

Newsletter of the Center City Residents' Association

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Our Greene Countrie Towne

Avenue of the Arts is Going Green

By Margie Wiener



This rendering, and those on the following page, show what the Avenue of the Arts will look like under the new plan.

Philly's Avenue of the Arts will spend \$100 million greening South Broad Street. Thirty years after South Broad was designated the Avenue of the Arts, the arts destination will be refreshed to attract more pedestrians.

Avenue of the Arts, Inc. (AAI), the organization that maintains Philadelphia's [Avenue of the Arts](#), hired the architectural firm Gensler and landscape designer OJB to bring extensive greenery, seating, and art installation spaces to the portion of South Broad Street designated an arts hub in 1993 under then-Mayor Ed Rendell. The avenue and its immediate environs contain 73 restaurants, 10 performing arts venues, and 10 hotels.

"Broad Street is the spine of the city," said developer Carl Dranoff, who has built four apartment buildings on South Broad — including Symphony House and 777 South Broad — and sits on the board of Avenue of the Arts. "The Avenue of the Arts component is from City Hall to Washington Avenue. It's 10 blocks. But those 10 blocks are packed."

"What we need is a refresh on the Avenue of the Arts," he said. "Everything here was installed approximately 30 years ago in 1993. The world has changed quite a bit since 1993. We're bringing the Avenue of the Arts up to the next generation and beyond."

The plan will be implemented in phases, with the first expected to begin early this year on the 300 block of South Broad, where both the [Kimmel Center](#) and Dranoff's new ArtHaus building sit. This so-called "pilot block" will test out how the greenery and

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installation concepts interact with both pedestrians and existing infrastructure. That is expected to be finished by April 2026 and will inform how other parts of the plan will be executed.

Laura Burkhardt, Executive Director of AAI, the organization responsible for this project, described their vision plan, AveArts2.0.

“AAI, Gensler, our architects, and their subcontractors, as well as our partners at the Department of Streets and PennDOT, are working together to move the plans forward,” Burkhardt said. “Pre-pandemic, SEPTA had been in the planning stage of working on Broad Street’s mezzanine. At this time, AAI is committed to working with any and all partners to enhance the Avenue of the Arts and its environs. Currently, AAI is committed to our Mayor’s goal of a cleaner, greener, and safer city and making noticeable improvements before we welcome the world to Philadelphia in 2026.

“This is a major project, with the majority of renovation happening over the next 10 years. The immediate goal is to complete the greening of the median strip between Spruce and Pine Streets and have contractors who will maintain this space. As the project progresses and there becomes a need for a higher level of maintenance, all avenues will be considered



to determine a long-term funding source. We are planning seasonal plantings on the pilot median using native species three times a year, as well as the same high-quality maintenance that we currently provide for the planters along South Broad Street.”

It is notable that other cities are greening: avenues in Manhattan and Brooklyn are beautifully maintained. Flatbush Avenue in downtown Brooklyn has undergone extensive upgrades in recent years. The median strip is particularly notable. It’s heavily armored but so pretty that it’s not intimidating.

Also, Manhattan’s Park Avenue is privately maintained by the [Fund for Park Avenue](#), which is responsible for planting and maintaining the trees and flowers on the Park Avenue Malls. Seasonal plantings include spring tulips, summer begonias, and fall chrysanthemums. The begonia was specifically chosen by the Fund’s gardeners because there is no automatic watering system, and the floral variety is resilient under hot sun. Annual mall maintenance consists of mowing, weeding, trash collection, pruning of trees and foundation plantings, as well as infrastructure repairs as needed.

For further information about AAI’s plans, click [here](#).

Letter to the Editor

A Differing View of the Development of Schuylkill Waterfront

The recent article reprinted from the *Fitler Focus* gives some history of the Schuylkill waterfront development while ignoring or misstating other history. Firstly, it overlooks the pivotal role CCRA took in spearheading the development of Schuylkill River Park in the 1970s and 80s. Secondly, it wrongly describes the area as an undeveloped area with warehouses. Apart from a former bank storage building between 25th and 26th on Delancey, there were no warehouses along the river and, much more important, there were many young families living and thriving in neighboring blocks. These were the people, along with CCRA, who developed a vital community, initiated the community garden at 25th and Pine, and encouraged the building of Schuylkill Banks.

It’s exciting that the long-term dream of energizing the riverfront will result in a trail connector over the Schuylkill in the foreseeable future and we look forward to reading articles about the future reality of the Schuylkill trail bridge and how it will impact our neighborhood.

Kristin Davidson
Frances Levi
*Past co-chairs of CCRA’s
Schuylkill River Park Committee*

EDITOR’S NOTE: Please see article on Page 17 for more news about the Schuylkill Trail bridge project.

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President's Letter

Memories and Opportunities

By Nathaniel Margolies, CCRA President

I am thankful to be stepping into the role of President of CCRA. This neighborhood, and specifically the neighbors within it, changed my life when I moved here in 2020. Whenever I tell anyone that I'm lucky enough to live in Rittenhouse, the universal exclamation is, "What a great neighborhood!"

Once I joined the CCRA board, I began following up this exclamation with a question: "What makes it so great?"

A credit to all our neighborhood offers, no two answers are the same. Sure, there are commonalities: the restaurants; the shopping; the tree-lined streets; and, of course, the Square. Without fail, every person, having lived here or not, has some story that connects them to our neighborhood.

There was the couple who took their engagement photos under the lights on Addison. I remember a gentleman who was so proud to have helped design 10 Rittenhouse. A young woman whose garden plot serves as a form of therapy. Several have some variation of celebrating on our side of Broad following an Eagles Super Bowl win (of which there are now multiple).

CCRA plays a critical role in ensuring our neighborhood can be the source of special moments for generations to come. Those engagement photos sure are prettier with the sidewalks swept.

The street-sweeping program, like many of our other goals for 2025 and beyond, is the result of a strong partnership — in this case with Center City District. The past year has proven the value of deep partnerships. Expect to see an increased emphasis on working alongside our partners in law enforcement, City Council, Friends of Rittenhouse Square, Philly Bike Action, local development companies, neighboring resident groups, and more. To anyone who is interested in improving our neighborhood, my door is open to you.

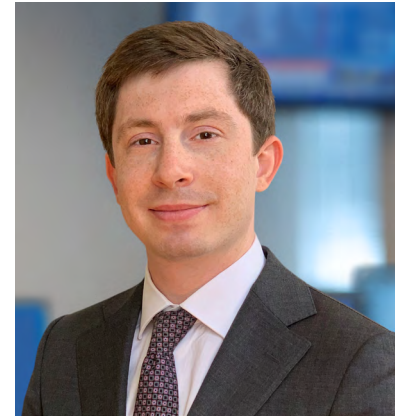
Our membership numbers have never been stronger, which I believe reflects the value CCRA provides to our residents. The Merchant Partner program continues to grow as well, evidence that businesses also see value in working alongside CCRA.

We are also conscious of several hot-button topics for our neighbors. Crime, panhandling, and noise are some of the most common we hear of. Much has been written in these pages about discussions with law enforcement, and I believe the statistics tell a compelling story. My hope is that over time, these improvements will feel more permanent, and the Covid-era anomalies can remain exactly that.

I cannot help but feel like a kid again at this time of year. Something about spring, and the promise of summer, always feels like opportunity. Rest assured CCRA is here to remain focused on the opportunities of our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Nathaniel Margolies



It Calms Traffic The Genius of the One-Lane Street

Text and photos by Bill West



2000 block of Spruce.

I'd like to take the adrenaline out of driving. Also the cortisol. Call me a dreamer. Imagine a low-stress commute.

And I have a dandy tool ready to hand in Philadelphia — the one-lane street. As I've often said, "Put 'em in a cattle chute, and then they'll behave." And that's what a street with only one lane for moving motor vehicles does. I don't know anything else that works as well.

Pine and Spruce Streets in Center City Philadelphia became one-lane streets when bike lanes were installed in one of the two lanes that had been devoted to moving motor vehicles. And yes, this change made these streets safer, less stressful, and more pleasant for everybody — not just bicyclists.

To understand what Pine and Spruce were like before they sprouted bike lanes, all we need to do is walk over to neighboring Lombard Street and have a look.

Lombard, the Last Two-Lane Street

Lombard runs westbound and is an access route for the South Street Bridge and the Schuylkill Expressway; in operation it is basically a race track. Drivers are clearly shifting into interstate mode, performing the abrupt lane changes so dear to Nascar drivers, and occasionally, in their enthusiasm, jumping the curb. My block on Lombard has lost, I believe, five trees in the last few years. Quite a few children live on the block, but no casualties to report so far.



Pine at 20th.

I think it's worth pointing out that this street was designed to produce precisely the effects that we see. The engineers were focusing on something called [Level of Service \(LOS\)](#) — basically, how many cars can you cram down this street in a given amount of time, and that meant speed. Speed above all, above human life.

The term [Level of Service](#) did not show up until 1965. But it simply gave a name to what the engineers had been doing for a long time. Starting in the late 1960s, with the arrival of things like the U.S. Department of Transportation, the approach actually softened, but the focus remained on Level of Service.

People had been concerned about the safety of motor vehicle traffic from the very first days of the car, but they weren't in the driver's seat. (See Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*, 2008.) It wasn't until the arrival of the Vision Zero movement in recent years that a curious idea gained traction: Perhaps speed is not as important as safety. Shocking.

So at least the thinking has started to change. On the street in front of my house on Lombard, not so much. Frankly, aside from the addition of a bunch of steel bollards to protect the sidewalk (this has been done by various residents and certainly not by the City) very little has changed in the configuration of the street here since I moved onto the block in 1984.

Meanwhile, on South Street

Meanwhile, South Street, Lombard's eastbound partner, is a one-lane street for almost all its length, usually with cars parked at both curbs and one traffic lane down the middle. However, down by the South Street Bridge, one of the curbside lanes, which elsewhere would be a parking lane, is in fact a bike lane.

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So Pine and Spruce both have one parking lane and one bike lane and one motor-vehicle lane. And South has one motor-vehicle lane in the center of the street, and the curbside lanes are devoted to other uses.

So why does Lombard have two motor-vehicle lanes for most of its length? Of the four streets — Spruce, Pine, Lombard, and South — it is the only one that retains two motor-vehicle lanes.



Lombard at 22nd.

My question is further complicated by the fact that near the South Street Bridge, where you would expect the heaviest traffic on Lombard because the bridge is a magnet for cars, there is in fact only one lane for moving motor vehicles. The other two lanes are for parking, on the left curb, and a bike lane on the right curb. So if you can do that there, and if your three neighbor streets all have only one lane for moving motor vehicles, why aren't you eliminating the second motor vehicle lane east of 22nd?

Why Is One Lane Safer?

Why is one traffic lane so much better than two? Because it reduces speeds and basically eliminates erratic lane changes.

Let's take a look at a vivid recent example of how this plays out. Dr. Barbara Friedes, a pediatric oncologist at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, was killed while bicycling on Spruce Street last July 17.

The driver who killed her, Michael Vahey, swung out of the traffic lane, which was apparently congested, and into the bike lane, which was protected only by plastic flex posts. He put his pedal to the metal, drove over the flex posts, and was apparently going more than 50 mph when he hit Dr. Friedes from behind. It's highly possible that she was unaware she was about to die until he hit her.

Vahey was performing his special version of a traffic maneuver that drivers perform all the time on multilane streets and highways: jump to the left or the right, depending on where you're starting, and then stomp on the accelerator. It's called passing.

Such a maneuver can be performed safely, but safety requires caution and a high level of situational awareness, two things that are not always present in a motorist.



Tree pit, Lombard Street.

Denying the motorist a second, or passing, lane will largely eliminate this behavior. It also will reduce average speeds of motor vehicles on the street, because, on a one-lane street, the fastest speed is set by the slowest driver. There's no way around someone who's driving the speed limit. On a multilane street, the fastest speed is set by the fastest driver — [the Barney Oldfield](#) of the crew.

I do understand the attraction of driving fast. I was a boy in America in the Fifties and Sixties. I read *Road & Track* and *Car & Driver*. Among my childhood heroes were [Dan Gurney](#), [Stirling Moss](#), and [Juan Fangio](#). My father, on the other hand, was partial to — yes — Barney Oldfield, and also [Wilbur Shaw](#).

