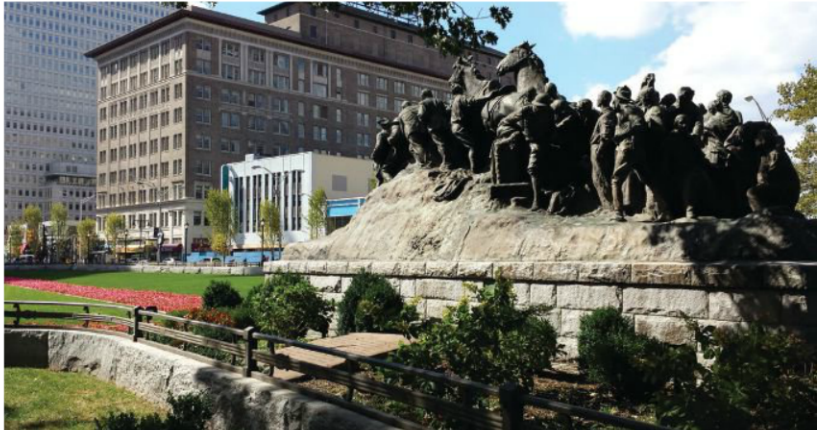


MILITARY PARK

REBORN

THE CITY'S NEW VILLAGE GREEN
BY SHARON ADARLO



On fair days, Newark's Military Park teems with life. Office workers enjoy lunch while sitting at the park's green cafe tables. Children frolic through the neatly manicured grass, which is ringed by flowers. Teens and adults play chess and various games at one end, while college students toss Frisbees at the other.

The YMCA of Newark and Vicinity, located across the street, held fitness classes at the park last year. Other events included poetry readings presented by the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival and the Guard d'Avant Music Festival, which was held on Wednesdays in July.

These scenes are a far cry from what the six-acre green space used to be: little used, threadbare, and with the aura of a dangerous place. But a coalition of organizations and businesses in downtown Newark has turned it around in an ambitious revitalization project, which has made Military Park into a thriving focal point for the city.

Signs of rebirth surround the park. The landmark Hahne & Co. department store building will soon house a Rutgers University arts initiative as well as apartments and a Whole Foods market. In addition, just up the street, one of the city's first skyscrapers, vacant since 2000, is scheduled to reopen this year as housing for Rutgers students and the university's Newark chancellor, and a new development called One Theater Square is rising across the street from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC).

Within view of the park, the new Prudential Tower is set to open this summer, with retail space and a parking garage in addition to office space for 3,000 employees.

"There's a lot of terrific energy in the neighborhood," said John Schreiber, president and CEO of NJPAC, which owns the land where One Theater Square is being built. "It's a really thrilling time to be in Newark and to be part of a future that is really bright."

Talks about revitalizing Military Park started percolating in the early 2000s, according to Ben Donsky, vice president of

the Military Park Partnership, the nonprofit organization in charge of the revitalization and current programming of the site. Biederman Redevelopment Ventures or BRV, the same organization behind the renewal of Manhattan's Bryant Park in the 1990s, was enlisted by various city businesses and groups to overhaul Military Park, explained Donsky, who is also part of BRV.

"We saw Military Park as an unusual opportunity to make a large impact with a public space in a city that really needed a town square," he said.

After signing a 24-year lease and redevelopment agreement with the city of Newark, BRV formed the Military Park Partnership with the city, the Prudential Foundation, the MCJ Amelior Foundation, and other organizations and businesses in order to oversee the redevelopment and programming for the park. Construction, which began in May 2013, totaled \$5 million, said Donsky. The

refurbished park opened to the public last summer.

Military Park was so named because it was a training ground for the city's militia. George Washington and his troops sought shelter there during the

Revolutionary War. Thomas Paine was with the army, and some historians surmise that he started writing one of his famous works, *The American Crisis*, while in Newark in 1776.

The park is dominated by the massive Wars of America monument, designed by Gutzon Borglum, the same artist behind Mount Rushmore. The bronze monument was completed in 1926 and represents all the wars America had participated in from the Revolution to World War I. Figures of horses and soldiers in various period dress stand triumphantly on a plinth overlooking a former reflecting pool in the shape of a sword.



Facing page, clockwise from top right: Chess players in the park; Wars of America monument; 2014 Dodge Poetry Festival; Farmer's Market, Tuesdays from June to October; enjoying a game of table tennis; even the tiniest folks find fun things to do.

The defunct pool was filled last year by a display of flowers. Last summer, the Military Park Partnership launched an Adopt-a-Monument program to raise funds for repairs and restoration to the Wars of America and three other monuments in the park. The program hopes to raise about \$800,000 by the end of 2016.

Meanwhile, Military Park has big plans in store for this year. A burger-centric eatery called the Burg is set to open in April, noted Donsky. The people who are behind the highly regarded Maritime Parc in Jersey City will be operating the new place. A carousel, 24 feet in diameter, is tentatively scheduled to come in May. In addition, he said, there will be an expanded offering of fitness activities, games, recreational programming, and a few big events that are being kept under wraps.

