

Philharmonic concert to open revived park at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center

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Bill Wippert/Buffalo News
Fran DeLuca walks through Schoellkopf Park on Portage Road in Niagara Falls. The park will be dedicated with a concert by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra on Wednesday.

NIAGARA FALLS — The sounds of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Gershwin will usher in a new era for a refurbished park on the Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center campus on Wednesday.

The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra will perform a free concert at 7 p. m. Wednesday in the hospital's Schoellkopf Park at Portage Road and Pine Avenue.

"It's become a wonderful, huge event," said Patricia E. Berggren, corporate adviser for the Memorial Medical Center Foundation. "We're hoping we may get 1,000 people here that night."

The hospital-owned park has undergone a \$600,000, two-year renovation that has restored many of the original design elements included in the park when it was first given to the city in 1913.

New chipped stone walkways, benches and period-style light posts now wind through the park around several circular plantings.

Joy Kuebler, a North Tonawanda landscape architect, said design elements in the refurbished park were carefully chosen to reflect early 20th century photographs of the park, but to fit into "21st century living."

The park was originally given to the city in 1913 by the Schoellkopf family in memory of former Mayor Arthur Schoellkopf, but was transferred to the hospital in the late 1960s when its 120-bed nursing home was constructed.

"It was lawn and some very big trees," Kuebler said. "The rest of the environment was so isolating, people turned their backs to it. People couldn't see the beauty of the trees."

A signature fountain will be installed in the park later this year.

Hospital officials believe the project is a cornerstone of a plan to revitalize the neighborhood.

“Our campus rests in a very critical area of the City of Niagara Falls. It is in the geographic heart of the city,” Berggren said. “Our idea was, if we’re going to do this, let’s take it back to the grandeur that it was.”

Funding for the project was entirely outside of the hospital’s operating budget and included grants from the John R. Oishei Foundation and the state’s Environmental Protection Fund, as well as federal funds administered by the City of Niagara Falls.

Susan B. Schoellkopf, daughter of hospital trustee Paul A. Schoellkopf, led the community fundraising efforts for the park project.

The concert Wednesday is part of the orchestra’s National Grid Summer in the Park series and is free to the public. A portion of Portage Road will be shut down for the event, and hospital officials are encouraging people to bring lawn chairs or blankets.

The concert will be moved to the Performing Arts Center at Niagara Falls High School if it rains.