I have said goodbye to all that. Others still cling to the romance of the open road. I think they need to be guided gently onto the paths of righteousness by appropriate design of our streets.



South at 15th.

CCRA Board Elects New Officers

During its April 8 meeting, the CCRA Board of Directors elected the following 10 Officers, all of whom will have a two-year term, from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027.



Nathaniel Margolies – President

With a BA in both Chemistry and Economics, as well as an MBA, Nathaniel is a wealth advisor with Bernstein Private Wealth, where he advises wealthy individuals, family groups, and nonprofit organizations. Before Bernstein, Nathaniel spent five years at Goldman Sachs. In addition to his work with CCRA, Nathaniel serves on the board of the Jewish Community Services of

Baltimore, the McDonogh School alumni board, and as a member of the Jewish Community Investment Fund's investment committee. A Baltimore native, he has lived in Center City since moving to Philadelphia in 2020.



Gina Ceisler Shapiro – Executive Vice-President

Gina has lived in the CCRA area for the past eight years. She worked in the healthcare industry as a strategic planner, and later as a fundraiser. Gina joined the CCRA board in 2023, co-chairs the Government Relations Committee, and serves on the Nominating Committee. She

has participated in the Police Advisory and Membership Committees, and worked on task forces addressing sidewalk trash and residential development. She is also a board member of InterAct Theatre. Gina believes building community builds a better Philadelphia, and CCRA is a leader in making our city a great place to live, work, and visit.



Michele Ettinger – Vice-President

Michele, a retired dental hygienist, and her husband, Joel, moved to Rittenhouse Square six years ago. Within months, she joined the CCRA Board and assumed the role of Membership Committee Chair; she was subsequently elected as a Vice-President with responsibility for that Committee, orchestrating its exciting growth with a myriad of new initiatives and an emphasis on relationship building. She has helped grow the CCRA membership

from 850 people to more than 1500. Michele has been a prominent community leader for three decades, serving as Board President of Jewish Family and Children's Service of Southern NJ, and as VP of The Jewish Federation of SNJ. Michele and Joel are proud parents of two children and the beaming grandparents of three little boys.



Caren Moskowitz – Vice-President

Caren and her husband moved to Rittenhouse Square five years ago from Montgomery County. Now retired from a career as a senior-level fundraising executive in the community, healthcare, and social-service environments, she previously served as a staff member for the U.S. Congress. Caren has always spent time volunteering and participating in community-service

projects. Currently, she co-chairs CCRA's Membership Committee, and serves on its Zoning and Development Committees. Formerly active in Montgomery County politics, Caren has continued that passion in Philadelphia, where she currently serves as an 8th Ward Committee Person. In her spare time, Caren enjoys the arts and most sports — especially the Phillies!



Harvey Ostroff – Vice-President

Harvey moved to "the city" 10 years ago with wife Lisa, to join their three children and seven grandchildren, and enjoy the sights and beauty of Philly. He is a builder/developer who takes pride in creating residential environments by design. Having served as a CCRA Director and active member of the Streets Committee, Harvey looks forward to taking on more responsibilities

as a Vice-President, and assisting in preserving and enhancing the neighborhood's beauty, vibrancy, and energy. He often can be seen picking up debris in Rittenhouse Square on Sunday mornings, and likes to cook and drink great wine with family and friends.



Ben Zuckerman – Vice-President

Ben has lived in Center City for more than 25 years, enjoying its many pleasures and dealing with its less frequent challenges. As a member of CCRA's Board of Directors for the past six years, he has helped strengthen the pleasures, and eliminate some of the challenges, through his service on the Zoning, Communications, Nominating, House Tour, and Executive Committees, and Speakers Bureau, and his work

on the Spruce/Pine Bike Lanes Task Force and several Major Development task forces. He looks forward to even more opportunities to serve our community as a CCRA Vice-President.

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Susan Kahn – Secretary

Susan came to Philadelphia to attend Penn Law School and stayed to practice law. She also ran a Penn mentorship program for high school students interested in a career in law or social justice. Upon retirement, Susan became an ISA Certified Arborist and has led the Center City West PHS Tree Tender group for the past 10 years. In addition to serving

on CCRA's Board and chairing the Green Committee, Susan serves on the board of the Friends of Schuylkill River Park.



Peter Eckstein – Assistant Secretary

Peter has lived in Philadelphia for the past five years. Prior to that, he lived for 25 years in Asia, where he worked in various roles with JPMorgan. He is a lead representative for CCRA with the Center City Opportunity Fund. Peter is married with two grown sons.



Rick Speizman – Treasurer

After 35+ years away from “home,” Rick returned to Philadelphia in 2019, a move enabled by Rick’s retirement from his role as a Washington, D.C.-based partner at a “Big Four” accounting and consulting firm, and the sale by his wife, Faith Horowitz, of her Maryland-based engineering firm. At his firm, Rick had national responsibility for a practice that provided tax services

to nonprofit clients, a specialty that he pursued for most of his career. Rick joined CCRA's Board of Directors in 2020 and has served as Assistant Treasurer and then Treasurer. Rick serves on CCRA's Executive Committee, chairs its Finance Committee, and has been involved with numerous other CCRA activities, including work with the Center City Opportunity Fund.



Bob Vogel – Assistant Treasurer

Bob is a retired business executive with more than 45 years of technology entrepreneurship. In addition to founding several tech companies from start-up to exit, Bob has served as the senior marketing executive in several tech companies, including, most recently, a \$12 billion IT software company. He's lived in Center City

for the past 10 years, and currently serves as the President of the Academy House Condominium Association, and as a coach and mentor to several young local entrepreneurs.

Town Square

Signs of the Times

Text and photos by Nancy Colman

April 5 marked the first of many massive rallies across the country to protest the draconian policies of the new Trump administration. As always, Center City was the site of one such protest, collectively known as Hands Off, a mass gathering at City Hall followed by a march down Market Street to Independence Mall.

Protesters carried an array of signs expressing their outrage, frustration, and fear – many using creative designs, colorful lettering and illustrations, not to mention some colorful and clever language as well.

Speakers included U.S. Rep. Brendan Boyle, PA State Sens. Vincent Hughes and Chris Rabb, City Councilmember Rue Landau, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, and Kadida Kenner of the New Pennsylvania Project.

Since that day, there have been numerous, ongoing protests here in Philadelphia and around the country, including the May Day rally at City Hall, featuring a fiery speech by Sen. Bernie Sanders, and picketing (and vandalism) of Tesla dealerships to send a message to company head Elon Musk for his ruthless DOGE cuts.



Effects of Trump's Immigration Policies on Philly's Immigrant Communities

By Margie Wiener

Philadelphia's immigrant communities are taking seriously the threats the Trump administration presents.

First, in January, KYW reported that the Philadelphia School District promised to protect immigrant students amid the threat of mass deportations. With President Donald Trump promising mass deportations, anxiety has grown among immigrant students. The district is underlining its policy to protect them.

If ICE agents show up at a Philadelphia school, Superintendent Tony Watlington said it is district protocol not to let them in or turn over any student information without a warrant. "We'll be following the letter and spirit of the law and won't provide undue access to children in schools without the appropriate warrants or paperwork," he said.

The district has conducted extra training with principals to ensure they understand the procedure, and created a [toolkit](#) to help staff support immigrant and refugee students. See [here](#) for details. Furthermore, principals have been trained on a board policy adopted four years ago that requires school staff to contact the district's general counsel should ICE agents appear.

"Our general counsel will advise them to make sure that appropriate warrants and other paperwork are in order. That will be the only way that we will provide access to our students," Watlington said. "We hear our students and some of their family members tell us they have an uptick in their anxiety levels," he added. "We're doing everything we can to assure them that we intend to educate them and protect their safety and well-being."

Second, as some immigrants mull leaving the country, advocacy groups advise them to stay informed and plan. Juntos and other legal aid nonprofits work to help community members develop family preparedness plans in case of possible arrest, detention, and deportation.

Within hours of being sworn in on January 20, Trump fulfilled several campaign [promises](#) by signing a series of anti-immigration executive orders and proclamations. Together, they moved the country toward his goal of mass deportations and significantly reducing access to many pathways to legal immigration.

In two months, the Northeast Philadelphia immigrant community was hit by two ICE raids: one [on Jan. 28 at Complete Autowash in the Juniata neighborhood](#), and the second [on Feb. 27 at Jumbo Meat Market in the Rhawnhurst neighborhood](#). Those raids have left many in the immigrant community deeply unsettled and afraid.

Preparedness Plans

"Trump promotes hatred, promotes fear, and uses anti-immigrant rhetoric in a way that weakens our sense of security," said Daisy Romero Chavarria, Director of Immigration Organizing at [Juntos](#),

an immigrant advocacy group based in South Philly. "And when we feel that way, we obviously start considering, 'I shouldn't go out. I should self-deport.' When we let ourselves be driven by fear and anxiety, they weaken us — not just as individuals, but as families and, beyond that, as a community."

"A family preparedness plan involves having a conversation with your family," Romero Chavarria explained. "It is a way to ensure the safety of your family and your assets, without the pressure of knowing you have no plan and that your children and property are in limbo."

A [preparedness plan](#) can be useful for any immigrant, whether they have children in the country or not. It includes updating and organizing important documents — such as your driver's license, passport, property titles, proof of tax payments, birth certificates, marriage licenses, and immigration documents (work permit, green card, visa, etc.), among others — and keeping them in a safe place.

Also, it involves securing proper legal representation and having emergency contacts — people you can rely on and share the location of your important documents with — in case of detention. In the case of families with underage children, family preparedness plans focus on ensuring the well-being and care of the kids, by planning for the possibility that one or both primary caretakers or parents may not be available to care for them.

"Some people may want to have a family preparedness plan if they become unavailable for whatever reason to care for their child or children. That may be because of being detained or deported, or for some other reasons," said Susan Pearlstein, senior attorney at [Philadelphia Legal Assistance](#), who specializes in family law matters, including child custody, child support, protection from abuse, and divorce.



School District of Philadelphia headquarters.

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One of the most important documents — or sets of documents — for parents in such a situation to include, along with instructions for the care of the child, are those that designate who will take care of them in the parents' possible absence. In Pennsylvania, no law allows parents to designate a temporary guardian if they become unavailable for reasons such as detention or deportation.

"In Pennsylvania there is not a way to be proactive about these types of situations except for very specific situations that are covered by what's known as [Pennsylvania's Standby Guardianship Act](#)," Pearlstein said. Those specific situations include when a parent is terminally ill or is entering rehab treatment.

In the case of an immigrant parent getting detained or deported, there are basically two options for formalizing who would care for a child.

- Option one, filing for custody. "They have the option of possibly going through a court process and maybe entering into an agreement, or the other person who would be the caregiver filing for custody," Pearlstein explained.
- Option two, assigning a caregiver. "There are several different forms that may be used to give a third party or someone else authority to care for a child other than a parent," Pearlstein said. Signing a caregiver authorization affidavit, a caregiver acknowledgment, a medical consent authorization or a letter of consent to travel internationally are examples.

With a court option, parents or caregivers can be sure that the family member or caregiver will have the authority to make significant decisions on behalf of the child.

"We talk about child custody more in the circumstance of who has the authority to make medical decisions or make educational decisions for a child, which is referred to as legal custody," Pearlstein said, "and then physical custody, referring to who has authority to have physical care and control of the child."

Plus, some undocumented people may be afraid to go to court. When *Billy Penn* spoke with Juntos, they reported seeing an increase in undocumented immigrants being arrested during mandatory check-ins.

"They are basically being asked to verify their identity, their location," said Romero Chavarria. "They're called ICE check-ins, and they can happen every other month, every month. But they're being asked to go and then they don't come out. You have families who, if they're applying for asylum and they don't go to their immigration court, then they're automatically issued a deportation order. But then if they go, there's no certainty about whether or not they will be picked up."

ICE's actions are impacting people's attitudes and behaviors, said Romero Chavarria. "I think people are already changing the way they go about their daily lives ... A woman told me that now she does her shopping on the weekends. She tries not to go out during the week," she said. "We know that Trump uses his rhetoric not only to promote hatred, but also to mentally impact our community. When you are afraid, you forget that you have rights, you forget that you can fight your immigration case. For us, the community must always remember that."

