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Citizens In Action

Fitler Park, Beautified By Civic Club, Increases Property Values in Area

Ninth of a weekly series on the work of community organizations in Philadelphia

The beautification of Fitler Park, on Pine Street between 23d and 24th Streets, by a community organization, has checked deterioration of the immediate neighborhood and has contributed to an upswing in the appearance and property value in the area.

This was a statement by Mrs. Halsey Manning, secretary of the 7th, 8th and 9th Wards Branch of the Civic Club of Philadelphia, the community group which undertook the program of improving the city-owned square, the north side of which is at Panama Street.

A culminating phase of the project was the planting of a garden plot at the park dedicated to the 3,000,000 men of the armed forces who were recipients of Philadelphia hospitality during the Second World War.

The Civic Club is a women's organization founded in 1894 and devoted to civic interests. Adelaide A. Sheble is president. The branch headed by Mrs. Manning sponsored the park improvement and beautification program as an independent neighborhood project.

This action for the betterment of a neighborhood - with its improving effect on the whole city - is representative of the efforts of scores of community organizations which center their volunteer activities on civic improvement.

Describing progress in the Fitler Park project, Mrs. Manning emphasized her appreciation to city officials for their cooperation in restoring "the forgotten park."

Before the project was begun three years ago, she said, there was no grass, the paving was crumbled, the guardhouse was in need of painting, there were only five benches, the fences were broken, more trees were needed and the trees already there needed pruning.

Representing their branch of the Civic Club, Mrs. Manning and several other members of the organization went to Nathan H. Rambo, Jr., chief of the Bureau

of City Property, and discussed improvement of the park. "He couldn't have been more courteous," she said.

Mrs. Manning also praised the cooperation of Morris H. Maxwell, City Park Supervisor, who assisted.

Improvement began within several months, Mrs. Manning related. The muddy ground was sodded, the paving was renewed, the number of benches doubled, the guardhouse was painted and fences were repaired.

As this improvement progressed, the Society of Little Gardens was invited to participate with the Civic Club branch in planting flowers and shrubs. The garden society consented, Mrs. Manning said, and began a planting project which continued for many months.

The garden society's activities were begun under the presidency of the late Mrs. Howard Lewis and its interests have continued under the presidency of Mrs. Clarence Finn.

The shrubbery dedicated to men of the armed forces resulted from interest taken in the park by directors of the Hospital Entertainment Canteen, an organization which succeeded the Stage Door Canteen at the end of the war. Mrs. Manning served as executive director of both.

Philadelphians and many visitors will recall the garden terrace at the south side of the Academy of Music; which was used by the Stage Door Canteen as a space for open air entertainment of service men.

In order to make the court attractive, shrubs and flowers had been planted along its edges. These included forsythia, lilacs and cedars. The Directors of the hospital canteen agreed to the removal of these plants to Fitler Park.

The plants now grow in a circular plot at the east end of the park. With them is a bronze plaque placed there by the director, bearing the following legend:

"These shrubs from the terrace of the Stage Door Canteen and the Hospital Entertainment Canteen are dedicated to the 3,000,000 men of the armed forces who were served by 5000 Philadelphia volunteers, June 20, 1942 - March 20, 1947."

The plaque, fixed to a masonry base, was designed by Roland Moore, an architect, and was approved by the Art Jury.

Since restoration of the park, there has been a noticeable improvement in some of the surrounding houses, Mrs. Manning said. She added that several which

were dilapidated and unused had been extensively renovated and occupied, while at another spot a new home is being built.