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News

# 'The voyage and the discovery'

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NORRISTOWN — If you drove by the Christopher Columbus monument in the last couple of years, you may have noticed something was missing.

Something wet.

Take a look now and you'll notice that the fountain is once again gushing with the "ocean" water beneath the famous Italian explorer's flagship, the Santa Maria.

Following an extensive plumbing tune-up, the symbolic elements in the story of Columbus' discovery of the New World — the earth, the Santa Maria ship, the compass and the sea — are once again in harmony at the Elmwood Park memorial.

In addition to the benevolence of a local company, the restoration was made possible thanks to the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office Community Service Program.

"The monument committee approached Risa Vetri Ferman to see about getting some help to bring the fountain back up to operational status," said Montgomery County Detective Lt. Mark Bernstiel, who oversees the program

"It was filled with debris and had just gotten into a state of disrepair. There was maintenance done by Alfonso and Rick Gallo, two local businessmen who committed a lot of time and energy doing work down there, but more needed to be done."

With Mascaro & Sons donating the services of its plumbing outfit, Goods Plumbing, and the DA's Office providing the court-ordered free labor, the goal was to have the fountain back in resplendent form in time for this year's Columbus Day celebration Oct. 12.

As of a few weeks ago, that mission was accomplished, Bernstiel said.

“Just last weekend there were 10 people down at the monument with rakes and weed whackers and brooms, cutting the hedges and scrubbing the interior of the fountain. And that’s what we’re planning to do until we shut it off. Next spring we’ll clean it up again.

“The District Attorney’s Community Service Program is an incredible thing, and I credit Hank Ciaccio for reaching out to me and asking me to get this project going. I’m just behind the scenes trying to facilitate things.”

Back in 1984, Columbus Monument Committee founder Ciaccio resumed the vow of 1920s Italian immigrants who instigated the concept of a memorial, but were unable to keep the ball of interest rolling through the Great Depression and World War II.

With the 25th anniversary of Ciaccio’s ambitious dream just around the corner, Norristown Columbus Monument Committee President Carolyn Tornetta Carluccio noted her personal attachment to the memorial’s history.

It was Carluccio’s great-great-great grandfather, John Bolger, who had dedicated the original stone that was to jump-start construction of the monument in 1926.

“He was head of the city council when a group of Italian immigrants went to him and said they’d like to build a monument, and he said, absolutely,” she said. “Now we’re working on expanding our group of volunteers who want to celebrate their heritage and keep the dream alive, as Hank would say.”

Bernstiel noted the unique quality of the monument.

“There’s really nothing else like it out there,” he said.

Committee member Bill Peters recalled the time when members of the Italian and Spanish consulates confirmed that notion.

“They came to see what we’d done here and all commented that they’d never seen another Columbus monument like it anywhere in the world,” Peters said.

“Some memorials have a bust of Columbus and they’re just about him, whereas this monument is about the whole voyage and the discovery.”

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