

## **Catharine Park**

Catharine Park. We LOVE that Park! But how did it get here?

In the 1980s, the neighborhood suffered through difficult times. Drug dealing in the lot was common. In response, the City of Philadelphia closed and locked the lot with a chain-link fence preventing use by the public at large.

Despite being forbidden from using it, nearby neighbors greatly valued it as passive open space. In 2007, after a long and hard fight, the neighbors successfully blocked the lot from being sold for commercial development by the Philadelphia Department of Public Property, which owns the lot.

From that effort, neighbors partnered with SOSNA to collaboratively design a concept site plan. Volunteers took on the project in 2010 while funding was sought and successfully negotiated an Urban Garden Agreement with the Department of Public Property, permitting access to the lot and taking over maintenance responsibilities.

The project transformed the municipally owned open space from a neglected garden into an innovative public pocket park.

With hundreds of similar lots around Philadelphia, this project provided a template for neighborhood-based non-profits to create passive open spaces in their own communities. Renovating this park had made adjacent properties more attractive to investment and catalyzed economic development, a core mission of the South of South Neighborhood Association. And now dozens of children enjoy playing in the park each week! It's a wonderful space for children and their caregivers to socialize.

The park is still maintained by volunteers in the neighborhood. While it's mostly self sufficient, funds are needed to pay for the electricity, clean-ups and future projects.

## **Triangles**

The Triangle Park will be celebrating its 10 year anniversary in 2024!

The park came to be how we know it today in 2014. But the planning for it started in 2012. A handful of local residents thought that the street in this small section was redundant and that the space was underutilized. In other parts of the city these small sections of redundant street were already being turned into parklets, so a handful of neighbors started the task of trying to turn this road into a park as well.

The first step was to get the close neighbors to buy into and agree to close off this street. As much of a success as this park is today, there were many neighbors, including all of the commercial spaces that line this strip, who were adamantly opposed. They cited the removal of

parking spaces and an increase in traffic as the reasons for being opposed. They fought tooth and nail and voiced their concerns at all of the community meetings. Half a dozen meetings, if not more, were held and at each and every one those opposed had louder voices than those who were for. The neighbors who started the project went door-to-door to get signatures for those who would support the project, but those who opposed still held the majority. After many more months of door knocking, they were able to get those who were neutral to change their vote to approve the project. With that, they took their petition to the Councilman's office (at the time it was Kenyatta Johnson) and pushed for him to write an ordinance that would turn this street section into a car-free zone. He agreed, under the condition that it would be a six-month trial. The city required that the park be maintained through volunteers and that SOSNA would hold insurance for the space.

After the approval, the volunteers got started with fundraising to buy furniture for the park and to get the required traffic barrier planters. They held a beer garden fundraiser and were able to raise enough funds to purchase the items needed. If you look closely at the planters in the park, you will see the names of the original larger donors!

Over the years, many amenities were added such as the snowflake lighting, the mural on the ground, the Indego bike station and the Little Free Library. In 2023, thanks to a generous donation from Vicinity, the Triangles was able to get all new furniture.

Nine years later, the park still operates under a temporary ordinance. Volunteers, including SOSNA, are still working to this day to get the Triangle Park to become a permanent park and maintain the space.

The park is a HUGE success. In the summer, the park is always filled with people who go there to relax, eat, or enjoy the programming like movie nights put on by Igloo or **Th**

### **Julian Abele Park**

"Julian Abele," said Darlene Smith. "Let's name our park for Julian Abele." Ms. Smith, a long-term (now deceased) resident of South Philly (aka Graduate Hospital Neighborhood) was the prime advocate for Julian Abele (pronounced *able*), a world-class architect who lived on Christian Street. His talents shaped the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He was the first Black graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture. Naming the hard-scrabble space on 22nd Street between Montrose and Carpenter after long-term neighbor Julian Abele seemed fitting, especially as a companion to another fabulously talented neighborhood resident, Marian Anderson. And now that it is a shapely, verdant place for parties and lively chats and quiet reading, the honoring of Julian Abele also honors the efforts of a group of neighbors who started with 'guerilla' gardening and moved to community activism.

Loretta Tague and Terry Gillen were among the early advocates for Julian Abele Park. Ms. Tague describes garbage-strewn empty lots envisioned by a group of neighbors as a park. After

cleaning the space (goodbye tons of trash), and assisted by public and private entities\* and the involvement of the neighborhood, gardening was the first sign of life. Claiming the park for Julian Abele further anchored it to the neighborhood. A now-replaced row house on the east side of the park was decorated with a mural, dedicated in 2011.

