduce Yuba Bikes.** We added two Yuba Electric Supermarché front-loading cargo bikes to our operations fleet in the North Park.

**Add new playground equipment.** Funds raised will allow us to introduce new playground equipment to the North Park (forthcoming in 2021).

**Plan free public programming.** Starting in the summer of 2021, we will offer three years of free public programming to the areas of the North Park that currently do not have any.

**Establish a partnership with Columbia University.** We engaged a graduate class at the School of International and Public Affairs to do a capstone project on Riverside Park's North Park, and study both strategies and tactics for the City and the Conservancy to do more.

We were both proud and encouraged by 2020's success in advancing our North Park Initiative. That said, we are not declaring victory here — these improvements just scratch the surface of what we need to accomplish in the North Park.

# Welcome our new Trustees

We are so honored to welcome a brand new group of distinguished community members to our Board of Trustees in 2020. Our Trustees steward our organization in good times and in bad, and are our greatest champions as we advance our important work in Riverside Park.



## Elizabeth de León Bhargava, Esq.

*Biden–Harris Presidential Transition Team*

Elizabeth has held many positions throughout New York City and State government, most recently as Deputy Secretary for Labor & Workforce for the Office of New York State Governor Andrew M. Cuomo. Her unique experience and insight will no doubt prove to be valuable to our staff and Board of Trustees.

Raised in Washington Heights, Elizabeth received her Baccalaureate of Arts in Literature & Rhetoric from Binghamton University. She grew up in and around Riverside Park, and is thrilled to again be living, with her husband, so close to its peaceful shores and hub of activity.



## Nnaji Campbell

*Senior Infrastructure Advisor, Ernst & Young*

A native New Yorker, Nnaji has lived in Washington Heights much of his life, and currently with his wife, Heidi, and their son, Emiliano. He frequents Riverside Park with his family and has personally been impacted by its transformation over the years. Impassioned by a career in public service and in the development of community-centered infrastructure, Nnaji aims to strengthen the bond between Riverside Park, his local community and all New Yorkers who wish to revel in its welcoming green from 59th street to 181st.



## Neil Horner

*Partner, Sidley Austin LLP*

Neil Horner has lived in the Upper West Side with his family since 2014.

“Riverside Park is a microcosm of life in New York. You have the beauty of Olmstead’s visionary design punctuated by the many historical monuments. Add New Yorkers from all walks of life finding serenity, invigoration, community and even a connection to nature — and you have a place where you really see the energy and diversity of New York come alive. I am lucky to have shared Riverside Park with my children as they grow up and am proud of RPC’s effort to preserve Riverside Park for all of us.”



## Maria Lizardo

*Executive Director, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation*

Maria currently serves on the board of United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), the Human Services Council (HSC), and the National Dominican Day Parade. She earned her B.S. from Hunter College of the City of New York and her Master of Social Work degree from the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College.

Maria is a wonderful product of the Hamilton and Washington Heights neighborhoods, and works tirelessly for the good of her communities, in both personal and professional ways.