Juntos emphasizes that strengthening a community is also a form of care. "We at Juntos provide this space so the community knows they are not alone, and that if ICE comes to their door and arrests them, we will be there for them, looking out for their families," said Romero Chavarria. "The way we can defend ourselves is by knowing our rights, having a family plan, and staying connected in the community."

Third, in April, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the Nationalities Service Center (NSC), Philly's biggest refugee resettlement agency, is fighting for its future as federal funds are slashed under Trump. NSC, funded primarily by the federal government's refugee resettlement program, expected its budget to be halved by May.

For more information, see https://www.inquirer.com/news/trump-refugees-immigration-nationalities-service-center-20250406.html?mc_cid=a9a2eda269&mc_eid=31ce1efc34



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Major Changes and a New Exhibit at the Mutter Museum

By Margie Wiener

In the Winter 2023 issue of the *Center City Quarterly*, I wrote about how the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia undertook an ethical review of its online exhibits. The move led to debates over how a medical history museum should handle human remains from the past, some of which did not come from consenting patients.

Since then, there have been major changes. The Mutter Museum and its parent organization, The College of Physicians, have selected Dr. Larry Kaiser as the new CEO of the historic medical society and [popular museum](#) of pathologies. Kaiser, a thoracic surgeon, led the Temple University Health System for a decade and has been active on the board of the College of Physicians for more than 30 years.

“Dr. Kaiser has the experience and demonstrated leadership capabilities needed to move the College forward at this critical time in our history,” said board chair Dr. Erica R. Thaler.

Kaiser, who started in January of this year, assumes the seat from Dr. Mira Irons, who stepped down in September 2023. Kaiser comes to his new role as [the Mutter Museum is overhauling its approach to displaying medical pathologies](#). The exhibition of human remains, many of which are damaged by disease, has made it both popular and controversial. Some people willingly leave their remains to the museum for future public display and study, but other historical remains were acquired without consent.

Kaiser will lead the historic medical society and museum through a tumultuous transition. Museum director Kate Quinn and former CEO Irons [abruptly took down online education videos](#), which ignited a backlash [from fans of the museum](#) and its staff, many of whom left the organization. In the last year and a half, the museum has held [a series of public town hall discussions](#) to chart a future course.

How the museum will address its collection of human remains is to be determined. Kaiser will also oversee a capital campaign to raise funds for a major physical renovation and expansion of its campus on 22nd Street.

For further information on the new leadership, see <https://live-cpp-cms.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/2025-01/cpp-kaiser-appointed-ceo-release.pdf>

https://why.org/articles/mutter-museum-college-of-physicians-new-ceo-larry-kaiser/?mc_cid=c6ca34387c&mc_eid=31ce1efc34

Trusted Messengers

Another major change at the Mutter is its new exhibit, “Trusted Messengers: Community, Confidence, and COVID-19” (running through Feb. 2, 2026, in the museum’s Thomson Gallery). It



Dr. Larry Kaiser. (Credit: Constance Mensh for The College of Physicians of Philadelphia.)

reflects on five years of COVID-19 and honors healthcare workers, community members, and public officials who worked to build trust in the medical community and spread confidence in vaccinations and medical institutions during a time of crisis and uncertainty.

The exhibition is all in one open room, meant for reflection. Its four walls contain information on the pandemic, from its early impact to the invention of the first vaccine and more. A timeline printed on the floor leads visitors through events that followed the initial outbreak and quarantine period.

“Amid the widespread chaos of a pandemic, a different threat loomed: a flood of too much information,” one wall reads in bold lettering. Underneath are photographs of “trusted messengers” in the community, those who helped inform the public about health and public safety.

The images range from a healthcare worker protesting in the street, urging people to stay home to government officials and public figures like Bill Nye the Science Guy. Even Flyers mascot Gritty makes an appearance, holding a sign that asks, “Have you taken your shot?”

Next to the second wall is a glass case with pipettes, test tubes, and tube racks from the University of Pennsylvania’s Weissman Lab, which helped develop the first vaccine.

“The breakthrough in mRNA happened here,” Quinn explained.

If we didn’t have the COVID vaccine, we’d have millions of people dead,” said René Najera, DrPH, the Susan and Stanley Plotkin Chair in Public Health at the College of Physicians of

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Philadelphia and editor of [History of Vaccines](#). “It would be the pandemic nonstop, because the virus just keeps mutating, just keeps changing, and so we would be getting it over and over and over and over again.”

Najera worked as an epidemiologist at the Fairfax County Health Department in Virginia during the height of the pandemic. He said he can understand why some in the public distrust modern medicine and government health initiatives.

“You have people who remember the [Tuskegee experiment](#),” he said, referring to a nonconsensual U.S. Public Health Service study in which Black syphilis patients weren’t offered treatment even after it was readily available. “You have people from Central America that suffered some harm from other experiments from pharmaceutical companies.”

Najera met a variety of people and patients during the pandemic, including a woman who survived the 1918 influenza pandemic.

“She was 100-and-some years old, and she joked with us ... ‘Wouldn’t it be funny if I end up dying for this?’” he said. Although Najera told this patient that he would work to keep her safe, she died because of COVID-19. “She lived through the advent of antibiotics, the vaccines, and now, she reached this other end of the story,” he said.

The third wall contains artistic posters with public health information. One tries to reach unhoused Philadelphians, asking “How do you ‘shelter in place’ when you don’t have a home?” Another calls for the protection of elderly Philadelphians.

The last wall of the exhibition features portraits of pandemic nurses by photographer Kyle Cassidy. Standing outside wearing their scrubs and N95 face masks, many of the nurses in the photos stare directly at the camera. The artwork is a display of the undeniable mental-health toll this virus took on the medical community. Cassidy is currently retaking photos of the women to reflect on the pandemic’s five-year legacy.



A nurse in Wisconsin protests a Reopen Wisconsin gathering in April 2020.

The College of Physicians staff takes a forward-looking view, understanding that there are still serious challenges ahead.

“The college has been around since the late 1700s and we’ll continue to be around for the next pandemic, because there will be a next pandemic,” Najera said. And although the exhibition is a reflection on the past, its message is still relevant. The Philadelphia Department of Public Health recently issued a [warning concerning measles exposure](#).

“People are still getting COVID,” said Kaiser, the President and CEO. “Yes, we have a vaccine, but are people getting vaccinated? And now the concern is with measles, and especially with some of the talk about not vaccinating.”

For further information on this exhibition, see https://billypenn.com/2025/03/14/mutter-museum-five-year-anniversary-covid-19-pandemic/?mc_cid=80b82ce831&mc_eid=31ce1efc34

ADDENDUM:

In April, the museum announced that Kate Quinn was no longer Executive Director. Her leadership for the past two-and-a-half years had been polarizing, leading to internal and external controversies. For details, see https://why.org/articles/mutter-museum-executive-director-kate-quinn/?mc_cid=d5aa3377b6&mc_eid=31ce1efc34

Town Square

This Just In ... **CCRA’s Speakers Bureau!**

Would you – and your friends and neighbors – like to hear about the State of the Neighborhood directly from CCRA?

CCRA is pleased to announce our new and improved Speakers Bureau.

That’s right, we are readily available to enlighten and share the latest updates about the neighborhood, and also entertain your questions or concerns.

Our Speakers Bureau would be delighted to address your professional groups, social groups, volunteer groups, high-rise buildings, offices, organizations, clubs, churches, synagogues ... you name it.

Please email [Travis Oliver](#) to arrange this golden opportunity.

Rowhouse Fire a Reminder for Vigilance

By Christina Cantrill

In February, we had just returned from a long Mardi Gras weekend in New Orleans with old friends from Girls High School, class number 232. Being with friends from long ago and attending parades every day made the problems of the moment recede from my thoughts. As the long weekend continued with creative new inspiration and treasured memories, I was further from worries than I had been in weeks.

The morning of our return was as normal as ever. Jack had been upstairs in his third-floor office; he had turned on and off the light in the half-bathroom right before a 9 a.m. meeting. I was working in the room below him.

We were happy to be home in the sunny house we had moved into 11 months before because it had a perfect layout for each of us to have an office on a different floor. That morning it was freezing in Philly, but the south-facing exposure helped give a small reminder of our trip down south.

Around 11 a.m., having come downstairs for a snack (or a “second breakfast,” as Jack likes to call it), we were sitting at our dining room table when the front door burst open and Frank, a contractor friend who had been working next door, ran in.

“Jack! Chris!” he yelled. “There is smoke coming out from your roof.” We jumped up to join him as he proceeded up the stairs to see if he could get a better view. On the way I grabbed the fire extinguisher I had stashed in the corner for this very eventuality.

The third floor was eerily quiet. No sound or smells, no heat or indication of fire. Not one of our freshly installed fire alarms making a sound. While Frank and Jack hung out our windows trying to get a better look, I went downstairs to see if there was some other clue. As I stood in our second-floor hallway, I heard Jack yell down “grab important stuff,” and I thought to myself, “what does that mean?” I was surrounded by all the things we had gathered here in our new home exactly because they were important. I froze, momentarily not sure what to do.

Thankfully a small logical part of my brain kept going ... If the fire is out back and above my office window, I thought, I should move Mom-mom’s favorite chair out of the way and into the bedroom. I should grab my cello and laptop. Oh, and let me take that beautiful new marionette my mother made for my birthday, and the leather shadow puppet that I brought from Bali many years before. And don’t trip, I remember telling myself, as I cradled it all and made my way quickly but carefully down the stairs.

Outside, I did the next logical thing and called 911. I suspect my voice was calm — I hadn’t yet actually seen any fire myself — and the woman on the other end of the phone asked me questions about what was happening. Struggling to answer, I walked back through the house and exited out the back door to see it myself. I looked up to see the smoke for the first time; it was billowing out of the third-floor roof with furious strength.

I must have screamed; she connected me to the fire department immediately.

Like magic, firefighters appeared instantly (clearly someone else had already called); truck after truck lined the streets around our house. Ladders, snaking firehoses, firefighters in black and yellow surrounded the house, went through the house under construction next door, and got to work. The smoke was now dark gray and rising, and visible to everyone in the area; it was also spreading to neighboring homes. Windows were smashed and the water started raining down, freezing as it landed.

We all survived — me and Jack, Frank and the neighbors, the neighbor’s cat who hid in the basement. This is the most important part of the story to tell so I am sticking that in now, reader, just so you know: No one was killed or even injured in putting out the fire.

And it was completely humbling. In every way. Despite my fire vigilance, one item that we didn’t replace when we moved in — a seemingly defunct exhaust fan in a half-bathroom on the third floor — had a live wire that sparked and ignited something flammable in the space between the ceiling and roof.



Smoke billows from the roof as firefighters tend to the blaze.

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The smoke that I thought might only affect our office rooms spread to homes next to us causing damage for three other families, two of whom, like us, are still also displaced. And my grandmother's favorite chair that I had tried to drag out of danger now held a piece of the collapsed ceiling; the water used to fight the fire caused extensive damage to every part of our new home.

After the fire was out and its cause identified, the fire chief commented, "If this had been the day before when the wind was so strong the whole block would be gone."

Beyond feeling humble, what remains in me is a profound sense of gratitude and relief. We are safe. Frank continued his work at the neighbor's house even as that family had to move, with their cat, to a temporary apartment nearby. All of the families impacted have insurance and are doing okay.

Family and friends took us shopping, handed over clothing, and got us randomly useful items we needed like envelopes, extension cords, and nail clippers. Neighbors we knew and those we didn't showed up from blocks around with blankets and dry socks the day of the fire, and we continued to get support for weeks and months after in the form of housing offers, basement storage, referrals, and caring plant fostering. We couldn't be more thankful and appreciative.

Town Square

Can You Pass the U.S. Citizenship Test?

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

During the last decade, more than 7.9 million people became new U.S. citizens. Adults applying for U.S. citizenship must pass a test provided by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which includes [questions](#) about U.S. government, history, and civics (rights and responsibilities of citizens): "Civics (History and Government) Questions for the Naturalization Test."

Those who pass and become U.S. citizens often know more about our government and history than people born and educated in this country. The Museum of the American Revolution offers a free U.S. Citizenship Test Prep course, privately funded, for non-citizens. Beth Ann Downey, Director of Communications, notes "these classes incorporate some of the Museum's stories, objects, and art to bring historical depth and context to the 100 civics questions, turning isolated facts into a more meaningful learning experience."

