

PROJECT PROFILE

Project Name	Harlem Meer Landscape and Charles A. Dana Discovery Center
Location	Central Park (between 106th & 110th Streets, and 5th & Lenox Avenues), New York City
Owner	City of New York, Parks & Recreation; Henry J. Stern, Commissioner
Project Use(s)	Outdoor recreation, park-based education, planned community events
Project Size	17 acres
Total Development Cost	\$10 million
Annual Operating Budget	\$352,000 (FY94)
Date Initiated	Construction began Summer 1989
Percent Completed, December 2, 1994	All
Project Completion Date	Fall 1993

Application submitted by:

Name	Elizabeth Barlow Rogers
Title	President
Organization	Central Park Conservancy
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Telephone	(212) 360-8236

Key Participants

■ Public Agencies

City of New York, Parks & Recreation	Stephen Whitehouse	(212) 360-3403
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■ Developer

Central Park Conservancy	Timothy Marshall	(212) 860-1800
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■ Professional consultants:

Buttrick White & Burtis Architects	Samuel G. White	(212) 967-3333
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■ Community Groups

1270 Fifth Avenue Cooperative	Desiree Hardaway	(212) 996-0932
1270 Fifth Avenue Cooperative	Derrick Gibbs	(212) 416-8145
Boys Harbor, Inc.	Richard L. Williams	(212) 427-2244 Ex. 585

■ Other

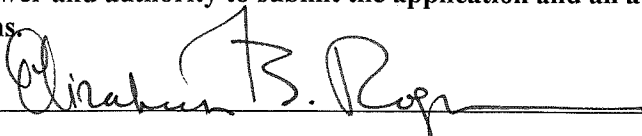
Upper Park Community Advisory Group	Nancy R. Davis	(212) 675-7050
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Please indicate how you learned of the Rudy Bruner Award in Urban Excellence.

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Signature



Project Name The Harlem Meer Landscape and Charles A. Dana Discovery Center

Location Central Park (between 106th & 110th Streets, and Fifth & Lenox Avenues), New York City

1. Describe briefly the project's design and implementation.

In July 1985 the Central Park Conservancy, a not-for-profit organization that administers Central Park in cooperation with the City of New York Department of Parks & Recreation, began the planning and design of the Harlem Meer, an 11 acre water body, and surrounding landscape. The Conservancy's Office of Landscape Architecture prepared plans to return the Meer to biological health and relandscape the surrounding area. The Conservancy also hired the architectural firm of Buttrick White & Burtis to design two new buildings—a visitor and education center with a public terrace, and a restaurant which was not ultimately built. These were to provide Upper Park visitors with amenities like public restrooms, Park information, and programmed recreational and educational events that visitors to the Lower Park have enjoyed for years. Construction began when the Meer was dredged of 30,000 cubic feet of silt and debris, and the project formally ended when the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center opened to the public in October of 1993. Since that opening the Conservancy has overseen maintenance of the landscape, work funded by both City and Conservancy money, and has also funded and managed the operation and programming of the Dana Center.

2. What local urban issues did this project address? What were its goals? Were there issues that, in your judgement, might have been addressed but were not?

By the early 1980s the Meer had fallen into gross repairs and neglect: the lake was eutrophic and algae covered, the banks were littered with broken pavement and debris, the surrounding landscape was barren, and a former boat house was a burnt-out shell. The area was under-used and had such an unsafe reputation that many families in the community forbade their children from entering the Park. The goal of the project was to restore the historic landscape to its original quality of pastoral beauty, keep the area safe so that people could enjoy it, and increase the number of visitor services in the northern end of the Park. We believed the restored landscape would help fulfill the local community's desperate need for open space and access to nature, and that the Dana Center would provide recreational and educational activities for the under-served Harlem community. We also hoped to create such a spectacular destination in the northern end of the Park that visitors from around the city would be drawn into the area, thus creating the social mix of users which the Park was designed to create. Lastly, we believed that if the project succeeded in all these objectives, then it would also stimulate development in the economically struggling adjacent areas.

3. Describe the financing of the project. Do you think it could be replicated?

The project used a mix of public and private funding. Initially the Conservancy received a grant from the Cissy Patterson Trust for planning and design which supported work through the construction design phase. Construction costs were divided between the City of New York Parks & Recreation and private funding secured by the Conservancy. The city paid for dredging the Meer and reconstructing the shoreline and landscape infrastructure, while private money paid for the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center, the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Plaza and Esplanade, the Bernard Family Playground, and all the trees, shrubs, and waterside plantings. Private funding continues to staff and program the building. Currently maintenance is funded by both partners.

