



Dustin Mizell, a landscape architect with Palm Beach-based Environment Design Group, spearheaded the restoration of Phipps Plaza Park. Mizell is a board member of the nonprofit organization Top of Mind, which collaborated with the town on the project. JAMIE PHILLIPS/CAPEHART PHOTOGRAPHY

Phipps Plaza Park overhaul aided by new town charity

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Palm Beach Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK

A new Palm Beach-based nonprofit organization played a key role in developing and executing a major renovation of Phipps Plaza Park.

Top of Mind, a charity composed of skilled tradesmen and businesses, worked collaboratively with the town and the park's neighbors to complete a large-scale overhaul of the historic site, Maura Landers, a representative of Top of Mind, told the Daily News.

Work on the project began last summer and was completed in February. It included hardscape and landscape improvements, a new path and new entry landings.

The century-old park sits within the Phipps Plaza Historic District in Midtown. It is owned and maintained by the town.

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Newly planted vegetation thrives in January as hardscape and landscape improvements are made to Phipps Plaza Park. Work was completed in February. MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS

Dustin Mizell, a landscape architect with Palm Beach-based Environment Design Group and a Top of Mind board member, spearheaded the park's restoration.

He brought in other Top of Mind members to contribute to the project, which was funded by the nearby Carriage House Club as part of a declaration of use agreement with the town.

In addition to Mizell's design work, which included choosing native plants to complement existing plantings, landscaper Coastal Gardens Professionals removed decaying trees and performed trimming and landscape installation; stone supplier Vassalotti Stoneworks installed the hardscape stonework; and pool service provider Caraccio Pools refurbished and repaired the park's landmark fountain in the center of the gardens.

"On any given project, we take our skills, and as members we collaborate so the finished product is better because we hold each other accountable to a higher standard," Top of Mind founder Jeff Sophir said.

An overhaul of Phipps Plaza Park was necessary because it had become "a little blighted," Mizell told the Landmarks Preservation Commission last April.

The board unanimously approved the town's plans for improvements to the park, which Mizell said would up-



Improvements to Phipps Plaza Park included repairing the property's landmark fountain. MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS

date and beautify its features while maintaining its historical character.

Improvements included the restoration of some of the park's historical elements, including the reintroduction of coral stone; a refurbished fountain; seven pedestrian-access points to the park; the relocation of the fire hydrant; relocation of street lights; new uplighting; new pathway lighting at the coral stone pathway entrances to the fountain; and new vegetation.

Additionally, Mizell and his team removed plantings that didn't add value to the park, while keeping many existing plantings, such as a white Geiger tree, two banyans, a red silk cotton tree, a royal poinciana, a gumbo limbo, a historic/specimen shaving brush and a ficus benjamina, according to the town.

"It was a great privilege to work on the restoration of Phipps Plaza Park," Mizell said. "The generous donation contributed by the Carriage House al-

lowed us to restore a park that had suffered environmental blight with time. The introduction of a fully native palette, selective pruning of overgrown trees, the allowance of airflow and the incorporation of open lawn spaces has revived the historic town greenspace."

Phipps Plaza was started as a development venture by the Palm Beach Co. — one of the Phipps family's real estate concerns — in 1924. It was built around an elliptical shaped central park with commercial and residential structures.

By the 1930s, Palm Beach Co. had erected 20 "Old World" buildings in the area, a composition that 50 years later would be designated as the town's first historic district, according to the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach.

Historically, the area has been a locus for architects and designers including Maurice Fatio, John Volk, Belford Shoumate and Polly Jessup.

Top of Mind was launched last year in an effort to independently raise funds for local charities and causes. Members include experts in architecture, construction, interior design, stonework, landscape architecture and property management.

For information on Top of Mind, visit www.topofmindpb.com or contact info@topofmindpb.com.

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