When the late Dr. Albert H. Shaheen’s wife, Gloria, and their five children donated his former medical practice building and two adjacent properties located at 1641 Genesee Street to the Conservancy in July 2017, their intent was to provide a headquarters for the organization and to preserve a unique architectural style located at the entrance to the Utica Parks and Parkway System.

On July 5, 2018, the Conservancy honored Dr. Shaheen and his family with the dedication of a new garden that the Conservancy anticipates will become a landmark in the City of Utica and the “gateway” to its historic Parks and Parkway System, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The Dr. Albert H. Shaheen Memorial Garden occupies a visible circular area next to the Conservancy’s office right across the Memorial Parkway from the Baron von Steuben Monument.

“Dr. Shaheen was well known in Utica as an outstanding plastic and reconstructive surgeon for more than 40 years”, said Locke. “He was noted for the skill, care, and devotion he showed his patients and his love of green spaces. He was especially fond of trees and planted hundreds at his home, on land he donated to the Sitrin Medical Rehabilitation Center, and at his office. Two heritage trees, in particular – a cucumber magnolia and an English burr oak – are flourishing in front of the Conservancy’s building.”

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The Utica Police Department (UPD) and the Conservancy will conduct Parks Patrol training on October 1 at 6 p.m. at the UPD Conference Room at 413 Oriskany St. West.

“Our collaboration with the Conservancy to recruit and train volunteers helps us keep Utica’s parks safe,” said Edward Noonan, Deputy Chief of Police.

“We’re looking for people to volunteer who already use the parks on a regular basis throughout the year and welcome individuals who want to get to know Utica’s parks better, too,” said Chief Noonan.

Volunteers are trained by members of the Utica Police Department. Topics include park locations, activities that are prohibited in the parks, applicable laws and City ordinances, and how to be a good witness if you observe a violation of the law or a City ordinance.

To learn more or to volunteer, please contact the Conservancy at 315.790.5262 or centralnyconservancy@gmail.com.

Get the Utica Parks and Recreation App

Download the Utica Parks and Recreation App to explore the over 700 acres of public parkland listed on State and National Registers of Historic Places.

Utica’s parks are maintained by the Central New York Conservancy, whose purpose is to heighten the public’s awareness of and appreciation for the Parks System, including its plant communities and watersheds that need protection and management, and the preservation of its historic architectural features.

The app provides:

- Trail maps that highlight park monuments
- Detailed information for each specific park
- Ways to get involved and give back
Explore the Memorial Parkway – its Monuments and Neighborhoods, on September 29th

Perhaps you drive along Utica’s Memorial Parkway daily or you live nearby, but do you know about the Parkway’s monuments, magnificent houses, historic neighborhoods, and gardens?

Bring your curiosity and questions to the Conservancy’s 2nd Annual Fall Walking Tour of the Olmsted Brothers designed Memorial Parkway on Saturday, September 29 (rain date Saturday, October 6) from 1 - 3 p.m.

The walking tour, given by Hamilton College Prof. Emeritus Rand Carter and architect Mike Lehman, will commence at 12:45 p.m. in the parking lot of the Conversancy. Professor Carter and Mr. Lehman will lead the group and offer information, historical facts, insights, and anecdotes about the Olmsted Bros. designed Parkway, its monuments, its neighborhood houses and gardens.

A luncheon will take place prior to the walking tour at the Conservancy’s office (1641 Genesee Street) at 11:30 a.m., where landscapers Cheryl and Peter Youngman will present a slide show about the Parkway’s seasonal plantings and their work in Utica’s Olmsted Parks.

Tickets are on sale now at www.uticaolmstedparks.org/events/upcoming/fall-walking-tour.php. The walking tour only is $10. The luncheon and walking tour is $22. The luncheon is limited to 40 people so reserve your place early.

Parking is available in the First Source Federal Credit Union parking lot across the street from the Conservancy at 1634 Genesee Street. On-street parking is available on Derbyshire Place and Holland Avenue.

The Memorial Parkway is part of the Utica Parks and Parkway System that also includes FT Proctor and TR Proctor Parks and Roscoe Conkling Park, all designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., whose father famously designed Central Park in NYC, the Delaware Park in Buffalo, and the Emerald Necklace in Boston.
The 1893 Chicago World’s Fair was an exciting place, where many Big Ideas were first hatched. It also launched the architectural career of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., then apprenticed in his very famous father’s landscape design firm. Olmsted, Jr. created the amazing vistas for what became known as “The White City” in one of Chicago’s most impoverished areas. The architecture and landscapes created by the Olmsteds were magical and unforgettable.