[HIAS Pennsylvania](#) offers a free U.S. Citizenship Test Prep course, funded by the federal government, for non-citizens. Since 2009, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has awarded \$155 million through 644 competitive grants to immigrant-serving organizations in 41 states and the District of Columbia. The program has helped more than 350,000 immigrants prepare for citizenship. In February, Federal funding was paused, and in March some organizations sued to have it reinstated. At present, HIAS PA is not getting paid but is continuing the classes for the time being.

In addition, there are free online test preparation classes such as USA Hello: <https://usahello.org/>

We know we are lucky, having the privilege of insurance and resources that many residents here in Philadelphia do not. Too many go without home insurance and live paycheck to paycheck, making any additional tragedy they may face like ours a full-on catastrophe.

In fact, days before the fire, my own family had been fighting to keep the homeowner's insurance on my 78-year-old mother's house as an inspector/algorithm had alerted the company that the roof needed repair. (We were in the process of repairing it too, but they didn't bother to ask.) And being in the house after the fire, retrieving what we could, I couldn't help thinking of the fires that had just raged through neighborhoods in Los Angeles this winter leaving nothing but ash for families to shift through, many of whom face economic precarity.

So why share this story? Well first, it is a thank-you to the Philadelphia Fire Department, to Frank, to our neighbors, to our friends and family. Next it is a Public Service Announcement: If you have an exhaust fan that is broken, get it replaced ASAP! <End of PSA> Finally, it is a reminder that we all need to fight like hell for economic parity while maintaining social support for all Philadelphians. Accidents are caused by a myriad of factors, and we never know when it will hit us or any of our neighbors.

U.S. citizens born and educated here are supposed to learn basic American history, government, and civics in school. In Pennsylvania, in 2018, Governor Tom Wolf signed into law Act 35 which requires all school entities to administer a locally developed assessment of U.S. history, government, and civics at least once to students during grades 7 to 12, beginning with the 2020-2021 school year. Resources are offered to teachers from PA Civics: <https://www.pacivics.org/>

Can you pass the U.S. Citizenship test? Maybe you learned this information in high school but forgot some of it. If you cannot pass the test, maybe you need to refresh your knowledge to become a more educated citizen. Knowledge of the past often helps us understand the present. You can read the U.S. Constitution on the National Constitution Center [website](#) and take their course, Constitution 101.

Several local colleges such as Community College of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania LPS (Liberal & Professional Studies), and Temple University offer non-credit adult education courses in U.S. history. Alumni may be able sit in on credit courses. These college level courses usually cover a section of U.S. history, not all of it at one time. For a complete overview, there is always *U.S. History for Dummies* by Steve Wiegand, and other similar books.

Naturalization statistics and facts about new citizen eligibility are available from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center/naturalization-statistics>

Choosing Center City and Beth David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne – “The Best of Both Worlds!”

By Sharla Feldscher

When I was young, my family belonged to a synagogue in our neighborhood in Philadelphia. It was nice that we could walk there, and that many of our neighbors were members. It wasn't about the type of synagogue it was. It really wasn't even related to our personal needs. It was about convenience and that my parents were very involved and, for those reasons, loved it.

But, today, there are more choices — driving 30 minutes or more to a synagogue isn't such an issue as it was back then. While a variety of places of worship are within walking distance in Center City, that may no longer be a reason for affiliation, especially if you love living in town but have not found that perfect religious connection for you.

Some people are natural city dwellers — they love walking in the city, taking advantage of cultural attractions and restaurants, and would rather live there and drive elsewhere.

Such is the case for Rabbi Beth Kalisch, senior rabbi at Beth David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne. She and her husband, Larry Levine, moved to Philadelphia from Manhattan over 10 years ago. Originally, the rabbi was hired for a temporary position, and Levine commuted to New York four days a week, so being close to Amtrak was a priority. Kalisch drove to Gladwyne, and appreciated the beauty of the surroundings there.

“Beth David is in such a lovely and woodsy part of the suburbs,” she said. “I love driving in Gladwyne. And, from inside our sanctuary you see all the trees — it's a nice destination from the city.”

That temporary position worked out so well, one year later it became permanent. Shortly thereafter, Kalisch and Levine married at Beth David and, accustomed to city living, stayed in Philadelphia. They now have two children.

“We had been living in cities our whole adult lives,” she said. “Philadelphia is so walkable. It's lovely. I love my kids' school and being able to walk to the theater and restaurants. It has another great advantage for us. My mom decided to relocate to Philadelphia to be closer to us, but she needed wheelchair accessibility which is a lot easier in a city. She moved a couple blocks from me and lives in a beautiful building. And our house is wheelchair-accessible. It's so much easier for her to get around in the city and for us to visit her.”

The rabbi's two children are elementary age. She talked about their involvement at Beth David: “My kids come every week to Friday night services and Sundays to Hebrew School. We all go together on Friday night. In many ways, Beth David is a destination synagogue, and members come from the suburbs west of Lower Merion and neighborhoods like Roxborough and Manayunk. My kids' friends go to all different schools. I like that they meet people from many areas of the Philadelphia region.”

What is most important, Kalisch added, “Jewish communities are spread out and people want to find a synagogue that feels right for them, feels like home.”

Returning Home

For Sharyn Katz and Miles Barel, who joined over seven years ago, Beth David is home. Center City residents, they believed that finding that perfect connection to a synagogue mattered most. Synagogue life was always important to each of them. In fact, they met at a synagogue in Connecticut, both past presidents.

When they decided to move to Philadelphia, they seriously shopped for a new synagogue. Katz was born and raised in Oxford Circle, moved to the Main Line during her first marriage, and was a member of Beth David, which she loved back then because it was so warm, so welcoming.

Her son attended the synagogue and studied there, but when he was 12, the family moved to Connecticut. Katz, then divorced, joined a synagogue there and soon met Barel, who became her second husband. Seven years ago, they came to Center City Philadelphia, and they love it. With easy access to cultural experiences, to the Free Library, to restaurants, they know they selected a wonderful city to live in.

Searching for the right synagogue “home,” they tried a temple in the city, but felt Beth David was a much better fit — small, intimate and very warm.

“Being part of synagogue has always been important to me,” Barel said. “In fact, I drove 45 minutes to a synagogue when I lived in Pittsburgh. We tried Beth David, and, while it is less



Sharyn Katz and Miles Barel at Zahav restaurant in Society Hill.

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traditional than I was accustomed to, it had a special warmth that was very engaging ... I know I found my religious home.”

Barel likes to be involved, and got right into it. Music was always important to him, so he joined the volunteer choir. He also plays guitar and now he occasionally plays duets with Cantor Lauren Goodlev, cantor at Beth David, and even fills in for her at times. He also sits on the board.

“We go to Beth David every Friday night for Shabbat, and it is such a big part of our life,” he said. “Some people even call me the synagogue technology ‘guru,’ since that was my career, and I love helping out.”

Unexpected Transplant

Ray Reed never expected to live in Center City. A longtime member and past president of Beth David, he lived on the Main

Line. Several years after his wife died, he found a building in Philly that he couldn’t pass up. With its sweeping views of the Schuylkill looking toward the Art Museum, he is reminded of the Seine River in Paris.

Committed to the community of Beth David, Reed maintains his membership and doesn’t mind the drive at all. “I grew up in a small synagogue,” he said. “I couldn’t imagine belonging to a big synagogue. I didn’t want to give up the community I have at Beth David and to drive a half hour is not a big deal. Honestly, I have the best of both worlds!”

Beth David Reform Congregation is located at 1130 Vaughn Lane in Gladwyne, PA. For more information, visit www.bdavid.org.



Ray Reed and grandchild in the city.



Rabbi Beth Kalisch, senior rabbi at Beth David.

CCCulture

Center City Mural by Celebrated Artist Amy Sherald

Text and photo by Bonnie Eisenfeld

At 1108 Sansom Street, there is a huge mural by Amy Sherald, best known for her portrait of Michelle Obama. Sherald’s untitled Philadelphia mural is a portrait of Najee S., a young participant in Philadelphia’s Mural Arts education program.

Another painting by Sherald was featured on the cover of the *New Yorker*, March 24, 2025. “American Sublime,” an exhibition of Sherald’s work, is on display at the Whitney Museum in New York through August 10, and then at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., September 19 to February 22, 2026. Sherald is the first contemporary Black artist to receive a solo exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery.



If Not Us, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?

By Liz Green Schultz

Political Director, Clean Air Council & Clean Air Action

I recently became a homeowner in Philadelphia. That's a huge deal for me for many reasons, including the fact that a brush with local politics once left me swearing off the city forever. It's the quiet inspiration behind my podcast, *Cleaning Up Dirty*.

In my first week in my new home, I discovered how deeply satisfying it is to put my feet on my couch with dirty socks on. Because it's my couch! And no one can yell at me for it. I can behave however I'd like; it's incredibly satisfying to take up that much space.

America is doing that globally right now, but we don't own the couch. And our socks reek like a summer sewer. Politicians should not take up that much space, period — our country was founded to protect against that exact harm. We have elaborate legal protections against it, which are being tested right now.

In any position of power, it is essential to have people around you who will tell you to get your feet off the couch. Otherwise, we end up fawning over the emperor's new clothes, which isn't good for anyone. In fact, it's un-American—without checks and balances, we have a king.

America also has state and local politicians with dirty feet on the couch. They are generally the exception and not the rule, but power can become misuse of power and the hypnotism of people around the powerholder. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. When we don't even know our politicians' names, much less their policy stances and campaign donors, it can lead to dirty feet all over the place.

Did you know that as a Pennsylvanian you have a constitutional right to breathe healthy air? And a constitutional right to the protection of our natural resources? Looking at Harrisburg, you might not know it.

Many don't realize that Pennsylvania is a fossil fuel state. New York, where I grew up, passed legislation to protect natural resources against profiteering and to protect residents' public health. Beneath my childhood home was shale, a type of rock that Pennsylvania politicians allow corporations to mine, transport, and convert into dirty energy and non-recyclable plastic.

Those resources are transported via "bomb trains" — so named because of their explosion potential. Norfolk Southern Railroad recently had two derailments in two years that contaminated Pennsylvanians' air and water.

The mining itself poisons our air and water. Thinking the government protects them from dire, preventable environmental and public-health emergencies, countless Pennsylvanians buy their dream homes — only to find their air smells like chemicals and their water catches fire. Not great for resale value.

Worse, children raised in that home will have four-to-seven times the cancer and lung-disease rates of children in New York. Yet

some of our elected officials — who are legally bound to protect our health and land—not only sold both to the highest bidder, they also passed legislation limiting polluters' responsibility to cap fracking wells at half the cost per well.

Who foots the bill for the rest? You guessed it: We, the taxpayers.

The methane escaping from those wells could be captured and turned into fuel instead of harming our lungs, but it isn't. DEP, PA's state agency entrusted with protecting your health and environment, lacks even the staffing to figure out who owns the wells. (So, we will likely pay closer to 100 percent of the capping cost!)

How many fracking wells would you estimate there are in Pennsylvania? If you guessed *more than 300,000* you would be correct.

Taxpayers not only subsidize dirty corporations, we also paid for the disaster in Centralia — the mining town about 100 miles from Philadelphia that has been on fire for more than 50 years. The Biden administration planned to provide federal funding for well capping. I'm going to go out on a limb here and guess that won't be a priority for President Trump, who threatened to terminate the nonprofit status of environmental groups.

I run Clean Air Action with Sean Hoffmann, my *Cleaning Up Dirty* podcast cohort. We are lawyers working alongside the Clean Air Council to fight for your constitutional right to breathe clean air. Since Clean Air Action is a political nonprofit, our team uses political tools.

Philly has some of the dirtiest air in the country, and the fossil fuel industry holds outsized influence in Harrisburg. House Speaker Joanna McCClinton (D, 191, Phila/Delco) appeared on our podcast episode "Happy Warriors Fighting for Progress (Not Power)," discussing her leadership and problem-solving in government, including making jobs in politics safer for women. Toward the end, Sean comments that the transition to clean energy will take "a little political gymnastics." Without missing a beat, Speaker McCClinton responds: "Let's get in the gym!"