## Chris Michel

*Americas Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Bloomberg LP*

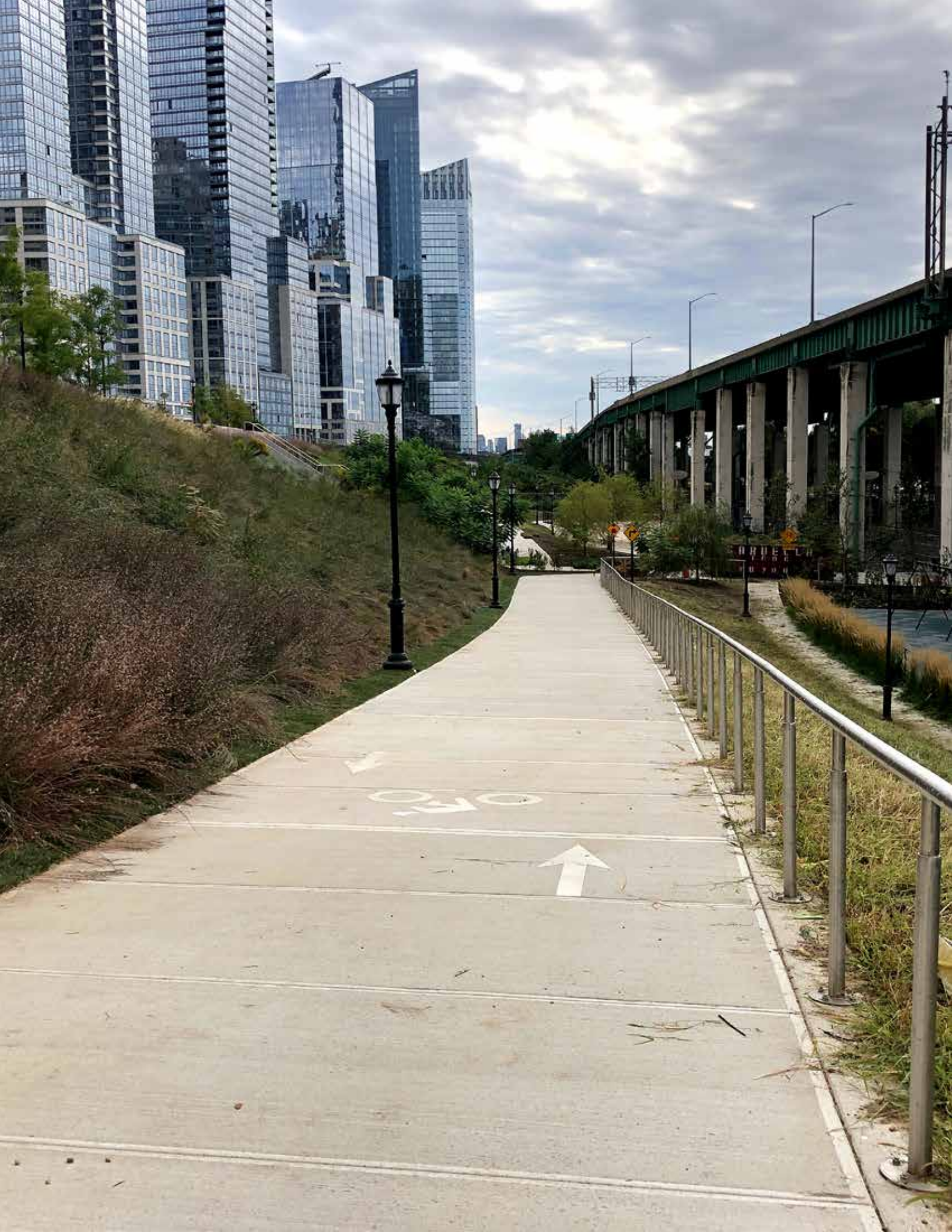
Chris Michel grew up in West Harlem, literally steps away from the 148th Street entrance to Riverside Park. He spent countless hours in the Park, playing basketball, baseball, football and the occasional game of hide and go seek. Today, he still lives uptown, close enough to the Park that he can walk to enjoy its charms and does so on a regular basis with the next generation of Michels. In his professional career, he has held several senior-level HR and Diversity roles and been responsible for initiatives and programs in over 60 countries around the world. Michel graduated summa cum laude from the City College of New York, and is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society.



## Alexis Offen

*Chief Operations and Strategy Officer, Greenwich House*

Alexis brings a professional and personal passion to New York City’s parks. She previously served as the Chief Operating Officer at the Trust for Governors Island. In her role she oversaw an array of programs on the Island, including park operations, strategic planning, and developing amenities for park visitors. Alexis and her husband enjoy weekends in Riverside Park with their two young sons, who love to run and bike for long stretches. She is excited to support the Conservancy and its important work for all New Yorkers.



## Riverside Park South



# Riverside Park South



The opening of Phase 5 of Riverside Park South features a new playground.



One of the new pedestrian pathways in Riverside Park South.

After years of work, the Parks Department's long-awaited fifth phase of Riverside Park South opened to the public at 7:00 am on October 22.

Stretching from West 65th to 68th Streets, this 4.6 acre area includes new paths, stairs, and plazas; a playground and swings; lawns, sand volleyball courts, and a dog run.