He was considered the intellectual leader of the American city planning movement in the early 20th century, Olmsted, Jr. was also involved in developing The Biltmore and the Vanderbilt Estate, which furthered his reputation as a premier landscape architect. According to an article entitled, “The City Beautiful,” written by John W. Reps of Cornell University, Olmsted, Jr.’s ascent in the world of urban planning began in 1901, with his appointment to the Senate Park Commission. He helped design the Forest Hills Gardens Project in Queens, the industrial town of Torrance, California, and he created plans for existing cities throughout the US during the early 20th century. Detroit, Utica, Pittsburgh, Rochester – all owe their early urban design to Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.

Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. will long be remembered for his life-long commitment to conservation and preservation, as expressed in the legislation he created to establish the National Park Service in 1916:

“To conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

The Conservancy’s Memorial Grove in FT Proctor Park celebrates the lives of friends and relatives while helping to restore the tree canopy originally designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., renowned landscape architect. Located near the corner of Rutger and Ludlow Streets, Memorial Grove is now home to radiant maples, triumph elms, red oaks, and tulip trees. Each tree has been donated by someone in honor or memory of a loved one.

Tree selection is made by the Conservancy’s certified arborists, Terry Hawkridge and Mike Mahanna, who also serve on the Conservancy’s Board of Directors. “We recommend trees based on Olmsted’s original landscaping plans, current climate and growing conditions, and hardiness,” said Mahanna. “We also plant different varieties of trees to ensure that everything we plant enjoys healthy growth.”

To have a tree planted in the Memorial Grove, please contact us at 315.790.5262 or at centralnyconservancy@gmail.com.
Dr. Albert H. Shaheen and family honored with dedication of new garden

Continued from Page 1

According to Mrs. Shaheen, she and Dr. Shaheen loved Utica’s parks. “When we were younger, we regularly took long walks in TR and FT Proctor Parks, and then stopped for breakfast at the Mar-Logg Restaurant. Utica’s parks and our walks were a welcome break from the stresses of his practice. My husband would be gratified to know that his love of the outdoors and parks will be preserved with this gift to the Conservancy,” said Mrs. Shaheen.

Incorporated into the center of the circular garden is the sculpture Cradle for the Moon designed by Rome artist Nell Harrison Russell. Dr. Shaheen originally commissioned the sculpture for his office property in 1970. Surrounding the sculpture and its main garden is a border of stone dust paths which leads to five smaller gardens representing each of their five children.

“We designed the garden to be simple and elegant,” said Locke. “We want people to see and enjoy it as they walk along the Parkway or drive by the building.”

The building and grounds donated by the Shaheen family have played a significant role in Utica’s history, according to Virginia B. Kelly, Conservancy Board member and local historian. “This building is an anomaly – one of the few remaining examples of classic ranch style architecture from the 1950s located in Utica’s Scenic and Historic District,” said Kelly. “As such, we are so grateful that the Shaheen family had the foresight to gift it to the Conservancy for its continued use and preservation.”

Falzarine to Depart as Conservancy Executive

Peter C. Falzarine, Executive Director since 2015, is planning to retire early in 2019. He will remain on staff until a new executive is in place. “Peter has graciously agreed to work with his successor to ensure a smooth transition, said President William F. Locke.

“During Peter’s tenure, the Conservancy has grown rapidly,” said Locke. “We increased collaboration and professionalized relationships with the City of Utica and the Common Council (which oversees Utica’s Olmsted Parks), as well as with MWPAI, the Landmarks Society, and the National Association for Olmsted Parks.”

Falzarine also helped to create a smart phone app that allows anyone to virtually visit Utica’s Olmsted parks. And, he played a significant role in the renovations to 1641 Genesee Street.

The Conservancy is grateful for Peter’s leadership. Thanks to his efforts the organization he was hired to lead three years ago is very different today.
Reconstruction Begins on Two Bridges in FT Proctor Park

The Conservancy is pleased to announce that two bridges in FT Proctor Park - Tributary Bridge and Starch Factory Creek Bridge, will be repaired as part of our ongoing commitment to preserve, restore, and enhance the Utica parks system. The bridge work begins the first of three phases, funded in part by a $125,000 State and Municipal Facilities (SAM) grant sponsored by Assemblyman Anthony Brindisi.