Whether you're ready for the gym, or just for politicians to get their dirty socks off your couch, now is the time to take action. On our podcast, we talk about the big impact of even small actions, like emailing your elected officials to tell them your priorities and helping your friends do the same. On Day of Action, hundreds of lawyers reaffirmed our oath to uphold the Constitution. Philadelphia Bar Association Chancellor Katayun Jaffari asked us: *If not us, then who? If not now, when?*

We the People have always driven change in America. I believe we will get through this challenging time, but we must send our politicians a strong reminder that they work for us.

For more information about how to help steer our country back toward reason, check out cleaningupdirty.com.

A Dream Revived, A River Revived

By Richard Vaughn

They said it couldn't be done — *wouldn't* be done — repeatedly, over the course of a mere 33 years.

The “it” in question is — or *was* — the completion of the Schuylkill River Trail, from up by the Fairmount Water Works down to Bartram's Garden, a total distance of five frequently difficult-to-navigate miles.

But now? Later this year the work will be complete, and those five miles will be fully traversable by cyclists, runners, walkers, picnickers, baby carriages and four-legged friends.

As 2025 dawned there were two pieces remaining to be finished for the puzzle to be complete: The section from Christian Street to the Grays Ferry Crescent, and the swing bridge connecting Grays Ferry Crescent to Bartram's Garden.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves here. How did we get to this point in the first place? What did it take, and who was behind it?

Believe it or not, back in the 1700s the Schuylkill was so pristine that people were actually baptized in it. But then came the Industrial Revolution, and with it, oil refineries, dump-collection stations, abbatoirs, chemical and paint manufacturers, and garbage-disposal plants along its banks. No longer pristine, the Lower Schuylkill was largely forgotten and ignored by the public for decades.

The tide began to turn in 1924 with the publication of the book *Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill*, by prominent maritime attorney John Frederick Lewis. Nearly four decades later, thanks to the work of urban planner Ed Bacon, plans for a Schuylkill River Park were included in the City's comprehensive plan.

Fast forward to the early 90s, when architect and developer John Randolph took it upon himself to push the plans forward. A 1991 *Inquirer* article, “Dream Revived for a River Park,” described Randolph's efforts and created a great deal of momentum. Not long after, Randolph founded the community-based Schuylkill River Development Council, which worked to procure the necessary grant funding.

Randolph's work was greatly aided by two local design professionals: landscape architect John Collins and civil engineer Elmore Boles, who jointly developed many early design concepts for the space. Having these designs on paper made the ideas come alive and helped get the needed buy-in from the City.

Eleven years after that, the Council was re-christened as the stakeholder-based Schuylkill River Development Corporation, helmed by civil engineer Joseph Syrnick, and which is now composed of major corporations, universities, and City government.

Fast forward again, to the current day. As of this year, the two aforementioned sections remained to be finished in order to complete the Schuylkill River Trail from the Fairmount Water Works down to Bartram's Garden.



Christian-to-Crescent.

Only the swing-bridge project remains, as May 17 saw the ribbon-cutting and the formal opening of the Christian-to-Crescent section, which now connects the South Street-to-Christian trail segment along the eastern shore to the existing trail in Grays Ferry Crescent, the park along the Grays Ferry river bend.

Some fast facts about Christian-to-Crescent: It was a \$48M project designed by infrastructure consulting firm AECOM and built by Newtown (PA)-based engineering, construction and management company PKF-Mark III.

Completing Christian-to-Crescent was difficult for two reasons: the area remains industrially active, and there were many constraints and obstacles to navigate. As a result, completing the project required the construction of a 650-foot cable-stay bridge along the east riverbank.

“The Center City section of the trail is very busy,” says SRDC President and CEO Syrnick, “but the section of the trail below that, the Grays Ferry Crescent, has been open for 13 years but is not connected either to the north or the south. This is going to connect it to the north, which will greatly increase the number of people on that section, which we think is a good thing, because the more people you have on the trail, the more active it becomes and the safer it becomes.”

But complete as it now is, it leaves one missing link: the final connection from Grays Ferry Crescent on the east shore to Bartram’s Mile, the park on the west side, north of Bartram’s Garden, the first botanical garden in America.

Completion of the final piece has required the conversion of an abandoned freight railway swing bridge to a new, fully operating swing bridge located south of the Grays Ferry Bridge that will provide easy access across the river for both pedestrians and cyclists.

Syrnick says, “The section of the trail on the west side of the river by Bartram’s Garden has been open since 2017, but that also is not connected to the north or the south. So it ends up being sort of a neighborhood park that does not get as much use as we would hope to get. Once these things all connect, it’s going to increase the amount of volume on the southern end of the trail.”

ETA for the final link is sometime this Fall, at which time the dreams of John Frederick Lewis, Ed Bacon, John Randolph, John Collins and countless others will be realized at last.

“Looking back, I am in awe of the change that has happened,” says SRDC founder John Randolph. “It fills me with enormous gratitude for all those who have helped us along the way, and for those who continue to make positive change happen.

“Through the contributions of countless individuals and organizations, the Schuylkill River has been transformed, from a dream revived to a river revived.”



Inquirer article.



Swing Bridge rendering.



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Greater Center City Saw a Boom in 2024

By Margie Wiener

The Center City District/Central Philadelphia Development Corp. annual housing report revealed unprecedented growth in Greater Center City's residential sector, with residential development reaching a five-year high in 2024, according to new CCD research.

Among the highlights:

- Greater Center City accounted for 44 percent of all Philadelphia housing completions last year while comprising less than 6 percent of the city's total land area.
- The 19123 ZIP code alone accounted for a quarter of all new housing units in Philadelphia, with approximately 2,000 new units completed.
- Core Center City's population grew by another 3 percent in 2024, compared to just 0.2 percent growth for the city overall.
- In 2024, Greater Center City saw the second-highest absorption rate of the past decade, with 2,400 more units occupied at year-end than at the beginning of the year.

Read or download the new 24-page housing report at [Center City Housing Report 2025](#) for a narrative of trends, along with explanatory charts and maps.



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Crosstown Considers Motion to Abolish Sheriff's Office

By Stephen Huntington

The Spring issue of the *Center City Quarterly* reported that the Crosstown Coalition, of which CCRA is a charter member, had written the Common Pleas Court President Judge asking her to convene hearings on the performance of the Sheriff's Office, led by Rochelle Bilal, who was elected to a second four-year term in 2024.

After receiving that request to the Court, Sheriff Bilal asked for and received an invitation to speak to the Crosstown board's March meeting, even though she had never responded to a prior Coalition request asking that she appear at a September 2024 Crosstown meeting. Despite the Sheriff's own request

for the opportunity to speak, the Sheriff's Office notified the Coalition, in the afternoon of Friday, March 21, that it was canceling its commitment to attend the Crosstown's Monday, March 24, meeting.

At that meeting the Crosstown board voted to ask the Mayor and City Council to conduct an investigation, and report on the functioning of the Sheriff's Office. You can read the letter [here](#).

In addition, the Crosstown Executive Committee was authorized to prepare a [motion to abolish the Office for consideration](#) at the May Crosstown meeting.

To Your Health

Allergy Capitals: Philadelphia Ranks Low among Major Cities

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America's 2025 report, [Allergy Capitals](#), ranked Philadelphia number 77. On this list, it's good to get a low ranking!

The 100 largest U.S. metropolitan areas were ranked based on 2024 tree-, grass-, and weed-pollen count; use of over-the-counter medication; and number of board-certified allergy/immunology physicians.

The most challenging cities for allergy sufferers were in the Midwest and Southeast. Wichita, Kansas, ranked number one for the third year in a row, followed by New Orleans, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Memphis.

About a quarter of U.S. adults suffer from seasonal allergies, which cause sneezing, itching, and watery eyes.

Drawing Room

Cartoon by Richard Vaughn



"I don't care what you say – I'm SKINNY!"

Philadelphia Ranked One of Top Two Cities for Art and Cultural Attractions in U.S.

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Philadelphia ranked number two this year in the AirportParkingReservations.com [blog list](#) of America's cultural and art capitals, second only to New York City. Based on Tripadvisor data showing the number of art galleries, museums, and monuments, cities were ranked and indexed; Philadelphia's score of 51.7 was based on 124 art galleries, 46 specialty museums, 19 art museums and 35 history museums.

On the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, an art hotspot, we are fortunate to have three major art museums, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Barnes Foundation, and Rodin Museum as well as two major science museums, Franklin Institute and Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University. This fall, Calder Gardens, another major art attraction, will be added to the Parkway. Additionally, we have the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts on Broad Street.

Art is not only in our museums; it is outdoors too. Philadelphia won the 2025 USA Today 10Best Readers' Choice Award for "[Best City for Street Art in America](#)," for the second time; the first was 2023. Cities were nominated by experts at *USA Today* and 10Best.com; then travelers from across the nation voted.

In addition to sculptures, installations, and other varied, interesting, and colorful displays in city squares, parks, and walls, constituting the nation's largest public art program, Philadelphia has more than 4,000 outdoor murals, which earned our city international recognition as the "Mural Capital of the World." Much of the street art is credited to Mural Arts Philadelphia and the Association for Public Art.

Public buildings contain many works of art, historic and current. In the lobby of the Curtis Building, at 6th and Walnut Streets, the spectacular "Dream Garden" is on display. A historic glass mosaic mural, created by Maxfield Parrish in collaboration with Louis Comfort Tiffany, it was installed in 1916 and is now owned by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

[Philadelphia's Magic Gardens](#) is a building and outdoor space at 1020 South Street, completely covered with mosaic murals created by Isaiah Zagar, using handmade tiles, bottles, bicycle wheels, and mirrors. His mosaic murals adorn many other buildings in Philadelphia, including Jim's Steaks, upstairs and downstairs, and a huge wall inside Seafood Unlimited.

Philadelphia public buildings contain [Works Project Administration murals](#) dating back to the Roosevelt administration. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has a collection of [WPA posters](#).

Our neighborhood is another art hotspot. Artists come to show their work at spring and fall Fine Art shows and Fine Craft shows in Rittenhouse Square every year. Center for Emerging Visual Arts, located on Rittenhouse Square, sponsors Open Studio Tours two weekends each year, when artists invite visitors to their studios in Philadelphia neighborhoods. The Naudain Art Collaborative hosts several exhibitions yearly, featuring local artists Bhavisha Patel, Ed Bronstein, Emily Squires Levine, Lauren Sweeney, Karen Villarreal, and Mark Willie. The Print Center, a nonprofit gallery, at 1614 Latimer, exhibits photography and prints. Founded in 1915 as The Print Club, it was one of the first venues in this country dedicated to the appreciation of prints.

Another Center City gallery, Da Vinci Art Alliance, at 704 Catharine Street, founded in 1931, shows artworks by all types of creative people. Arthur Ross Gallery in the University of Pennsylvania's Fisher Fine Arts Library presents rarely seen art and artifacts from a diverse range of time periods, media and cultures.

Despite the closing of the University of the Arts, Philadelphia still has several excellent art colleges including the Moore College of Art & Design, Temple University's Tyler School of Art and Architecture, the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design, and Drexel University's Westphal College of Media Arts & Design. In addition, our city has several artist-in-residence programs including those sponsored by Clay Studio, Twelve Gates Arts, Museum for Art in Wood, Fabric Workshop, Da Vinci Art Alliance, Cherry Street Pier, and Monument Lab. We also have the Fleischer Art Memorial and the High School for the Creative and Performing Arts.

This year, Philadelphia artists reported many challenges including financial instability and limited access to affordable workspaces, according to Councilmember Rue Landau's [citywide survey](#) of over 360 multidisciplinary artists. Various nonprofit organizations have allied to create better support for artists.

Art influences travelers' decisions and attracts tourists to our city. Over 50 percent of American travelers said they consider destinations' arts and culture experiences when deciding where to visit, according to Americans for the Arts, a nonprofit organization sponsored by Mellon Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. This coalition also believes art strengthens the economy, drives revenue to local businesses, promotes mental and physical wellbeing, improves academic performance, and sparks creativity and innovation.

Soaring Views

Photos by Sue Eisenfeld

SkyHigh Restaurant on the 60th Floor of the Four Seasons Hotel, 1 N. 19th St. offers stunning views of the city skyline.