“We have been overwhelmed with the positive response we have gotten,” Donsky added. “Just walking through the park, people say, ‘I can’t believe this is in Newark.’”

Adding to the buzz are the construction projects going on around and near the park.

The 20-story glass Prudential Tower, at Broad and New streets, will encompass 740,000 square feet of office space, stated



Richard Hummers, vice president of financial management for Prudential. There also will be 47,000 square feet of retail space and a parking garage with 1,500 spaces.

Some of the most ambitious work is taking place at the landmark Hahne & Co. building at 609 Broad Street, built in 1910 and vacant since the late 1980s. The former department store will house the new Express Newark arts collaboration between Rutgers University-Newark and a host of cultural organizations in and near the city. In addition, the building will have a 30,000-square-foot Whole Foods market, set to open in 2016; office and retail space; and 150 to 200 apartments.

Express Newark will take up a portion of three floors in the Hahne’s building. It will include classrooms, gallery space, studios, a communication media center, and performance spaces for Rutgers Newark’s Institute of Jazz Studies.

Among the community collaborators in Express Newark will be the Newark Museum, NJPAC, Gallery Aferro, Newark Print Shop, Aljira Gallery, *HYCIDE* Magazine, Newark First, GlassRoots, the Edison National Historical Park, WBGO-FM, and VII visual documentary collective.

It will take some time to fix up the Hahne & Co. building, according Jon Cortell of L&M Development Partners, which is redeveloping the property along with Hanini Group of Newark, among others. In the fall, crews were repairing

Photos, clockwise from top: New Prudential Towers under construction; two interior renderings of Express Newark, an arts collaboration; rendering of historic Hahne & Co. building that will house Express Newark, a Whole Foods Market, apartments and retail space.

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: ROBERT HARTMAN; KSS ARCHITECTS; KSS ARCHITECTS; BEYER BLINDER BELLE ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS, LLP



have views of the Manhattan skyline and will have amenities such as balconies and gourmet kitchens. The complex also will have a lap pool, a club room, a demo kitchen for visiting celebrity chefs, and an outdoor deck area.

Retail areas will have shops, cafes, and restaurants for residents and NJPAC visitors, Dranoff pointed out. There also will be a parking garage with 285 spaces. He spoke of the site's easy access to mass transportation, cultural centers and city destinations. "I can walk to work. I can walk to the theater. I can walk to the train station. I can drive 10 minutes and be in Newark airport. I can be in the Ironbound in a short walk," he said.

A bit farther from Military Park, Hotel Indigo is also part of the general buzz around downtown Newark, noted Samer Hanini of Hanini Group, which is redeveloping the property. The structure at 810 Broad Street was formerly a bank. The architect was Cass Gilbert, who also designed the Woolworth Building in Manhattan and the U.S. Supreme Court. The 108-room hotel opened in November 2014.

Designed in a Beaux Arts style with marble columns, the hotel has a swanky, modern interior with design features that reference Thomas Edison, who apparently had a workshop behind the building at one time. For example, the lobby has a glass mosaic mural of a ticker tape machine. The mural was made by GlassRoots, a city-based youth arts organization devoted to glass making. The hotel rooms themselves have modern furnishings while the bathrooms boast large, stylish barn doors. ■

the façade, assessing the structure and shoring up the building for additional work.

As they excavated and cleaned up the building, developers discovered traces of the gracious old department store within the shell, such as old, faded lettering on walls. They also found a room within a room. Historical records said it was the store's fur vault. "We didn't find any fur for Grandma," Cortell quipped.

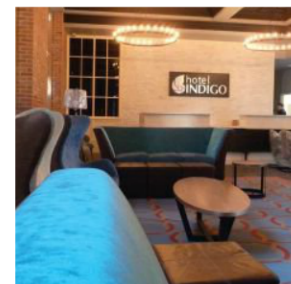
Rutgers University is also renovating the 16-story building at 15 Washington Street, one of the city's first skyscrapers, into 350 apartments for upperclass and graduate students, said Antonio Calcado, the school's vice president of facilities and capital planning. The building's main hall will double as a seminar space for lectures or for art shows. The two top floors will serve as a residence for the university chancellor. The building is slated to open this summer.

The neo-classical building, constructed in the 1920s, was originally the home of the American Insurance Co. and then served as the location of Rutgers-Newark's Law School until 2000. It has been empty ever since. The skyscraper was designed by John and Wilson Ely, the same firm that designed Newark's City Hall.

Closer to the park and across the street from NJPAC, is the site of One Theater Square development, a retail and residential project spanning 1.2 acres, said Carl Dranoff, the developer. Many of the 245 apartments will

"Just walking through the park, people say 'I can't believe this is in Newark.'"

**Ben Donsky,
Military Park Partnership**



Above: clockwise from top: rendering showing One Theater Square; James Moody Democracy of Jazz Festival in Military Park; 15 Washington Square being converted into 350 apartments for upperclass and graduate students at Rutgers University; Below right: Hotel Indigo

PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DRANOFF PROPERTIES; MILITARY PARK PARTNERSHIP; ROBERT HARTMAN; ROBERT HARTMAN; HUDCONIA/WIKIPEDIA