Ms. Tague and Ms. Gillen recall key players, including Ms. Smith, her husband, William, as well as many who lived around the park. They collaborated with the City to support the project and worked hard to secure funding (a never-ending task). As early as 2005, neighbors saw the space as potentially clean and green. Neighbors saw neighbors drinking tea and chatting with friends, taking a moment after dinner at one of the neighborhood restaurants, playing with their kids, hosting a party in the space.

And in 2023, that is exactly what happens in Julian Abele Park.

The Friends of Julian Abele Park, are carrying on the legacy and the vision of the originators. The existence of the park is a testament to the power of impassioned, involved and hard-working people. The Friends' website is: <http://julianabelepark.org/>

For more information about how Julian Abele Park came to be, go to: [http://www.southphillyblocks.org/sosna/site\\_archive/green/case/22montrose.html](http://www.southphillyblocks.org/sosna/site_archive/green/case/22montrose.html)

The City of Philadelphia has a Citizens' Planning Institute, which teaches citizens the who-what-why of city planning, including a step-by-step process to create a park. Go to: <http://www.citizensplanninginstitute.org/park-in-a-truck-home>

\* including but not limited to: the City of Philadelphia, the Community Design Collaborative, the Philadelphia Economic Revitalization Corporation, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the South of South Neighbors Association (SOSNA), Shiloh Baptist Church, Greater St. Matthew Baptist Church, 30th Ward Democratic Party, Washington Avenue Business Association (from a list on a meeting notice in 2006 to discuss the design of what was then called Montrose Park).

## **UBC Garden of Eden**

UBC Garden of Eden is located at the corner of 19th and Fitzwater Streets in the churchyard of Union Baptist Church. The collaboration between the church and local artist/urban farmer Meei-Ling Ng started in 2017. The site has become a thriving food garden and orchard, providing produce to non-profit food pantries, community fridges, and local groups serving seniors.

There are many opportunities for community members to volunteer at UBC Garden of Eden. Volunteers can learn how to grow and care for vegetables, herbs, fruit, and pollinator plants. The harvest is shared with the volunteers, too.

Raised beds along the west side of the churchyard were built with bricks recovered from the Royal Theater on South Street and joists and pew ends from New Light Beulah Baptist Church, which formerly stood at 17th and Bainbridge. Seasonal vegetables like rainbow chard, garlic, spring mix, and collard greens are grown in mixed beds. Fruits include Asian pears, raspberries, and figs. UBC Garden of Eden uses companion planting to increase nutrients, improve yields, deter pests, and provide shade.

UBC Garden of Eden partnered with the Philadelphia Orchard Project to plant fruit trees (including native paw-paws), herbs, and wildflowers for pollinators.

The garden is a hub for the neighborhood in many ways. The church and volunteers hosted an event for Earth Day 2023 that highlighted sustainability, community, and social connections. The Free Library of Philadelphia has held story hours there, and the Christian Street YMCA hosted bootcamp classes. Pine and yew greens and pinecones from the garden have also been used at SOSNA's free wreath-making workshops in the holiday season.

Visit UBC Garden of Eden's Facebook page to see the latest news and learn how to help.  
<https://www.facebook.com/ubceden/>





(Other sources:

[https://why.org/articles/church-in-grad-hospital-hopes-newly-planted-garden-of-eden-will-turn-n  
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[https://www.salon.com/2018/09/22/the-artist-creating-urban-farms-to-feed-philadelphia\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2018/09/22/the-artist-creating-urban-farms-to-feed-philadelphia_partner/)

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### **Marian Anderson Recreation Center and Park**

The Recreation Center has recently been rebuilt with donations from former Phillies player Ryan Howard and the Phillies themselves, but has been an active center since 1954. It was named after Marian Anderson, internationally known contralto who lived a few blocks from the center.

Besides a large baseball field which is the home of the Anderson Monarchs, there is a public pool, outdoor basketball courts, playgrounds, and an indoor center with a boxing gym and several multipurpose rooms. The area green space is bounded by many trees, and the grounds are well maintained. As an added bonus, the Fitzwater street side of the center is adorned with drawings of well known historical figures including many from the sports world.

The entire site covers 3.4 acres. It was formerly a playground called the William McCoach playground before being rebuilt and renamed for Ms. Anderson. Before then, it was the site of weekly baseball games between all-Black teams composed of local workers. In the late 19th century, the field was the home of the Rosengarten and Company Chemical Works....if you check out the website of the Library Company of Philadelphia there is a lovely lithograph of the factory in 1876. It appears that our lovely green space of the 21st century was once the site of a company that were "Manufacturers of sulphate of quinine, sulfate of morphine, nitrate of silver, and other chemicals." A 1904 New York Times article notes a merger to become the Powers-Weightman-Rosengarten Company, and in 1927 that firm merged into Merck & Company.

Hence, the lovely green space—full of athletic fields, courts and pool—was once a large chemical company that eventually became one of the major Pharma companies of the world.