

FAIRMOUNT PARK ART ASSOCIATION

1616 Walnut Street, Suite 2012

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19103-5313

www.fpaa.org

Labor in the Park: Philadelphia's Monument to the American Labor Movement

*A project of the Fairmount Park Art Association and the Friends of Elmwood Park
with the City of Philadelphia Department of Recreation*

Project Summary. *Labor in the Park* by artist John Kindness was developed for Elmwood Park at 71st Street and Buist Avenue in Philadelphia by the Fairmount Park Art Association and the Friends of Elmwood Park in cooperation with the City of Philadelphia's Department of Recreation. *Labor in the Park* will provide a focus for ongoing community activities and commemorate the neighborhood's working class history.

In a letter supporting *Labor in the Park*, President Patrick J. Eiding, Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO, applauded the project's "celebration of the contributions of organized labor nationwide and emphasis on the pivotal and unique role that Philadelphia has played in the American labor movement." Secretary-Treasurer Richard L. Trumka, AFL-CIO, has expressed his enthusiasm for *Labor in the Park* and has been instrumental in securing sponsorships from ten national unions for the project.

About Elmwood Park. From the late nineteenth century through much of the twentieth, Southwest Philadelphia prided itself on its thriving working-class neighborhoods. Thousands of Philadelphians raised their families here and worked for major industries such as the Hog Island shipyard, Fels Naphtha, General Electric, and Westinghouse. Located at 71st Street and Buist Avenue, Elmwood Park was originally created to provide workers with a respite from factory life and became a community centerpiece. Unfortunately, as business and industry departed from the area, so did many of the residents, and the park declined.

After witnessing years of neglect, a group of neighbors with homes bordering the park formed the Friends of Elmwood Park in 1995 to revitalize the area. Today, in a true urban success story, Elmwood Park has been stabilized, and is again being used by neighbors. In conjunction with *Labor in the Park*, the City of Philadelphia Department of Recreation undertook \$500,000 in improvements to the park, including new paths, lighting, and seating. *Labor in the Park* will have an immediate positive presence and will become a symbol of the ongoing revitalization of the park and the Elmwood community.

About the Project. *Labor in the Park* is a further expression of this neighborhood's initiative and calls for the transformation of Elmwood Park into a community gathering space and an "outdoor history lesson." At the park's center are two circular areas connected by a path. The artist will transform these locations into two seating areas (amenities that the park now lacks), which will draw their imagery from historic labor photographs and denim work clothes—especially the uniforms' brass work buttons, which often bore interesting images and slogans.

One seating area will have benches facing seven circular bronze tables inspired by the metal buttons on the denim clothing once worn by workers. These **Work Button Tables** will commemorate important events in American labor history. Among the events featured on the **Work Button Tables** will be the landmark 1968 African-American Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis, Tennessee, a pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movements; the United Farm Workers Union organized by Cesar Chavez; and the 1912 "Bread and Roses" Strike by textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, which helped to shape the character of both the labor and women's movements.

In the other area, outward-facing benches will display seven large-scale historic photographs of Philadelphia workers. These will be fired in porcelain enamel and mounted on the backs of the benches creating a *Gallery of Labor*. Thus, the inside of the circle will form a small photo gallery. These images were selected because they capture the dignity and humanity of workers relative to their massive undertakings and emphasize labor history in Philadelphia.

Support for *Labor in the Park*. *Labor in the Park* has been fully endorsed by the Elmwood community, and has received significant support from private foundation. The project has also been endorsed by the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO, National AFL-CIO, and to date ten other International union sponsors.

About the Fairmount Park Art Association. The Fairmount Park Art Association is the nation's first private, nonprofit public art organization. Founded in 1872, the Art Association has worked with civic organizations for more than a century to place an imposing array of outstanding works of public art throughout Philadelphia.

Labor in the Park
Current Donors (as of 3.25.08)

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For more information or to make a donation please contact:

Jennifer Richards, Development Manager
Fairmount Park Art Association
215.546.7550
jrichards@fpaa.org