The most important—and innovative—element of this strategy was having a body able both to raise private money to complement City money and also to oversee the use of both monies. It is very difficult for a city agency to raise private money, but as a not-for-profit corporation the Conservancy could do so. Further, the Conservancy arranged with the New York City Office of Management and Budget for the right to act as a private contractor, which allows the organization to oversee city-funded construction. This strategy, though unique, ought to be replicable. For example, the Louisville Olmsted Parks Conservancy in Kentucky is currently following the Central Park model, working with the local parks department to draw up a masterplan and establish a system for implementing capital projects to be based on that masterplan.

4. Why does the project merit the Ruby Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment?

The Harlem Meer restoration project deserves the Ruby Bruner Award for bringing together local and City-wide actors to restore 17 acres of parkland in a neighborhood where open space is continually threatened and co-opted for other uses. The project restored a seriously degraded natural habitat in a section of Manhattan where citizens are deprived of nature. This restoration not only created a healthier ecosystem, but it used the highest standards of design in recreating an internationally renowned historical landscape. Further, the Conservancy deserves recognition for demonstrating the success of an inclusive approach to urban park restoration. By taking the unprecedented approach of involving the neighborhood in every step of the project, the Conservancy was able to make more informed plans and also succeeded in restoring to formerly alienated local residents a sense this was *their* park. Today the community feels a sense of stewardship which has made possible the area's upkeep. Lastly, the renewal of the Park has stimulated desperately needed neighborhood renewal, demonstrating how well-maintained open space can be an important component in reviving inner-city areas.

1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project? Describe the scope of involvement.

The Central Park Conservancy designed and managed the whole project. We produced the designs and contract documents for both the publicly and privately funded landscape projects. We put together the construction management plan, provided general oversight and quality control of the city-funded projects, and were the on-site construction supervisors of the privately funded construction. We also supervised the consultant architects in the development of the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center and were the site supervisors for building construction. The Conservancy organized the required public review process and secured all necessary approvals. We also involved the public beyond these required steps by creating two special advisory committees. We initially set up a Citizens Task Force to conduct a study on the interconnected issues of use and security in the Park. The findings of this committee highlighted the need for input from the Harlem community surrounding the Meer. In response we created an Upper Park Community Advisory Committee composed of residents, clergy, business leaders, and educators living and working near the Meer. This committee was consulted regularly throughout the design and construction phases and still meets today to help guide our programming and future plans. We asked the Committee to evaluate the Task Force recommendations, prioritize them, and monitor our implementation of the Committee's recommendations. The Committee also raised community awareness of the Conservancy's own limitations (such as the need to protect a historic landscape) and identified other pressing needs, both inside and outside of Central Park, thereby broadening the scope of the Conservancy's mission.

2. What, if any, modifications were made to the original proposal as the project was developed? What trade-offs or compromises were required during the development of the project?

Numerous technical details were changed during the design process (shape and detailing of the clay lining, shore steps, etc). Also, the building went from a planned 3500 square feet to 5000 square feet to accommodate the upstairs classroom and an enlarged public space below. The original plan called for a restaurant to the east, but it was not built because the designated developer/operator failed to secure the necessary funding. In response to this setback plans were developed to provide food at the Meer by renovating a small building along the lake edge at 106th Street. The Conservancy funded the necessary renovations, and the Parks Department issued a Request for Proposal for a food concessionaire. Successful RFPs for food carts were also issued. In the long run we still hope to be able to build a permanent restaurant.

We also changed the construction process to respond to local needs. We had planned during construction to close off a playground that lay between the Meer and the Park's perimeter stone wall. However, the community objected to losing access to the playground, so we applied for permission from the Landmarks Commission to open the Park's historic stone perimeter wall to create a temporary entrance to the playground during the construction phase. This entrance was closed once the Meer landscape was finished.

3. What, if any, innovative means of financing the project were used?

This was one of the most sophisticated public-private partnerships the Conservancy has ever undertaken. A private gift from the Cissy Patterson Trust funded the project through the design of the construction plans. The construction phase was jointly funded with money from the City and private donations secured by the Conservancy. City money paid for dredging and other items which are standard expenses for the city but which are very difficult to raise donations for. Private money paid for building the Dana Center, which would not have been funded by the city, and provided the quality landscaping and architectural details that make the project so beautiful. In other words, we asked each partner for money for the type of expense it was accustomed to funding.

4. How did the financial benefits and economic impacts of this project differ from other projects? How does the project's quality relate to the financial goals?