Next up — and already in progress — are improvements from 69th to 72nd Streets. This will include better pedestrian and bicycle paths, a reconfigured dog run, new seating on Pier I, and a Parkour gym that will replace the unimproved area behind Pier I Café. This work began on October 1. While the entire project is scheduled to take approximately 18 months, sections

will be opened on a rolling basis, to be enjoyed as soon as they are ready.

Phase 6 — the final stage of Riverside Park South construction — stretches from 59th to 65th Streets. This will introduce a large, multi-use athletic field, basketball courts, and new entry points at 64th and 67th Streets. It will also include improvements to the entrance at 59th Street.

At the end of 2020, the Riverside South developer was securing permits and finalizing preparations to begin construction. Once it begins, phase 6 construction is expected to take approximately two years.



**Special Events and Public Programming**



# Summer on the Hudson

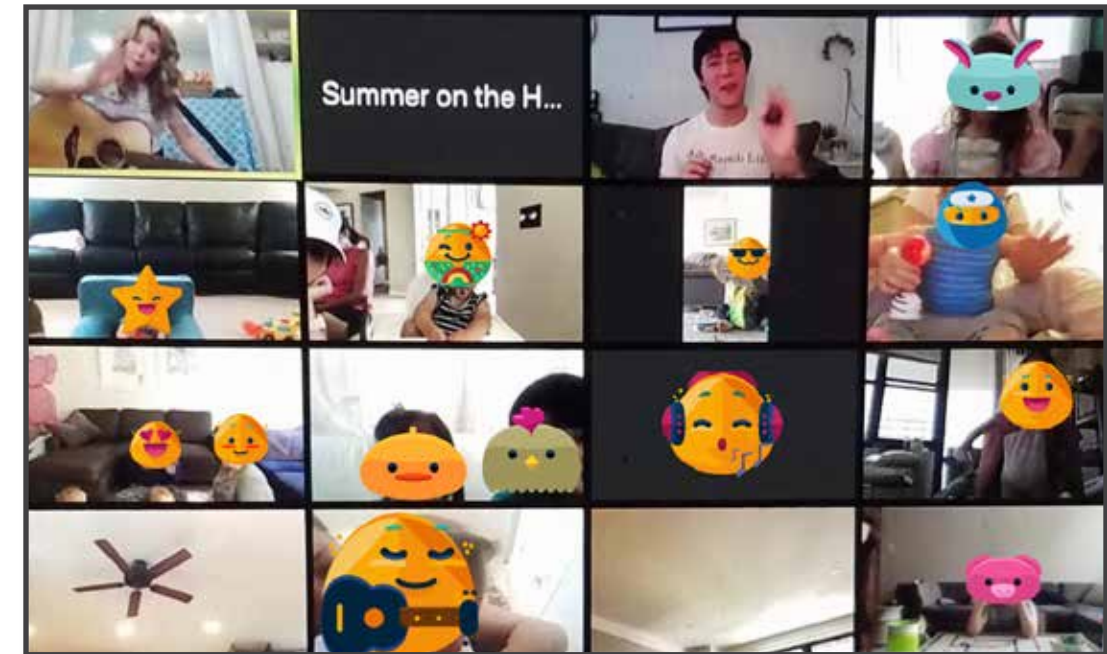


Dancers appear in Riverside Park South as part of a livestreamed performance by Kinesis Project Dance Theatre.

Summer on the Hudson is an annual arts and culture festival held in Riverside Park from 59th to 181st Streets. Launched in 2001, Summer on the Hudson is co-sponsored by the New York City Parks Department and Riverside Park Conservancy. This public programming series offers a wide range of concerts, movies, health and wellness classes, educational workshops, family programs, and other events.

In response to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, Summer on the Hudson worked quickly to convert a planned outdoor season to a virtual format. Riverside was one of the first NYC Parks to make this shift, holding interactive events on Zoom, social media, and even broadcasting on-site performances from the Park. 5,382 people registered for our events, and 4,232 attended, from mid-May through the end of October.

We presented 112 events in 2020 including health and wellness, children's programs and concerts, trivia, educational workshops, online art exhibitions, and even a virtual DJ party.



Moosiki Kids presents an interactive musical story time to a virtual audience every week.



Participants enjoy a Pilates class on Zoom with instructor Melissa Ricci.

