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The Villager

# Parks pans labyrinths but artist fights to save one

By amNY 0 comments Posted on May 29, 2007



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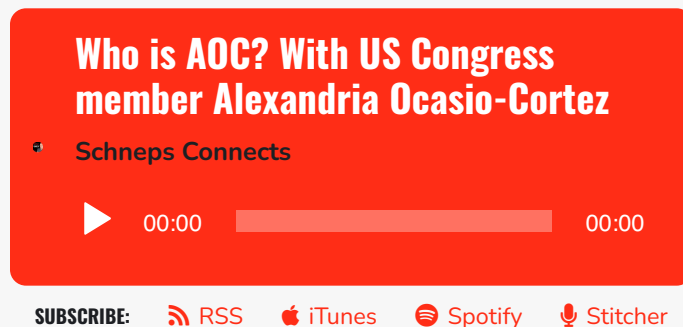
**By Kristin Edwards**

When writer Mary McHugh's daughter died of diabetes, she found solace in walking one of the labyrinths in the plaza at the north end of Union Square. These labyrinths have become her quiet place in the city — a place, however, that might not be around much longer.

The Parks Department plans to redesign Union Square Park's north end and the square's northern plaza, where three labyrinths are currently painted on the asphalt. Under the plan, the labyrinths would be painted over.

Diana Carulli, the artist who painted the labyrinths — actually, two labyrinths and one

maze — is fighting for them to remain in the northern plaza. The difference between a labyrinth and a maze as Carulli explained it, is that a maze has choices — “It tricks you” — while a labyrinth has only one path.



Carulli is not pushing to save all three.

“I’d settle for one!” she said.

Carulli explained that the labyrinths — and even the maze — are a peaceful place in the city, one worth keeping.

“It’s something useful,” she said.

Carulli feels the labyrinths are a great use of space and also provide very good exercise. It’s a place where people can walk tranquilly, while kids can still ride bikes or skateboard over the paintings.

McHugh agrees. When diabetes caused her daughter to go blind, then suffer kidney failure and finally die, McHugh desperately sought a way to cope. McHugh, who lives in New Jersey but is frequently in the city, began taking up walking to help her deal with her grief.

McHugh believes the walking helped because, as she said, “It helps to stimulate the serotonin and puts you in a better frame of mind.”

McHugh began reading a lot of books about walking and came across a book on labyrinths. The book told of all the labyrinth locations in the city. Learning there was one in Union Square Park, McHugh decided to give it a try.



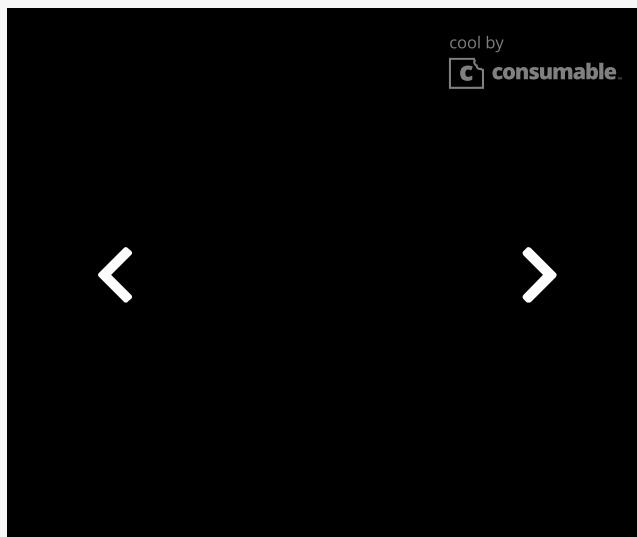
McHugh said she had a spiritual experience when she walked the labyrinth the first time. She walked very slowly until she got to the center.

“I learned it’s more about the journey than the destination,” McHugh said. Pacing the labyrinth was more peaceful and spiritual than other walking, she said, because, “You have to look down to follow the path. You aren’t getting distracted by everything around you and all the noise inside your head.”

McHugh wrote an article for Family Circle magazine in which she described how walking helped her cope with her grief. Carulli read the

article, and asked if she could use it to help support her fight to save the labyrinths.

McHugh said she was happy to help her. The two corresponded through e-mails, and eventually met in person to walk the labyrinths together. They plan to meet again to walk the labyrinths once more, McHugh said.



Carulli painted the labyrinths in Union Square's northern plaza in 1999, after fighting for four years for permission. After learning of Parks' plan to pave over the labyrinths, Carulli

designed her own proposal, which includes a cement labyrinth to replace one that would be paved over.

“They are very popular. They’re a tourist attraction,” Carulli said of the labyrinths.

Despite writing many letters and petitions, and even offering to fundraise for her proposal, Carulli’s request was still denied.

Carulli has painted other labyrinths in the city — one of which was paved over despite Carulli’s plea to remake it in cement.

According to Ashe Reardon, a Parks spokesperson, the labyrinths simply don’t go with the new design the department wants to execute.