As a not-for-profit organization, the Conservancy did not plan to receive any direct return on this investment. However, we did hope that the creation of a high-quality landscape in a troubled inner-city area would help to spur neighborhood revitalization and also attract new Meer visitors from across the social spectrum. Happily, since the project's completion the streets adjoining the Park have been cleaned up and new restaurants have opened. Also, users from outside the community who used to be afraid to come to the Meer have started using the landscape and attending programs at the Dana Center.

We also hoped that if the delicate landscape proved maintainable it would help the Conservancy and other groups to raise funds for similar quality projects in low-income neighborhoods.

5. What was the most difficult task in the development of this project? What was the least successful aspect? With hindsight, would you do anything differently?

We planned for a two-story, 17,000 square foot restaurant to lie to the east of the Dana Center. We thought a restaurant would help to bring in the critical mass of people needed to keep the area safe. Unfortunately, the developer/operator selected did not secure funding and so the restaurant was not built. We arranged instead for eight new food stands in the area (there were none before). We have also found that Dana on its own brings in a critical mass of people at many times during the week, though there are still under-used periods. Ultimately we would still like to build a food concession to attract more people on week-days and at nights, times when the site is still under-used, but we would plan a much smaller project.

6. What about this project would be instructive to other developers?

An important lesson for developers would be that in order to generate community support for a project—and to avoid community protest and NIMBY movements—it is necessary to work with the community from the pre-planning stage. The Community Advisory Committee, the first of its kind in Central Park, increased trust between the Conservancy and the community as well as helping to inform the design process. Because the community had participated in the planning process and saw its recommendations implemented, local residents became invested in the project, supported it, and, today, feel a sense of stewardship towards the Meer and Dana Center and support their maintenance.

The most instructive lesson of this project is that restoration requires more than making an area beautiful—it requires programming. We started with a derelict, dangerous site that people wouldn't use. Since the restoration, programmed activities have brought in a large new user population. From October 1993 to October 1994, 174 school groups visited the Dana Center to see an exhibit on natural science in the Park, 2,948 people participated in 115 family workshops, and 11,403 people came to the Center to borrow free fishing poles for catch-and-release fishing in the Meer. Along with the jump in visitor numbers, there has been a dramatic change in user patterns. Our survey work shows that we have lots of return visitors, which indicates that we are succeeding in creating a real community at the Center.

7. If, five years from now, you were to judge that this project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

In five years I would hope to see a community-based group of users, and lots of repeat visitors using the park and attending the activities at the Dana Center. Repeat users are a sign that the Meer has developed its own constituency, people feel that the park is *theirs* and so will make the extra effort to see that the area is respected and well maintained. Only when users as well as managers take responsibility for open space will it remain safe, clean, and beautiful. Also, I would like to see the restored areas looking as beautiful as they do today. Lastly, I would like to see a diversity of users, which would show that we have succeeded in attracting people from around the city into the northern area of the park.

1. What role did your organization play in the development of this project?

Central Park is a property of the City of New York Parks Department which is operated in conjunction with the privately-funded Central Park Conservancy. While the Conservancy managed the project, the City Parks Department played the following roles:

- Provided City funding.
- Prepared and received a state assistance grant through the Environmental Quality Bond Act.
- Performed design review.
- Performed construction site and engineering supervision.
- Prepared an RFP to select a restaurant developer/operator (this phase of the project was never completed).

2. Describe what requirements were made of this project by your agency (e.g., zoning, public participation, public benefits, impact statements).

The Parks Department required that the project be approved by the two relevant Community Boards, the New York City Art Commission Board, and the New York City Landmarks Commission Board. Also, the Department required that the Conservancy acquire a de-watering permit from the Department of Environmental Protection to drain the Meer, a permit from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for disposing of the dredged material, and a building permit from the New York City Department of Buildings. Finally, the Parks Department required that the project comply with standards established in a departmental design review.

3. From your perspective, how was this project intended to benefit the urban environment? Describe how, if at all, these intentions changed over the course of the project. What trade-offs and compromises were required? How did you participate in making them? With hindsight, what would you now do differently?

The project aimed to improve both the natural and social environments at the Meer. The lake was dredged and the edge rebuilt to create a more self-sustaining water body, to provide storm retention, and to provide a better habitat for wildlife. The original plans called for deepening a section of the Meer to create a more stable aquatic environment, but this proved a physically impossible construction project. The project also tried to create a more social and aesthetic experience for visitors. One strategy was simply to restore and upgrade the quality of the landscape to make it more beautiful. Also, the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center was built to offer structured activities that would provide people with recreational outlets and a more friendly ambiance. A large (30,000 square feet) restaurant was also planned in the hopes that it would draw yet more people to the area, but a developer and operator were never secured. If the project were being done now, I would scale down the size of the restaurant to make it more feasible—and also more in keeping with the aesthetics of the site.