# Multi-Sport Summer Camp



Launched in summer 2013, the Conservancy's Multi-Sport Summer Camp provides an opportunity for young people between the ages of 4-16 to spend their summer days outside at a high-quality camp in Riverside Park. The Conservancy provides scholarships for families that need financial assistance to ensure that the Camp is fully inclusive for all who seek to participate. 20% of our campers received full or partial need-based scholarships provided by the Conservancy.

Riverside Park Conservancy partners with three providers to operate the Camp: Kids of Summer, Carlos Oliveira Soccer Academy, and Riverside Clay Tennis Association. Sports offerings include baseball, basketball, flag football, soccer and tennis.

Due to COVID-19, this is the first season since the inception of the camp that the program could not operate. We strongly hope to be back on the field and courts for the 2021 season.

# Riverside Clay Tennis Association



The Adaptive Tennis Program is held weekly at the clay courts.

Expelled from the Park by the NYC COVID-19 shutdown in March, RCTA staff returned in late June to discover how much damage nature can inflict in three short months when left to itself. Undeterred by the immense task of restoring the courts, RCTA staff and volunteers teamed up with Parks workers to bring the red clay tennis courts back to life in record time. RCTA staff then worked with volunteers from 119th Street Tennis Association and the Fort Washington Park Tennis Courts to reopen those facilities, which had also been invaded by weeds. By early July, all 30 tennis courts along the Hudson River were back in play.

A tennis boom followed, with court usage at record highs – the red clay tennis courts were packed from dawn to dusk every day from the end of June to the end of November – as tennis proved the perfect response to COVID-19 for thousands of Riverside Park users. It's an inherently socially-distanced sport and

provides healthy, safe, outdoor fun and exercise. Moreover, it was free this season—no permits required.

Sadly, due to the pandemic, no tournaments, picnics, or concerts were held this year. However, expectations are that all of these will return in 2021. RCTA did manage to safely hold – and even to expand – its Adaptive Tennis Program this year and to enlist over 20 volunteers to help. The free program was held weekly for people with physical, cognitive, emotional or social challenges.



The pandemic left the courts empty for months, allowing weeds to grow.

# John-Carlo Monti Community Bike Education Center



Riverside Park Conservancy partnered with Bike New York to open the John-Carlo Monti Bike Education Center at 158th Street in October 2020.

In partnership with Bike New York, Riverside Park Conservancy opened the John-Carlo Monti Community Bike Education Center at 158th Street.

This brand-new bike education center will provide free programming for New Yorkers of all ages and skill levels to learn how to ride a bicycle, and is coming at a time when New Yorkers are using parks and cycling more than ever. We are so happy to be able to provide a resource for those who want to start riding – and this is one of many improvements that we delivered as part of our North Park Initiative.

The Bike Center is named after John-Carlo Monti, an avid biker and adventurer who enjoyed biking in Riverside Park, but tragically passed away at age 27 last year. John-Carlo will be remembered through this new Bike Education Center as it empowers new cyclists with a sense of wonder and joy when they learn to ride in Riverside Park.

# Fireside Chat

**Fireside Chat with Fareed Zakaria & Adam Gopnik**

Join us for a virtual discussion with journalist Fareed Zakaria and writer Adam Gopnik as they explore Fareed's new book and the future of cities in a post-pandemic world.

This is a free event; any donations will directly support Riverside Park Conservancy.

The first 200 people to donate \$50 or more during the event will receive a copy of Fareed's book!

Thursday, November 19, 2020  
6pm - 7pm

RSVP Here:  
<http://riversideparknyc.eventbrite.com>

TEN LESSONS FOR A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD  
FAREED ZAKARIA

Fareed Zakaria and Adam Gopnik discussed the future of cities during a virtual fundraising event.



Over 100 participants joined CNN's Fareed Zakaria and Adam Gopnik, author of *A Thousand Small Sanities*, in a fireside chat to benefit Riverside Park Conservancy on November 19.

Zakaria and Gopnik explored the future of cities, and offer some lessons for a post-pandemic world. Zakaria – who is a neighbor and supporter of Riverside Park Conservancy – had recently released his book, *Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World*.



# Volunteer Program

# Dedicated Volunteers



RPC Staff and Volunteers gathered virtually in December for a toast to their hard work this year.