Urban Bees and Pollinator Gardens Perform Vital Ecological Service

By Susan Kahn

If you visited Schuylkill River Park last July, you might have witnessed a curious sight outside the playground, near the new native pollinator garden. You might have seen a tall, bespectacled young man staring intently at the flowers and swinging a butterfly net. The person in question was Matthew Donahue, a University of Connecticut PhD student in ecology and evolutionary biology, who seeks to better understand how prepared our urban bees are for the challenges of climate change as compared to non-urban bees.

Why bees? Crucially, bees (as well as birds, butterflies and bats) have evolved over hundreds of millions of years to provide the plant world with a critical ecological service: moving pollen from one flower to another or “pollination.” Fruits and nuts that have been pollinated by bees are responsible for 30 percent of our daily calories. However, bees around the world are under severe threat from pesticide use, climate change, parasites and habitat loss. As a result, their populations around the world have steadily declined. This disturbing trend has become the focus of academics, farmers, and casual gardeners alike.

But Donahue was not always entranced by bees. As a child growing up in Tennessee, his greatest joy was playing in the woods, where he developed an abiding interest in the environment. He headed to college at Notre Dame for environmental studies. His interest turned to bees only during his master’s work at the University College Dublin, where he studied native mining bees. There he became fascinated with their diversity (there are 1500 species of them), their fuzzy, round cuteness, and their docile nature.

When he arrived at UConn to pursue a PhD, he was ready to move on from bees. He recalls, though, that reading *Darwin Comes to Town: How the Urban Jungle Drives Evolution*, by Menno Schilthuizen, “changed everything.” The book describes how lizards in Puerto Rico are developing feet that better grip surfaces like concrete, how crows in the Japanese city of Sendai have learned to use passing traffic to crack nuts, and how Europe’s urban blackbirds sing at a higher pitch than their rural cousins so as to be heard over traffic noise.

Donahue applied the same logic to bees. He wondered whether urban bees could adapt to the challenges of climate change and disease in the same way as the urban communities of Puerto Rico’s lizards, Japan’s crows, and Europe’s blackbirds.

Donahue found support for his interest in bee evolution at UConn’s Eco-Evolution Lab, led by Dr. Mark Urban. Most studies focus on just one city, but he is taking a more general approach and looking at three: Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Last summer he did sampling work to find species that were abundant in both urban and non-urban habitats as well as good sites for collecting them.

In Philadelphia, in addition to Schuylkill River Park, he captured bees at Marian Anderson Recreation Center, FDR Park, Awbury Arboretum in Germantown, Capitolo Community Gardens in

South Philadelphia, Pier 53, and the Discovery Center in Fairmount Park. Outside the city, he collected bees at French Creek State Park and Crows’ Nest Preserve in Chester County.

Donahue already has made some notable observations regarding Philadelphia. Compared to other areas in which he has worked, Donahue was impressed with the quality and diversity of Philadelphia’s green spaces. Yet, he was surprised by the scarcity of ground-dwelling bees in his initial visit. While these bees constitute 85 percent of all bees, they are very picky about their nesting sites. They prefer sunny, undisturbed sites with well-drained soil, which are not easy to find in Philadelphia. He theorizes that cities are good for certain kinds of bees – those that live above ground in small crevices.

Last summer’s collecting work was exploratory. Donahue’s goal was to find species that were abundant in both urban and non-urban areas. Altogether, Donahue caught over 1,000 bees. Since then, he has been doing the painstaking work of identifying them. He explained that it takes five to 10 minutes to identify a bee just on the most general species level, and much longer on the more specific genus level.



Matthew Donahue samples bees as part of his research comparing urban and non-urban bees.

Continued on p.25

However, last summer's collecting work laid the foundation for this summer's work, when he will focus on only six of the 437 bee species found in Pennsylvania. He will return to the most productive sites to resume his collecting. From there he will compare the genetic diversity of these two sets of urban and non-urban bees and how "connected" they are.

When bee communities are connected, it means there is movement of bees between different habitats. Connected habitats lead to increased genetic diversity within the population, when bees from different genetic backgrounds interbreed. The more genetically diverse a bee population is, the healthier and more resilient it is to respond to diseases and environmental changes.

What does genetic diversity have to do with resilience to environmental change? When a population has diverse genes, some members of the population may possess traits that allow them to better adapt to challenges like extreme weather or disease. Those members survive and reproduce in the face of these challenges.

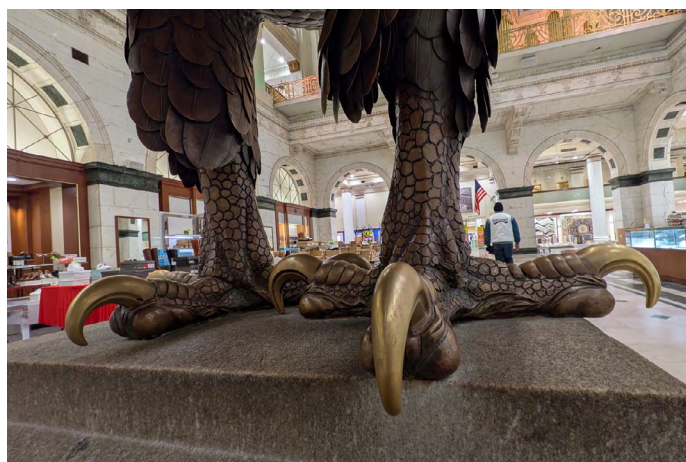
Living History

Farewell to Wanamaker Eagle and Organ

Text and photos by Margo Villanova

During the two months before the Macy's store in the Wanamaker Building closed, I visited two or three times a week. I watched groups of people gather at the renowned Wanamaker Eagle statue. Family groups, friends, and strangers were taking pictures and talking earnestly about their memories. They would gently touch the eagle's talons.

On the last day, Saturday, March 22, at 9 a.m. Peter Richard Conte, Wanamaker Grand Court Organist, performed the first concert. Conte was appointed in 1989 as the fourth Grand Court Organist and has held that position for 36 years. At the beginning of each subsequent hour, an assistant organist performed a 30-minute concert. After each concert, the crowd would disperse somewhat and then return larger than before. The numbers grew during the day. People were looking down from the second and third floors. In the Grand Court, people sat on chairs, on the floor, and on rugs. I felt great tenderness in the crowd: we were all friends.



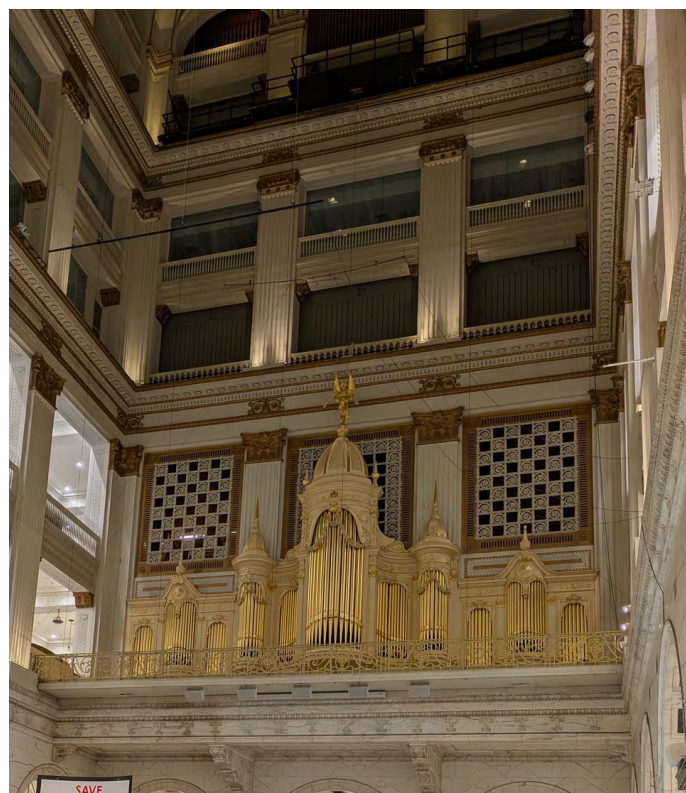
The Eagle's talons have been polished by years of human touch.

The work of better connecting our neighborhood bee populations has already begun. Last spring, CCRA Green added Center City West to the national Pollinator Pathway network, a group of volunteers working to establish continuous corridors of habitat and food sources for pollinating insects and wildlife. You can help by becoming part of the network. Plant even a few native flowers in your flower boxes, planters or roof deck. Then register your planting on the Center City West pollinator pathway [website](#). Most native bees have a range of about 750 meters or approximately five blocks, so the goal is to connect properties within that range.

Donahue suggests that there is a lot to learn about bee behavior in cities – whether roads inhibit or encourage bee movement, how high bees forage for food, and the impact of pollinator gardens like the ones at Schuylkill River Park and Rittenhouse Square as well as pollinator networks like ours.

Take a closer look at bees. For budding enthusiasts, Donahue recommends the field guide *Common Bees of North America*, and [this website](#). And keep an eye out for Donahue this summer when he returns to resume his work with our local bees.

At 5 p.m. the final concert began, with Conte at the console, and lasted more than one hour. He gave a nice speech about all the people who have maintained and restored the organ to its glorious condition, the Friends of the Wanamaker Organ, and their hopes for the future. He expressed their optimism for the future of "Baby," the Wanamaker Organ.



"Baby," the Wanamaker Organ, presides over the Grand Court.

Drought-Tolerant Plants: A Sustainable Solution for Every Urban Garden

By Travis Oliver

As climate change continues to impact weather patterns, many regions are experiencing more frequent droughts, making water conservation a crucial topic for gardeners. One effective way to combat water scarcity while still enjoying a vibrant landscape is by incorporating drought-tolerant plants into your garden.

What Are Drought-Tolerant Plants?

Drought-tolerant plants are species adapted to survive in low-water conditions. These plants have evolved unique characteristics — including deep root systems, thick leaves, and waxy coatings — enabling them to thrive in arid environments. By choosing drought-tolerant varieties, gardeners can create beautiful and sustainable landscapes that require minimal irrigation.

Benefits of Drought-Tolerant Plants

- **Water Conservation:** The most important advantage is their ability to reduce water usage significantly. Once established, these plants often require little to no extra watering.
- **Low Maintenance:** Many drought-tolerant varieties are native to local ecosystems, which means they are naturally resilient and require less care in terms of fertilization and pest control.
- **Environmental Impact:** By choosing these plants, gardeners contribute to a more sustainable future. Drought-tolerant gardens require less irrigation, which helps conserve water and reduce runoff that can carry pollutants.
- **Biodiversity:** Many drought-tolerant plants attract pollinators and other beneficial wildlife, promoting biodiversity in the garden.

Popular Drought-Tolerant Plants

- **Succulents:** These hardy plants store water in their leaves, making them perfect for xeriscaping. Varieties like agave and aloe vera are both beautiful and functional.
- **Native Grasses:** Grasses such as blue fescue and little bluestem create a soft, flowing texture in the garden while needing minimal water.
- **Herbs:** Many herbs, including rosemary, lavender, and thyme, thrive in drier conditions, adding fragrance and flavor to your meals.

- **Perennials:** Plants like black-eyed Susans, coneflowers, and desert marigolds not only withstand drought but also provide color and structure to your garden year after year.

Designing a Drought-Tolerant Garden

Creating a drought-tolerant landscape in your urban garden doesn't mean sacrificing beauty. Here are a few tips to get started:

- **Plan for Grouping:** Plant drought-tolerant species together to simplify care and ensure efficient use of water.
- **Soil Preparation:** Amend the soil with organic matter to improve drainage and nutrient retention, helping plants establish their root systems.
- **Mulching:** Apply a layer of mulch around plants to retain moisture and suppress weeds.
- **Incorporate Hardscaping:** Use stones, gravel, and other materials to minimize water loss and add visual interest.

Drought-tolerant plants offer an excellent solution for gardeners looking to create sustainable landscapes that are both beautiful and functional. By making thoughtful choices, we can reduce our water usage and still enjoy the natural beauty of our gardens. Whether you're starting a new garden or revamping an existing one, consider adding these resilient plants to your landscape for a greener, more sustainable future. Happy gardening!