4. Describe any data you have that document the impact that this project has had on its surroundings and the people in the project area. Attach supplementary materials as appropriate. What have you observed of the project's impact?

From my observation of the Meer, which I now visit with my family, I can without reservation say that the area is more beautiful and easily five times more heavily used than it was before the project began. I have also observed more bird life at the Meer; the new island and more varied edge have apparently succeeded in providing more and more diverse habitat for wildlife. I have attended recreational programs at the Dana Center, where many children and families participate. In sum, the project has revitalized the whole corner of the Park.

5. What about this project would be instructive to agencies like yours in other cities?

I would draw five lessons from the project for parks departments in other cities:

- Build partnerships with the private sector.
- Involve the community in planning the project.
- Figure out ways to generate and support activity in areas with perceived use and social problems.
- If at all possible, provide the high-quality details and materials that make for a truly beautiful site.
- Where possible, work to build self-sustainable natural systems.

6. If, five years from now, you were to judge that this project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

I will be convinced that the project has been successful if in five years people continue to use the Meer as heavily as they have since the completion of the project, if the Dana Center and Meer have developed their own public constituencies pressing for quality programming and upkeep, if the physical improvements have held up, and, lastly, if the project has had a beneficial effect on the surrounding community.

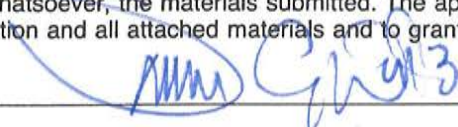
PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT PERSPECTIVE

This sheet is to be filled out by a professional who worked as a consultant on the project, providing design, planning, legal, or other services. Copies may be given to other professionals if desired.

If possible, answers should be typed directly on this form or a photocopy. If the form is not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds. Please limit answers to the area provided.

Name Samuel G. White Title Partner
Organization Buttrick White & Burtis Telephone(212) 967-3333
Address 475 Tenth Avenue, New York, New York 10018

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1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project?

2. From your perspective, how was the project intended to benefit the urban environment?

3. Describe the project's impact on its surroundings and on the people in the area. Do you have data that document these effects? Attach supplementary material as appropriate.

BUTTRICK WHITE & BURTIS

BRUNER FOUNDATION AWARD FOR HARLEM MEER PROJECT

1. What role did you or your organization play in the development of this project?

Buttrick White & Burtis was the architect for the new Charles A. Dana Discovery Center and related improvements to the landscape at the Harlem Meer. We assisted with site analysis, programming, and schematic design for the overall project. We obtained a Certificate of Appropriateness from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for the design of the Dana Center, the Plaza, and a future restaurant. We completed the working drawings for the Dana Center and provided administration of the contract for its construction.

2. From your perspective, how was the project intended to benefit the urban environment?

The project begins to reconnect Harlem to its southern neighbors by reconfiguring one of their common boundaries. Over the years we have learned that the Park does not appear the same way to everyone. Most New Yorkers regard Central Park as a verdant oasis, offering relief from the city, connecting major neighborhoods, and inviting all to enter and enjoy. New Yorkers living to the north of Central Park had a different perception. For them the Park was a wall separating Harlem from the rest of the City. Prior to the completion of our project, that perception was reinforced by the following conditions:

- a. The image of the north end of the Park was established by unattractive playgrounds, inappropriate recreational facilities, and bad landscape design.
- b. The negative effect of these poorly designed elements was compounded by their advanced state of deterioration and neglect.
- c. While the value, maintenance, and development of properties on the other three sides of Central Park are enhanced by adjacency to the Park, the condition of property near the north end of Central Park declined significantly in proximity to the Park's edge, creating a "Berlin Wall" ambiance of abandoned buildings and vacant lots.
- d. As a result, the landscape around the Meer attracted the least desirable group of park users and discouraged more benign visitors from using the north end of the Park.

The project was intended to reverse that perception and its consequences. By implementing a series of highly visible landscape improvements, our client intended to create a gateway into the Park from the north, and a destination for users from the south who formerly never ventured into the upper Park.

BUTTRICK WHITE & BURTIS

3. Describe the project's impact on its surroundings and on the people in the area. Do you have data that document these effects? Attach supplementary material as appropriate.