Riverside Park Conservancy owes its beginnings to the intrepid volunteers who saw their neighborhood park was not living up to its potential, and they weren't afraid to get their hands dirty. Volunteers continue to be essential to our mission to restore, maintain, and improve Riverside Park. Especially in a year when parks became a much-needed place of respite and recreation for New Yorkers, our volunteers' enormous contributions went even further to provide a peaceful setting for our community.

In January, we hired a full-time North Park Outreach Coordinator to expand our programs north of 120th Street. This staff position further established the Conservancy's presence in every corner of the Park. Even in the midst of the challenges brought on by COVID-19, we strengthened and formed new partnerships with several local organizations, and brought in many new recurring volunteers who live in the surrounding area.



Volunteers help with trash clean up in Riverside Park.

ParkTenders — long-term volunteers who are responsible for the maintenance of their own areas — spent nearly as many hours as they would any other year meticulously tending to their gardens. Sometimes they had the help of “worker bees”, known as PlacePartners, but only at a safe distance. ParkRovers had a huge impact this year in buttressing our trash clean-up efforts, providing reinforcements all over the Park. All volunteers receive training, guidance, and support from the Conservancy's Zone Gardeners and NYC Parks to ensure common goals are met and to provide tools, horticultural material, and supplies for volunteers to carry out their work.

These volunteers make up our Grassroots Volunteer Program, and account for the vast majority of the 20,000+ hours poured into Riverside Park in 2020. Over 90 areas from 59th to 181st Street are completely maintained by these dedicated volunteers, giving them the TLC they deserve year-round.

When the snow comes, an all-volunteer “Snow Corps” emergency response crew boosts snow removal efforts. Members of the community join with park operations staff on the day of a storm to help clear entrances and staircases and keep Riverside Park safe and accessible all year round.

# Teen Corps Program

Each summer, the Teen Corps Horticulture Internship Program hosts high schoolers from West Harlem in an experiential learning program, designed to provide a comprehensive overview of what's involved in working in a public park. Teens work with our Gardeners to maintain key horticultural sites, explore the ins and outs of our natural areas, and keep the Park safe, clean, and healthy. Upon completion, teens receive a stipend on top of their hands-on stewardship experience.

Teen Corps 2020 was a cohort of seven, with the size reduced to stay under the COVID-19 guidelines limit of ten for gatherings in outdoor spaces this summer, and we carefully implemented social distancing, sanitizing procedures, and daily health checklists to ensure everyone's safety. Projects spanned from 97th to 120th Street and included removing invasive plants, implementing erosion control measures, and clearing damaged areas incurred by Hurricane Isaias.



Teen Corps members prepare for a planting project.



Teen Corps work on cutting away and clearing debris.

