

Children's Museum to turn unused plaza into green haven

By Kellie B. Gormly, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
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An aerial view of Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture's design for Allegheny Public Square Park is shown in this artist's rendering. The park, situated across from the Children's Museum, currently is a sunken plaza.

From a cold concrete space, a leafy paradise will grow.

It's part of the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh's plans to revitalize the dormant, gray Allegheny Public Square Park, and turn it into a green haven, as part of its \$8.5 million capital campaign, officials announced Thursday.

The park -- a sunken, one-acre plaza situated across from the North Side museum in Allegheny Square -- will be transformed from a virtually unused space to a green area that includes 75 trees, said Jane Werner, executive director of the museum. The park will include ferns, native grasses and other plants, along with benches, tables and movable chairs.

Visitors will enjoy water gardens -- intended as a museum teaching tool, and to minimize water runoff -- and a "Cloud Arbor" art structure, by MacArthur Fellow Ned Kahn. Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture in San Francisco has designed the future park.

The new park will bring art, nature and community members together, and improve the quality of life on the North Side, planners say.



The site today

"It will be a place of beauty and tranquility," Werner said at a press conference Thursday. The capital campaign -- called "Connect with Art, Nature and Each Other" -- includes improvements to the museum's nursery, store and cafe, along with the creation of a new climbing structure.

The campaign began in 2007, and has raised \$6.3 million to date from supporters including the Heinz Endowments, the Hillman Foundation, Duquesne Light Company, and several others. The state has conditionally granted \$250,000 to the project, which is included in the \$6.3 million.

The museum has enough money to break ground sometime this year in the park, which is scheduled to open in 2012. However, it needs an additional \$2.2 million to reach the \$8.5 million goal and complete the work on the entire project.



Anne Lewis and Mike Duckworth unveil an artist's rendering of a new sculpture, "Cloud Arbor," during a news conference at Children's Museum on Thursday.

The Buhl Foundation has pledged a \$250,000 challenge grant, which will contribute \$1 to the project for every \$2 donated by individuals and corporations connected to Pittsburgh's North Side. This money will go toward the \$2.2 million, and museum officials will set aside \$400,000 of the remaining money raised for park maintenance, officials said.

"Everything we all say we care about -- this is the encapsulation of it all," said State Sen. John Pippy, R-Moon, who said both Democratic and Republican colleagues supported renovating the park, partially because of its green benefits.