Scenes of Spring Foretold

Photos by Margo Villanova

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society sponsored the Philadelphia Flower Show at the Pennsylvania Convention Center from March 1 to March 9, with the theme "Gardens of Tomorrow."



Correction

In the photo essay "After Devastating Fire, Jim's Steaks Gets a Zagar-Flavored Makeover," (Spring 2025 CCQ), picture credit was incorrectly given to both Margo Villanova and Bonnie Eisenfeld. All photos in the essay were by Margo Villanova. We regret the error.

From the Court to the Stage Philadelphia Theatre Company Turns 50 with *Small Ball*

Philadelphia Theatre Company (PTC) marks 50 years as an institution dedicated to staging new plays for Philadelphia audiences. Since its founding, PTC has cultivated more than 75 community partnerships, reached over 11,650 students through educational programs, and presented more than 150 world premieres.

PTC has been a home for the city's theatrical artists and artisans, garnering both local and national acclaim for its bold productions, imaginative design, visionary direction, and tour-de-force performances.

In celebrating this milestone year, PTC is revitalizing theatrical experiences at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre. Most recently, *Night Side Songs* toured local hospitals, community centers, and places of worship — bringing its poignant story directly to the heart of the communities it uplifted. Funded by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, this free, two-week tour exemplified PTC's commitment to making transformative theatre accessible to all.

PTC closes its 50th season with *Small Ball*, an offbeat musical with book and lyrics by Mickie Maher and music by Merel van Dijk and Anthony Barilla. Directed by Taibi Magar and Tyler Dobrowsky, the production runs June 6–29 at the Suzanne Roberts Theatre (480 S. Broad Street). It is commissioned and co-produced by Daryl Morey, president of basketball operations for the Philadelphia 76ers.

Philadelphia loves sports—so why not a sports-themed musical? In the surreal world of *Small Ball*, melancholy journeyman basketball player Michael Jordan (no, not that Michael Jordan) joins the Lilliput Existers—yes, from *Gulliver's Travels*—a team of six-inch-tall players. Michael quickly learns that both the team's success and the post-game press conferences rest entirely on his (full-sized) shoulders.

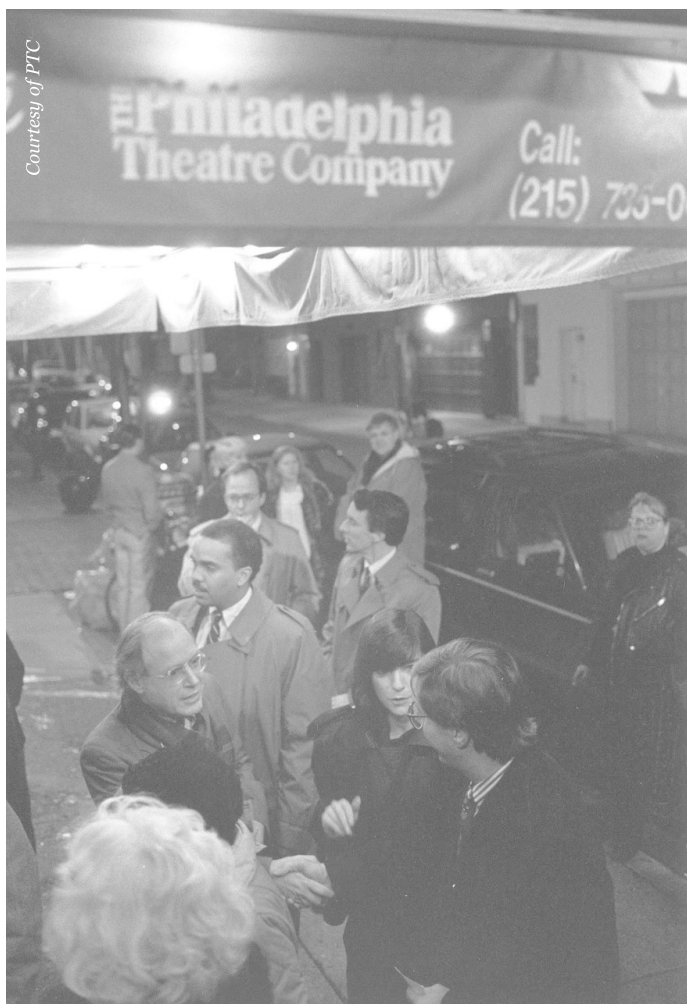
Get in the Game!

Whether you're part of an office squad, basketball team, alumni network, student group, or just friends looking for a slam-dunk night out, *Small Ball* is a winning play to launch your summer. PTC offers exclusive group sales packages for parties of four or more, with:

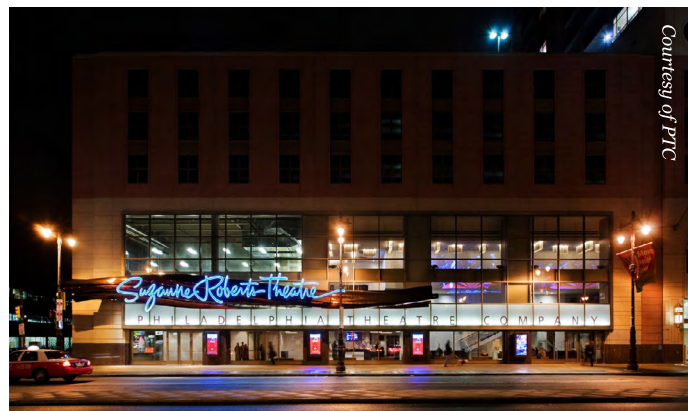
- Discounted group pricing
- Custom pre- or post-show talkbacks
- Optional drink tickets at a special advance rate
- Dedicated concierge support from their Audience Services team

To plan a memorable outing that combines sports, spectacle, and surreal storytelling, to learn more, or to reserve your group tickets, contact the team at audienceservices@philatheatreco.org or call 215.985.0420. The Suzanne Roberts Theatre box office is always open for questions—by phone, email, or in person.

And stay tuned for PTC's upcoming 2025–26 season announcement, to see what they have planned for the next 50 years and beyond.



The Philadelphia Theatre Company's homes—then, and now. Above, PTC's first home, *Plays and Players*, on the 1700 block of Delancey Place.



Above, PTC's second and current home, The Suzanne Roberts Theatre, at Broad and Lombard.

Marian Anderson Historical Society & Museum Reopens Five Years After Flood Damage

By Margie Wiener

The Marian Anderson Historical Society & Museum, a rowhouse in South Philadelphia, had been closed due to flood damage while undergoing major repairs. Good news! After five years of large-scale renovations, the Marian Anderson Historical Society & Museum opened its doors to visitors in March. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held to celebrate the reopening of the iconic museum at the start of Women's History Month.

The residence, where the famed opera singer and civil rights icon once lived, was closed to visitors in March 2020 because of the pandemic. While the museum was closed, a burst pipe caused massive flooding in the basement, where historic [artifacts were displayed](#).

"It's been a long road, there have been many partners and supporters who have brought us to a point where not only is the flood damage repaired, but the entire structure has been renewed," said Paul Steinke, executive director of Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

The renovations cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Funds were raised through donations from local and historical groups, and supplemented by city and state funds.

At the ribbon cutting, officials gathered for a patriotic medley by Historical Society performers & Local 77 AFM Instrumentalists. A new exhibit, "Marian: The Philadelphia Story," running through November, displays letters, photos, music, and artifacts from the singer's life, including those nearly ruined by flood damage but since restored.

"Everything that [Anderson] dreamed she could be, everything that she suffered because of Jim Crow segregation, even in our city of Philadelphia, all of that story gets told through this beautiful, brand-new exhibit," said Jillian Patricia Pirtle, the museum's CEO. "And I think at the time when our voices continue to be silenced, our history continues to be ignored, and women are not uplifted like they should be, as the great leaders that we are, it is essential to tell this story now." Pirtle said she hopes women leaders in Philadelphia will champion the exhibit and show their support.

Virginia Storage, the first vice president general of the Daughters of the American Revolution, said her organization donated money toward the restoration project and preserved two of Anderson's gowns that were housed at DAR's museum.

"As an organization dedicated to historic preservation, education, and patriotism, it has been important to the DAR to support the museum's restoration efforts so they may return to sharing the legacy and history of this incredible treasure to our nation, Marian Anderson," Storage said. "The history of the DAR will be forever intertwined with one of Marian Anderson's defining moments, which took place on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial after being denied the opportunity to sing at DAR Constitution Hall because of her race."

Storage added that she is grateful for Anderson's impact on the nation's conscience. "It helps the DAR to recognize the important changes for our own organization."

DAR presented the museum with two framed photos of Anderson, one of which captured her farewell tour of the United States at Constitution Hall in Washington on Oct. 24, 1964. The performance was part of a series of concerts that raised money for the American Red Cross. The second photo showed one of Anderson's restored dresses damaged by the flood.

City Council President Kenyatta Johnson, who supported the renovation project, said the museum's reopening is another chance to continue celebrating Anderson's life and legacy.

"She was more than just an opera singer," Johnson said. "She was a civil rights activist and so for her to grow up in South Philadelphia and us to have this opportunity to not only exemplify but most importantly promote all that she represented in this area means a lot to me."

Johnson emphasized that the museum's opening comes at a time when African American history is being challenged. "Nationally in our country there's a movement to erase Black excellence and so this event for me is special because it provides us an opportunity and allows us to exemplify the greatness of Marian Anderson," he said.

For more details, see https://why.org/articles/marian-anderson-museum-south-philadelphia-reopening/?mc_cid=eb4c2b25fd&mc_eid=31ce1efc34



Inside the Marian Anderson Historical Society & Museum in South Philadelphia are restored artifacts from the basement, first, and second floors.

Rittenhouse Square's Lawns Being Restored to New Beauty

By June Armstrong

Executive Director, Friends of Rittenhouse Square

As Rittenhouse Square's Lawn Restoration Program, sponsored by Friends of Rittenhouse Square, enters its second phase, we are thrilled to see what has been accomplished so far. Throughout this project, we continue to evaluate initial results to inform our future work and plans for the Square. As many eagerly await the reopening of additional sections, let me share some information on the work performed so far, as well as lessons we continue to learn through this important initiative.



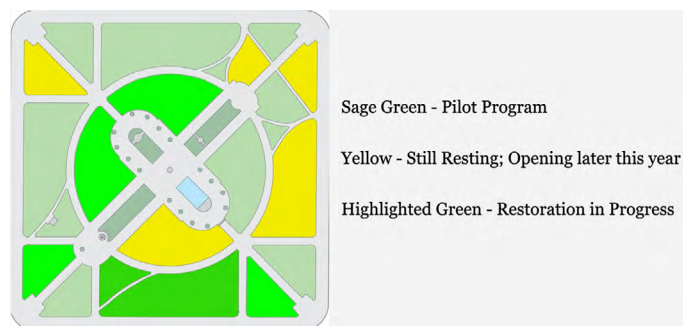
Rolling out the green carpet in Rittenhouse Square, 2025.

The most immediate changes are the ones we can see every day — a dramatic transformation from bare, muddy patches of dirt to luscious, green lawns. But the most critical work to maintain this beauty long term is happening underground. Healthy lawns take time to grow deep root systems, and our irrigation infrastructure, nearing the half-century mark, is carefully evaluated in each area multiple times throughout the season, to ensure that all areas that need water receive the right amount to thrive. We've added a surprising number of irrigation heads to many areas during this project, and we expect to find more areas to address as we continue our work.



One of Rittenhouse Square's pollinator gardens, 2024.

We also are learning that some areas of the Square need a different approach. We hope to add new garden beds full of colorful and native plants to many areas where grass lawns simply do not thrive. Though details are still being finalized, we always encourage those who are curious or interested in helping to sign up for our future volunteering opportunities. It's a way to gain firsthand insight into the challenges and opportunities here.



Map of progress to date.

At this point, half of our lawns have had restoration work performed, as shown on the accompanying map. Later this summer, after additional seeding is done, the areas that were closed off starting last year will be opened. This year, we are increasing the frequency of periodic reseeding during our regular lawn maintenance work, about 50 percent more often than what was performed last year, thanks to ongoing support from our members, donors, and others.

First, we will open passive recreation areas — places where children and caregivers can enjoy our lawns without having to worry about pet waste. Then, as long as our work continues to hold, we will open these lawns up for all to use. New signage for these areas will soon inform and explain the importance of this work.