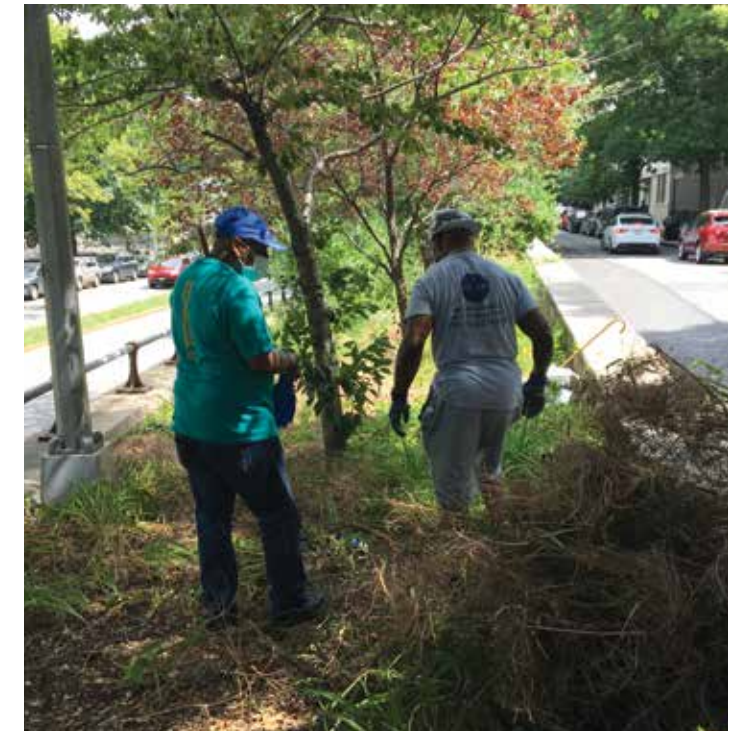
# Group Volunteering

Each year we welcome groups of all ages and sizes to schedule projects to volunteer together in the Park. In a typical year, we host corporate, nonprofit, school, and other community groups throughout the year any day of the week, with most groups ranging in size from 10-50 volunteers (and the occasional 100+ showing). Whether a one-time project or part of a larger ongoing commitment, group volunteers have a major impact on our large-scale long-term Park projects. In addition to these specific group projects, the Conservancy hosts community-wide volunteer events every month.

In the late summer and fall of 2020, we opened up socially-distanced group volunteering for limited size groups and with new safety protocols. As always, projects are tailored to meet each group's interests and capabilities, and activities depend on the time of year and current Park priorities.



Volunteers weed invasive plants by the riverside.



Volunteers clean up debris by the roadside.

# User Groups



Joan of Arc volunteers paint the fence around the island.

Riverside Park Conservancy works side by side with volunteer-led “User Groups” that focus fundraising and maintenance efforts in a particular area of the Park. In 2020, our partnership with User Group volunteers was more important than ever in delivering communications and concerns between Park users and the Conservancy with the changing landscape of the pandemic, especially with some community areas having their accessibility limited.





**In Memoriam**



# In Memoriam

For the RCTA community, a difficult year was made all the more difficult by the loss of several influential members.



## Bruce Director

Bruce's smile, charm and endless kindnesses made him one of the most popular players at the red clay tennis courts over the past 30 years. He leaves behind a large circle of friends and players who miss him dearly. His wife Minnie Johnson served on the RCTA's board of directors for several years. Bruce's family and his many friends are honoring Bruce with a memorial plaque on a bench facing the river in front of the courts, where he spent so many hours waiting to play.



## Albert Lasher

Albert had a profound influence on the early development of the RCTA both as a board member and as a volunteer at the gate on Sunday mornings. He led RCTA's first major fundraising campaign at the end of a particularly rainy season in the late 1990s: "Blue Skies are Here Again." Albert and his wife Stephanie were also instrumental in connecting the RCTA with local elected officials. Their son, Micah, currently serves as the Chair of the Riverside Park Conservancy's Board of Trustees.



## Kevin O'Brien

Kevin grew up across the street from Riverside Park, where he played as a boy and where he continued to play and work as an adult. He volunteered in the Park for many years through the Conservancy until he was hired by NYC Parks in 1992 to work as the caretaker of the red clay courts. After he retired from Parks in 2015, he continued to work at the courts as part of the RCTA staff. It was his personality and work ethic, as much as anything else, that forged the RCTA community; he was its heart, if not its soul.



## Bob Ryland

Among RCTA's most prominent members, Bob died a few weeks after his 100th Birthday. In 1957, Bob became the first Black man in the United States to play tennis professionally. Prior to that, Bob played in the US National Championships in Forest Hills as an amateur. In later years, he played frequently at the red clay courts, participating in tournaments and on the men's ladder. Bob stayed active in the RCTA even when he was no longer able to play tennis, never missing an RCTA picnic or an opportunity to encourage a young player.



**Financials**

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

	December 31	
	2019	2018
<b>Assets</b>		
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$4,196,473	\$3,532,375
Contributions receivable – current	351,743	735,021
Prepaid expenses	-	13,459
Total current assets	<u>4,548,216</u>	<u>4,280,855</u>
<b>Contribution receivable – net</b>	<u>136,803</u>	<u>-</u>
<b>Investments, at fair value</b>	<u>1,469,226</u>	<u>1,228,112</u>
<b>Property and equipment, at cost</b>		
Furniture and equipment	49,730	58,818
Leasehold improvements	20,350	20,350
Sub-total	70,080	79,168
Less: accumulated depreciation and amortization	<u>61,959</u>	<u>59,140</u>
Net property and equipment	<u>8,121</u>	<u>20,028</u>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b><u>\$6,162,366</u></b>	<b><u>\$5,528,995</u></b>
<b>Liabilities and Net Assets</b>		
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 924,847	\$ 581,163
Deferred RPC – South maintenance fee and other	<u>415,404</u>	<u>230,187</u>
Total current liabilities	<u>1,340,251</u>	<u>811,350</u>
<b>Net assets</b>		
Without donor restrictions	951,029	900,944
With donor restrictions	<u>3,871,086</u>	<u>3,816,701</u>
Total net assets	<u>4,822,115</u>	<u>4,717,645</u>
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<b><u>\$6,162,366</u></b>	<b><u>\$5,528,995</u></b>