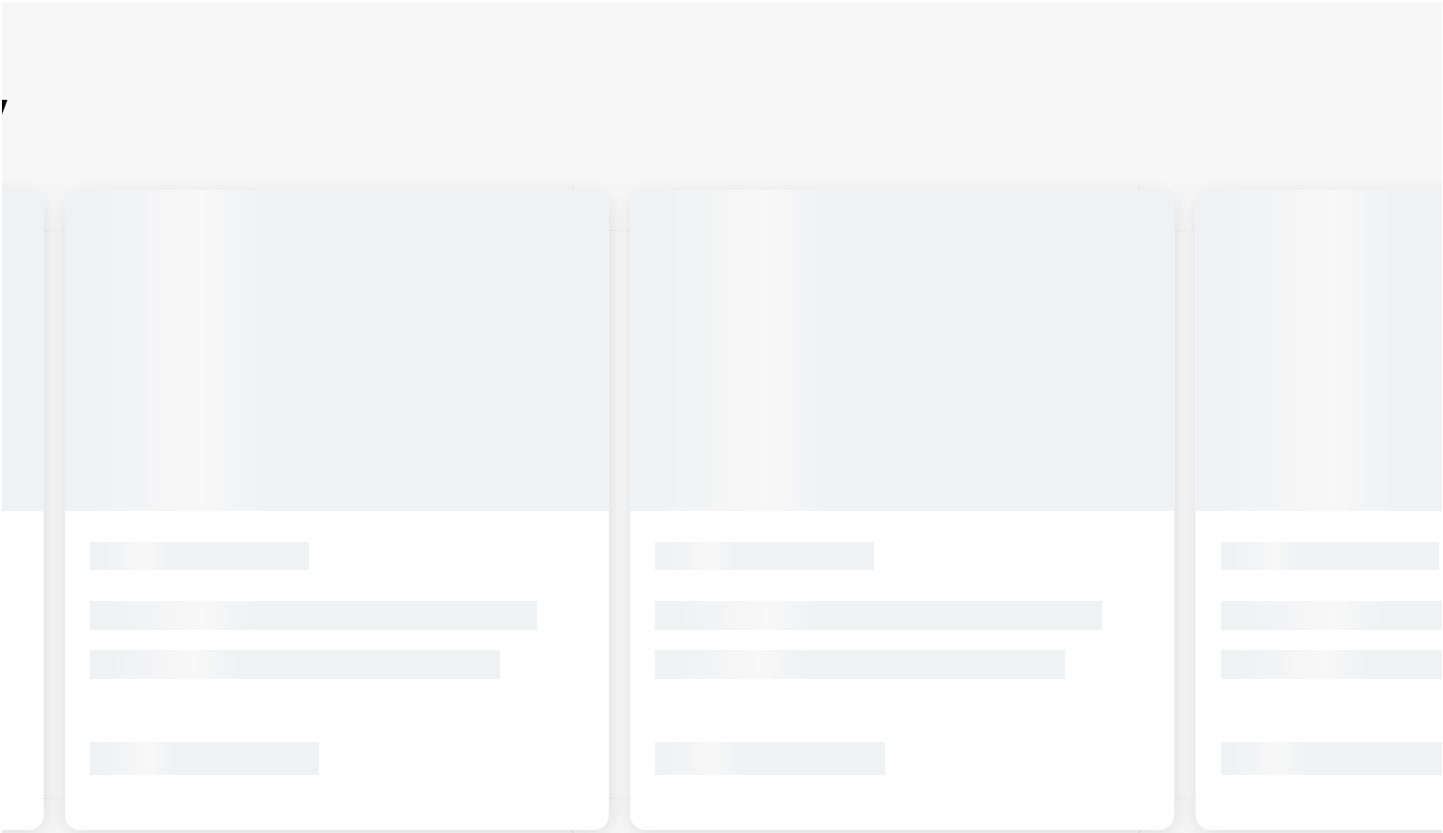


Reardon said that Parks felt the labyrinths were more appropriate for a children’s playground.

McHugh said that while putting a labyrinth in a playground is a great idea, she feels one should be included in the square’s northern plaza, as

well.








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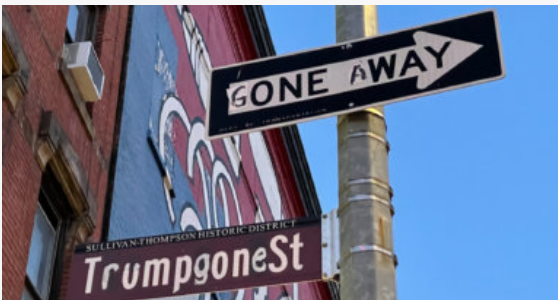
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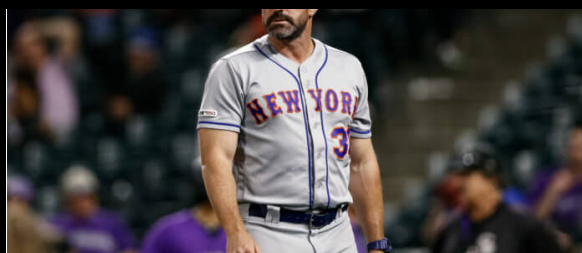
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