The bridges were a focal point in the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects design for FT Proctor Park, but were replaced in 1939 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). “Ideally, we would have preferred to replace the structures with the bridges that were part of the original Olmsted design. However, the bridges built by the WPA are significant elements within the parks that were named to the National Register of Historic Places. This limits what we can do to the structures without jeopardizing the parks’ status on the National Register of Historic Places” according to Conservancy President William F. Locke.

Both regular wear and vandalism over many years have caused loss of stones in the sidewall at the western corner of the Starch Factory Creek Bridge. Rebar juts out creating a safety hazard. While the bridge is structurally sound, the stones will be replaced as part of Phase One of this project.

Phase Two will reconstruct the reflective pond in Olmsted’s original design by diverting Starch Factory Creek to create an island pond. A bridge to the island and a Greek revival folly will also be restored. The Conservancy is currently seeking grant support for Phase Two and fundraising efforts will be undertaken to meet the required match. A project schedule has been completed to direct further efforts.

For the third and final phase of construction, the Conservancy will apply for a grant to restore the cracked keystone of the 1906 Starch Factory Creek tunnel that runs under the former railroad tracks.

The Conservancy wants to ensure the Olmsted Parks stay true to the original purpose of their design, which was to provide a place for Uticans to engage in organized and spontaneous recreational activities. Schools, colleges, neighborhood residents, friends and their families enjoy sports and recreation in FT Proctor Park. It is hoped that these bridge repairs and future plans will continue to foster vitality and enhanced activity in the parks.
The New Conservancy Office Preserves Unique 1950s Flavor

The new Conservancy office is notable for its design and integrity. It was originally constructed in 1957-58 by Dr. Samuel and Alma Sweet to house their residence and Dr. Sweet’s orthopedic medical practice. Dr. Albert H. Shaheen purchased the building in 1975 for his office.

History

The tract of land on which the building stands was once owned by Benjamin Jewett and was given in 1856 to the Utica Orphan Asylum. The large brick asylum was constructed in 1860. By 1920, this structure was renamed The Children’s Home of Utica and relocated. Upon demolition of the original asylum, the entire property was subdivided into lots, several of which were joined together when Dr. and Mrs. Sweet designed their home.

Architecture

Egbert Bagg, A.I.A., who designed the residence for the Sweets, descended from Utica’s early settler Moses Bagg. A graduate of Cornell University’s School of Architecture, Bagg joined Clement R. Newkirk in the Bagg and Newkirk partnership in 1919. The firm designed numerous residences along the Parkway during the 1920s. Bagg’s ranch style design for the Sweet residence, created more than 20 years after the earlier Parkway homes, departs from those designs.

A special ranch house

The residential ranch style originated in the US during the mid-1930s and became popular in the 1950s and 60s. The style evolved in part from vernacular designs of rural western ranch buildings and integrated Modernist features including Frank Lloyd Wright’s ideas about comfort and convenience.

The Conservancy office follows the typical ranch design with its one-story height and extended width, and is unusual in the urban Genesee Street corridor, with its asymmetrical façade, low-pitched roof with wide overhanging eaves, and the use of both wood and stone exterior materials. Floor to ceiling insulated glass “picture windows” are a prominent feature and serve the important function of linking the interior space with the surrounding environment. The private patio at the rear of the building (now enclosed) was a popular feature of the ranch style. The massive stone chimney serves both the outdoor patio grill and interior fireplace.

Notable interior features

The informal open plan creates adaptable interior spaces and allows for easy circulation. Built-in shelves and cabinets of natural birch reduce the need for bulky furniture. Natural birch plywood interior wall paneling and flush birch doors reinforce the simplicity of the interior design.

Custom built cabinets remain in the original compact kitchen. The white oak narrow board floors, sometimes known as “Rochester floors” or “top nail floors” are intact. While preserving the original features of this landmark, the Conservancy has restored exterior surfaces, windows, and floors to adapt the building for office archives and conference areas.
Did You Know?

The magnificent tree in front of the Conservancy’s new office is a Cucumber Magnolia (Magnolia acuminata) and stands nearly 70’ tall. It is one of the largest magnolias, and one of the coldest-hardiest. It is a large forest tree of the Eastern United States and Southern Ontario in Canada. This tree may be one of the largest of its species in the United States.