Consolidated Statement of Activities  
Year Ended December 31, 2019  
(with summarized comparative information for 2018)

	2019			2018
	Without Donor Restrictions	With Donor Restrictions	Total	Total
<b>Public support and revenue</b>				
Contributions	\$ 1,492,434	\$ 1,659,112	\$ 3,151,546	\$ 3,854,771
RPC-South maintenance fees	1,647,423	-	1,647,423	1,328,328
Special events proceeds (net of direct expenses of \$196,868 for 2019 and \$123,992 for 2018)	684,879	-	684,879	601,909
Interest and dividends	3,703	26,917	30,620	28,311
RCTA fees	570,996	-	570,996	344,870
Sports camp fees	866,831	-	866,831	778,381
Other	132,706	-	132,706	233,741
Net assets released from restrictions	<u>1,863,611</u>	<u>(1,863,611)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Total public support and revenue	<u>7,262,583</u>	<u>(177,582)</u>	<u>7,085,001</u>	<u>7,170,311</u>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Program services				
Field operations and volunteers	3,157,883	-	3,157,883	2,982,403
Public programs and events	1,583,952	-	1,583,952	1,568,493
Design and construction	<u>1,029,978</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,029,978</u>	<u>361,193</u>
Total program services	<u>5,771,813</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>5,771,813</u>	<u>4,912,089</u>
Supporting activities				
Management and general	813,954	-	813,954	408,366
Fundraising	<u>626,348</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>626,348</u>	<u>469,995</u>
Total supporting activities	<u>1,440,302</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,440,302</u>	<u>878,361</u>
Total expenses	<u>7,212,115</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>7,212,115</u>	<u>5,790,450</u>
Increase (decrease) in net assets from operating activities	50,468	(177,582)	(127,114)	1,379,861
Non-operating activities				
Unrealized gain (loss) on investments	<u>(383)</u>	<u>231,967</u>	<u>231,584</u>	<u>(68,767)</u>
<b>Increase in net assets</b>	<b>50,085</b>	<b>54,385</b>	<b>104,470</b>	<b>1,311,094</b>
<b>Net assets, beginning of year</b>	<b><u>900,944</u></b>	<b><u>3,816,701</u></b>	<b><u>4,717,645</u></b>	<b><u>3,406,551</u></b>
<b>Net assets, end of year</b>	<b><u>\$ 951,029</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 3,871,086</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 4,822,115</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 4,717,645</u></b>

See notes to consolidated financial statements.



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**Manhattan Borough Commissioner,  
NYC Department of Parks & Recreation**

as of December 31, 2020

# Advisory Board

Riverside Park Conservancy's Advisory Board is a dedicated group of professionals whose mission it is to help us expand our reach in the community through advocacy, events and social media. The Advisory Board joins Conservancy staff for periodic meetings to hear what is happening and offer guidance and feedback as engaged neighbors.

**Advisory Board Members:**

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Nick Bazos

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Avalon Watson  
**Horticulture Supervisor**  
Nina Webb  
**Horticulture Supervisor**

And an amazing team of dedicated gardeners and field technicians.

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Lois Williams  
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**Landscape Architect & Chief of Design and  
Construction for Riverside Park Conservancy**  
Geoff Martin  
**Riverside Park Manager**  
Nicole Phillip  
**Special Events Coordinator**  
Barbara (Basia) Nikonorow  
**Riverside Park South Facilities Coordinator**  
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The mission of Riverside Park Conservancy is to restore, maintain, and improve Riverside Park in partnership with the City of New York for the enjoyment and benefit of all New Yorkers. We support the preservation of the Park's historic landscape, structures, and monuments, engage the community in active stewardship of the Park, and provide a wide range of public programs.

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