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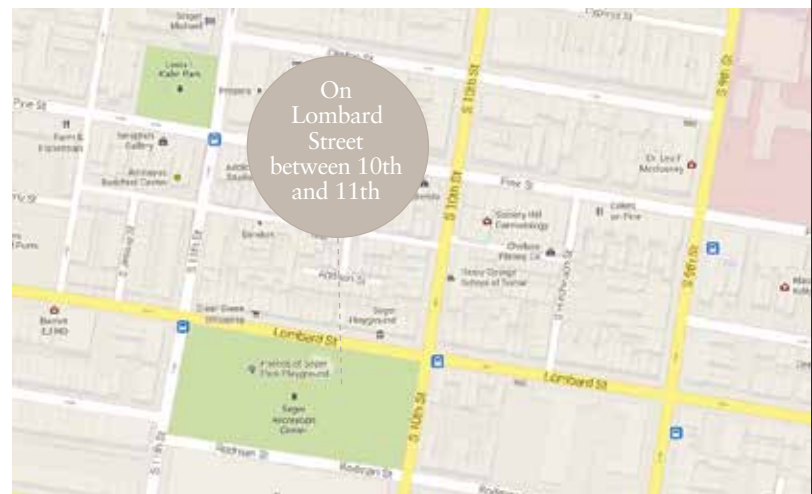
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Ambitious design of 'Fluidscape' showcases Philadelphia park

A popular park in the heart of Philadelphia fell into disrepair. Seger Park did not meet the Americans with Disabilities Act, playground equipment was outdated and the park fountain was broken. Children in the Washington Square West neighborhood did not have a place to cool off during the hot, humid summers. Meanwhile, more families moved into the neighborhood and the city, in tight budget times, closed public pools because of their large operating costs.





In 2011, the neighborhood group Friends of Seger Park Playground asked for submissions to create a new water feature, the main element for a revamped park. Nathan Howe, an assistant professor of architecture in Kansas State University's College of Architecture, Planning and Design, his students and a former faculty member won an international design competition to create the water feature. The unanimous winner, called "Fluidscape," beat out 16 entries from around the globe.

The winning sculptural design uses concrete and water to blend art, performance and play, Howe said. The water feature is interactive and educational. Children can play on, around and through it. An active zone provides a place for older children and parents to play together, and a passive zone allows toddlers to splash water with their parents. The water flows through the concrete for children to explore.

Children will activate the water feature by playing on it. In the winter, it will form icicles and the sculpture's form will encourage children to play in the snow, Howe said. The new park, under construction in various phases, also will have a new playground and more green space.

The project has served as a teaching tool for students and goes beyond creating a conceptualization or rendering in a studio, Howe said. Students continue to create new models, editing the original design, while the park association raises money to build the water feature.

"Our students are experiencing the real process, where things can always change and you have to readjust your designs," Howe said. "You often find out the assumptions you had are not correct, and you have to go back to the drawing board."

Students are also learning about fabrication, a much-needed skill in the professional world, Howe said. They are diagramming and drawing instructions on how to build and piece together the water feature.

"Fluidscape" will accommodate all ages and children, said Jason Lempieri, an industrial designer and architect in Philadelphia and a board member of the Friends of Seger Park Playground. The judges chose the design in part because it can function in the winter and will not become a useless concrete pad in the off seasons.

"In short, their design was very attractive, contemporary and urbane," Lempieri said. "This is a piece that cannot be found anywhere else, and it will serve as a model for city government, local citizens and great designers coming together to create something beautiful — and we could not have done that without Kansas State University."

In the City of Brotherly Love, home to more than 1.5 million people and landmarks such as the Liberty Bell and a huge statue of Benjamin Franklin, "Fluidscape" will make an impression on park visitors and neighborhood residents.

"This will become an icon for the park and for Philadelphia," Howe said. "I like to think of 'Fluidscape' as functional art. It will be great for the neighborhood and for families, but it will also serve as a beautiful object that has a lot of presence in the city."

By Trevor Davis, Communications and Marketing