While we look toward the work still ahead, I'm thrilled to see families, friends, and neighbors enjoying the benefits of an even greener Rittenhouse Square, especially as the weather warms. We are grateful for the support of our community and partners in continuing this improvement for years to come. I want to thank our community members for their patience during this time, and I encourage everyone to look toward the longer-term picture — a healthy, well-maintained Square, that will continue to inspire and delight generations to come.

Summer of Wonder at Philadelphia City Institute Library

By Erin Hoopes

The Summer Reading program at Philadelphia City Institute Library (1905 Locust Street on Rittenhouse Square) is open to community members of all ages, and will run from Monday, June 9, through Saturday, August 9. Children earn stickers and prizes for completing summer reading passport activities. Teens and adults can also participate in prize drawings for summer reading!

For Children & Families:

- *Summer of Wonder Kickoff* program with Taffy's Face Painting, Friday, June 20, 3:30 pm. In addition to face painting, enjoy fun activities and snacks for children while signing up for summer reading!
- *Special programs*, Saturdays at 11 am, June 14 – August 9. Learn about snakes, geography, and outer space, and enjoy puppets, juggling, and more!
- *Pride Concert by Ants on a Log*, Saturday, June 7, 3 pm. Ants on a Log plays award-winning music for children and other childlike people. Their energetic, interactive shows center positivity, social justice, and silliness, and are a delight for children and adults.

For Preschoolers:

These activities will be held outside in Rittenhouse Square. Meet at the Goat Statue on the days and times listed below (in inclement weather, we'll meet inside the library).

- *Toddler Storytime*, Tuesdays, 11:15 am, June 3 – August 5
- *Baby Storytime*, Wednesdays, 10:30 am, June 4 – August 6
- *Toddler Art Studio* on the following Thursdays at 11:15 am: June 5, July 17, August 7

For School-Age Children:

- *Kids' Cooking Club*, on the following Mondays at 5 pm: June 9, July 14, August 4
- *Kids' Sewing Club*, Tuesdays, 4 pm, June 3 – August 5
- *Kids' Gardening Club* on the following Thursdays at 3:30 pm: June 12, 26; July 10, 24

For Teens:

- *College Prep Workshop* series on the following Mondays at 4 pm: June 23 (SAT Crash Course), June 30 (The College

Application Essay), and July 7 (How the Brain Learns for Teens). Please register at <https://tinyurl.com/PClcollegeprep>

- *Teen Hangout* on the following Mondays at 4 pm: July 14, 21, 28, August 4
- *Volunteering* — Teens in grades 7 – 12 are invited to earn community service hours by volunteering to help with the summer reading program. Ask a librarian for details!

For Adults:

- *Community Crafting*, Tuesdays 5:30 – 6:30 pm, with a special program in honor of Pride Month on Tuesday, June 3, at 4:30 pm: Collage as Resistance
- *Free Movie Screenings*, Wednesdays, 2 pm
- *Queer Comics Club* on the following Saturdays at 11 am: June 14; July 12 & 26; August 9 & 23.
- *Free Photography Workshops*, Saturday, June 14, 1 pm, and Saturday, June 28, 12 pm. Get details and sign up at <https://tinyurl.com/damianworkshops>
- *Introduction to Black American Sign Language*, Saturday, July 12, 3 pm
- *Urban Gardening with Native Plants*, Saturday, July 26, 2 pm

Please visit <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/locations/philadelphia-city-institute> for program details.



TPS Announces New Head of School Alyssa Rickels

By Elise Greenberg

The Philadelphia School has announced that interim head of school Alyssa Rickels has been appointed as their ninth Head of School.

Described by colleagues as a dynamic and relational leader, whose warmth and joy have instantly energized the community, Rickels is known for fostering authentic connections. She leads with empathy, listens deeply, and inspires a shared sense of purpose and commitment across all parts of the school community. Her ability to build strong relationships with TPS students, faculty and staff, families, and alumni reflects her belief that education is most powerful when grounded in trust and a collective, child-centric approach.

Upon learning of her appointment, Rickels had this to say: "What we do at TPS — joyfully educating children to become curious and conscientious citizens — matters. Building children's self-confidence, expanding their minds, and deepening their experience of feeling cherished and truly known is powerful, purpose-driven work. It is the key to unlocking the academic and personal potential of each and every individual, and to inspiring their stewardship of the world around them. To lead this work, and to collaborate with the people who do this work best, is a privilege, and a responsibility I hold with great care."

With a Bachelor of Arts degree from Colgate University and a Masters in Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania, Rickels' background includes expertise in child development, parent education, and mental health.

A member of the TPS community for 23 years, she has served in multiple roles: a parent of four TPS graduates; a dedicated volunteer, including terms as TPSA (parent association) president and board trustee; an administrator, holding both student- and parent-facing roles as preschool admissions director and middle school dean of students; and most recently, interim head of school.

Last May, the board asked Rickels to lead TPS through a time of transition, bringing her familiarity with the TPS community and her professional skills to support and steady the school. Over the course of the last 10 months, she has exceeded all expectations, and the school has thrived. Under her interim leadership, the school has seen rising morale, growing enrollment, record-setting fundraising, increased programmatic investment, and meaningful momentum on both existing and new strategic initiatives.

Next year, thanks to Rickels, TPS will re-establish the Preschool 3 program. She also led the board in accelerating the final phase of the Ours to Shape strategic plan, which includes this summer's renovations of the music and support spaces in the Lombard building.

With much accomplished and significant projects on the horizon, The Philadelphia School is optimistic for the future under Rickels' leadership.



TPS Head of School Alyssa Rickels.

Out & About

See More for Less: Sightseeing with Philadelphia CityPass

With Philadelphia [CityPass](#), sightseers can save as much as 51 percent on admission to three, four, or five attractions. Tickets must be purchased online, and are valid for nine days.

Attractions include Adventure Aquarium, Franklin Institute, Philadelphia Zoo, Big Bus Co. and Philadelphia Trolley Works, Eastern State Penitentiary, Battleship New Jersey, Museum of the American Revolution, Academy of Natural Sciences, National Constitution Center, and Barnes Foundation.

Discover Connection and Growth with Montessori & Me at Greene Towne

By Olivia Powers

Greene Towne Montessori School invites families with children ages 0–3 to join Montessori & Me, a unique playgroup designed to introduce the Montessori approach, foster community, and support early childhood development. Offered year round, Montessori & Me provides a warm, welcoming environment where both children and their caregivers can learn, grow, and connect.

In our thoughtfully prepared Montessori setting, toddlers spend their mornings exploring hands-on materials and engaging in developmentally appropriate activities that nurture independence and curiosity. At the same time, caregivers — whether parents, grandparents, or nannies — gain valuable insight into supporting their child's natural development through guided observations, one-on-one and small-group lessons, and meaningful discussions led by experienced Montessori educators.

In the afternoons, infants and their caregivers benefit from a nurturing environment where they can share the joys and challenges of parenting in a supportive community, guided by a Greene Towne facilitator.

What sets Montessori & Me apart is its collaborative model. Rather than working directly with the child, our Montessori teacher partners with caregivers, empowering them with tools and strategies they can use at home. This approach not only builds caregiver confidence and understanding but also strengthens the bond between adult and child.

Montessori & Me is ideal for families seeking connection, an introduction to the Montessori philosophy, or a gentle way to prepare their child for future schooling.



Montessori & Me Lead Teacher Olivia Powers.

"Our family loved the Montessori & Me program!" parent Jess Rice says. "Both of my children participated before they started their first school year, and it was the perfect way to prepare them for the new learning environment. The warm, friendly, and knowledgeable staff made each session enjoyable, and I looked forward to the playgroup every week. The program not only helped my kids feel comfortable in a classroom setting but also introduced us to the Montessori philosophy and genuinely made me feel part of the wonderful school community."

Whether you're new to Montessori or looking to join a welcoming parenting community, Montessori & Me offers a meaningful and enriching start to your child's educational journey.

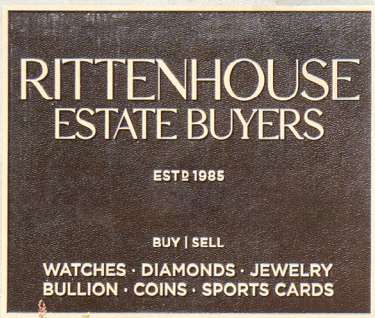
Olivia Powers, a Montessori-trained teacher for ages 0-6, serves as Greene Towne's Montessori & Me Lead Teacher. Playgroup sessions take place at Greene Towne Montessori School, 55 N. 22nd Street.



Participants in the Montessori & Me playgroup enjoy an activity together.

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Business Members and Friends



CCRA Summer Calendar – Celebrations of History and Culture

Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show

Friday, June 6, 11 am – 6 pm

Saturday, June 7, 11 am – 6 pm

Sunday, June 8, 11 am – 5 pm

<http://www.rittenhousesquareart.com/>

Odunde Festival

2300 South Street (15 city blocks)

Sunday, June 8

<https://www.odundefestival.org/>

Ball on the Square

Benefits Friends of Rittenhouse Square

Thursday, June 12, 7 – 11 pm

<https://www.friendsofrittenhouse.org/event-details/2025-ball-on-the-square>

Bloomsday Festival

A daylong public reading of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, featuring literati, artists, public figures, and familiar personalities, along with musical performances that will bring the novel's tavern songs and arias to life.

The Rosenbach Museum & Library

2008 Delancey Street

Monday, June 16, 12 noon – 10 pm

<https://www.rosenbach.org/programs/the-2025-bloomsday-festival>

Chinese Lantern Festival

Franklin Square

200 N. 6th Street

Friday, June 20 through Sunday, August 31

Open 6 – 11 pm daily (closed July 4)

<https://phillychineselanternfestival.com/>

Red, White, & Blue To-Do

Parade and Block Party

Philadelphia's Historic District

Wednesday, July 2

<https://www.visitphilly.com/things-to-do/events/red-white-and-blue-to-do/>

Wawa Welcome America

Commemorates Juneteenth and Independence Day

16-day celebration, ending with

Fourth of July free concert on Benjamin Franklin Parkway,

Fireworks display over the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Thursday, June 19 to Friday July 4

<https://www.visitphilly.com/things-to-do/events/wawa-welcome-america/>

Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy

13th Annual Piano Festival

Academy of Vocal Arts

1920 Spruce Street

Saturday, July 26 to Sunday, August 3

<https://www.pypa.info/festival-events>

Schuylkill Navy Rowing Events

<https://boathouserow.org/schuylkill-river-schedule/>

Schuylkill Banks Riverboat Tours

<https://www.schuylkillbanks.org/events/riverboat-tours>

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Walking Tours

<https://preservationalliance.com/walking-tours/>

America's Garden Capital

30+ gardens, arboreta, and historic landscapes within 30 miles

<https://americasgardencapital.org/>

Coming in Fall...

CCRA Annual House and Garden Tour

TBA – Check CCRA *This Week* for updates

Calder Gardens

Benjamin Franklin Parkway between 21st & 22nd Streets

Building designed by Herzog & de Meuron, gardens

designed by Piet Oudolf

Rotating works from the Calder Foundation, New York

Administered by the Barnes Foundation

Fall 2025

<https://caldergardens.org/>

"Imagine! 100 Years of International Surrealism"

From Brussels to Paris to Hamburg to Madrid to Philadelphia

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Fall 2025 through Spring 2026

<https://www.artnews.com/list/art-news/artists/surrealism-art-shows-exhibitions-around-the-world-2024-calendar-1234706053/brussels/>

Coming in 2026...

Philadelphia Celebrates America's 250th Birthday

<https://www.visitphilly.com/2026-philadelphia/>

<https://www.philadelphia250.us/>

To get the latest news about events in Center City, sign up for (IN) Center City, the e-newsletter of the Center City District:

<http://www.centercityphila.org/incentercity/signup.php>

To learn about more festivals and events in Philadelphia, go to

<https://www.visitphilly.com/>



Center City Residents' Association

1900 Market Street, 8th Floor
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centercity@centercityresidents.org
www.centercityresidents.org

Coming: Fall 2025

Rittenhouse & Fitler Square

62ND HOUSE & GARDEN TOUR



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