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Revitalizing Joseph Young's "Dream City in Florida," Hollywood's Young Circle is now home to the Hollywood ArtsPark. Four years in the making, this cultural centerpiece owes its existence to former city of Hollywood Mayor Mara Giuliani, Manager Cameron Benson and various city commissioners.

A \$5 million grant from Broward County, matching funds from the city of Hollywood and investment of early supporters spearheaded the park. Phase I included re-doing the park, the surrounding traffic circle and the infrastructure. The Visual Arts Pavilion comprised Phase II. In 2005, the Greater Hollywood Arts Foundation raised additional funds needed for Phase III, which includes the performing arts pavilion and its amphitheater.

"Going after the county grant for the ArtsPark was actually my idea so, of course, I'm extremely gratified that it was created and thrilled that it is being enjoyed by so many residents," former mayor Giuliani says.

"The foundation is a small organization put together to raise private funds to complement the public funds for the ArtsPark Project," foundation president Steve Shulman says. "There are still \$7 million needed, and that is where I get involved."

The city leaders and fundraisers essentially want to revive Young Circle to the glory days of the 1920s and '30s, when Joseph Young incorporated three large circles of land located along his planned principal boulevard. One of the circles became the site of

a 10-acre park, which was later called Young Circle. As one of the earliest designated-by-design recreation areas in the region at the time, it always remained a place for the community's cultural and artistic enrichment.

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"For decades, Young Circle Park was the centerpiece of downtown culture, providing a backdrop for yearly events, including the Mardi Gras Fiesta Tropicale, St. Patrick's Day Parade & Festival, Viva Italia, and holiday light displays," says Lacey Wooton, publicist with Ambit Public Relations.

Despite its initial popularity, Wooton recalls that the 1990s saw Young Circle Park diminish in importance and appeal, partly due to its aging infrastructure, the rise of other entertainment venues, and the emergence of other downtown districts. And even with these woes, Giuliani was not originally an advocate of the revitalization. She turned down the Community Redevelopment Agency director's plan to pour \$2 million into fixing the old park.

"I felt the timing wasn't right... I thought we ought to wait until we could do something really special to transform our central



park, not just fix it up," Giuliani explains.

The timing became right in 2003, and leaders—led by Giuliani and Benson—responded to a Request for Proposal from Broward County and initiated plans to transform Young Circle into an arts-themed regional park and make Hollywood "The City of the Arts."

According to Shulman, the ArtsPark has hosted several successful festivals and is equipped for rock shows, symphony concerts, dance performances and other events at the outdoor stage. Eventually, it will become the amphitheater stage at the performing arts pavilion.

"The area will be able to seat about 2,000, and we've already got the shell for the seating area built. It's got a gentle rise to it, so people can bring blankets and enjoy the performances that way," he says. The pavilion also features a 300- to 350-seat black box theater; state-of-the-art sound, lights and acoustics; and rehearsal areas.

Although acts are still being booked,

Mike Wharton, program and events manager for the Hollywood ArtsPark, has plenty in the works for a program schedule. A Third Thursday event will feature local, South Florida and national groups in the form a concert or other entertainment. A monthly international film series will begin in the fall.

Shulman envisions a layer of activities taking place. While kids play on the contemporary playground equipment, demonstrations and classes occur at the Visual Arts Building—which features three working studios, viewing areas, exhibition space and classrooms. Each week, the art studios host artists, who log in a combined total of 100 hours a week and 25 art classes.

"People can count on something going on at all times at the ArtsPark. This builds to a wonderful crescendo of good feelings by people, which keeps them coming back," Shulman says.

Inspiring features of the ArtsPark include "Millennium Springs," a public art project by Japanese artist Ritsuko Taho; open spaces, including "The Grove" and "The Meadow;" and activity centers, such as the aforementioned playground. All these elements of Young Circle's revitalization are another phase in what is already a thriving cultural landscape in Hollywood.

Giulianti mentions that the Hollywood Central Performing Arts Center has had free or reasonably priced musical, theatrical and cutting-edge ballet performances for years; and the Art & Culture Center of Hollywood's Ocean Dance supplied the first—and perhaps only—venue in which Mikhail Baryshnikov danced under a starlit sky at the beach.

"I expect the ArtsPark to continue the city's tradition as an important locale for the arts for people of all ages, tastes and income levels," Giuliani says. "Undoubtedly, the ArtsPark will evolve into a sought-after downtown venue for the highest-quality visual and performing arts and cultural opportunities, as well as a perfectly beautiful outdoor park experience."

Echoing Shulman's thoughts, the former mayor has high expectations for ArtsPark as an integral part of Hollywood's urban fabric. She hopes that, as it evolves to meet the needs of present and future generations, ArtsPark will become one of Hollywood's defining features.

The ArtsPark at Young Circle is at the intersection of Federal Highway and Hollywood Boulevard. For more information, call (954) 921-3520 or visit www.artsparkatyoungcircle.org online. 🌳