The Meer's redevelopment instantly transformed the relationship between Central Park, Harlem, and upper Fifth Avenue. People now come to the Meer to enjoy the picturesque landscape and to participate in a wide variety of activities. Paths once littered with crack vials and empty liquor bottles now feature strolling couples and bicycle-riding children. The body of water once filled with tires is now stocked with fish. A shore once lined with concrete now has grassy banks populated by optimistic anglers. Lawns once barren and abandoned now provide a lush setting for picnicking families. The Lila Atchison Wallace Plaza is the formal center of activities for the north end of the Park while the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center is a popular neighborhood landmark. Even 110th Street appears to be cleaner and better maintained.

4. Describe any data you have that document the impact that this project has had on its surroundings and the people in the project area. Attach supplementary materials as appropriate. What have you observed of the project's impact?

The north end of the Park has been returned to the public. The Meer is no longer an 11-acre garbage can. It is a neighborhood park, and the neighbors use it. People feel good about being there.

5. What about this project would be instructive to agencies like yours in other areas?

This project illustrates three lessons:

- **Public/Private partnerships work;** neither the City nor the Central Park Conservancy could have completed this project alone.
- **Avoid half measures;** this project can stand as a symbol of successful strategies in urban planning because it was not approached as token of those strategies. The full scope of each component of the final project was essential to create a viable whole.
- **Don't design down;** the traditional response to the design of improvements to public spaces with a history of abuse is to create bunker-like structures assembled from indestructible materials. We took the opposite approach, and to date it appears that the public appreciates the generous, coherent, and even fragile nature of the improvements.

6. If, five years from now, you were to judge that this project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

I expect that other jagged edges which isolate Harlem from its neighbors to the south will have softened. The real estate on the north side of 110th Street should be in the process of redevelopment, and Central Park North should be a respected address. I also expect that the level of maintenance around the Meer will continue to be high, in spite of municipal budget cutbacks, due to the increased number of neighborhood volunteers.

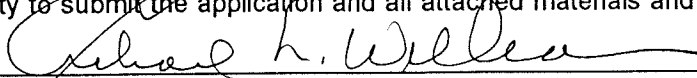
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

Name Richard L. Williams Title Executive Director
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1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in the project? What role did you play? For example, was there a public review process in which you took part?

In the Spring of 1989, a young woman jogging in Central Park was raped. The rape was allegedly committed by a group of young men from the East Harlem community on a "wilding" spree in the Park. Due to Boys Harbor's immediate proximity to the area of the Park where the rape took place and due to our standing in the community as a youth service provider, I was asked by the Central Park Conservancy to discuss possible responses to the incident. That initial meeting led to a series of contacts between the Upper Park Advisory Committee, of which I was a member, and a number of concerned parties including: the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, the New York Roadrunners Club, parents groups, young people, law enforcement representatives and corporate leaders. All parties I met with were concerned about the development of the area's adolescents and with keeping the Park safe for everyone. The above contacts culminated in the establishment of the Fund for the North Park, a group of concerned citizens who created a plan to re-develop Central Park's northern end so that the Park could become responsive to the needs of regular users and to the community around the Park's northern perimeter. The Fund's aim was to either raise the dollars necessary to directly implement those changes deemed necessary in the Park or to "seed" changes to be undertaken by Parks and Recreation. I, along with Ira M. Millstein of the law firm Weil, Gotshal & Manges, co-chaired those efforts.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

Immediately after the incident three sets of concerns emerged. For runners and other habitual Park users, safety related concerns were paramount. For those living around the park, and especially for adolescents, the question of retribution by law enforcement officers and others, based on inaccurate racial presumptions, was a critical concern. The potential polarization of these two groups made up a third group of concerns. As these groups worked together, a common concern emerged that, in time, countered the potential polarization of the two groups. Both groups wanted a park that was user friendly, and that met their recreational needs. Given the state of disrepair that existed in the Park's north end at that time, all agreed the Park could be greatly improved. It was this agreement that was the foundation for the work that followed.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them? With hindsight, what if anything would you do differently?

Central Park was initially conceived of as a genteel, pastoral respite from City rigors where the polyglot population of New York could come together on peaceful terms. This mission was alien to the residents of the northern perimeter who wanted to use the Park as their backyard picnic ground, and to the area's teens who wanted sports facilities that responded to their rigorous and competitive interests. These groups saw the Park's 1989 condition not as the preservation of a state of nature but as another instance of institutionalized racism. In conversation, it was frequently noted that the southern, "white" areas of the Park received all the attention and funds. Moreover, northern perimeter residents saw the effort to re-energize Olmsted's vision in the northern part of the Park as a form of gentrification, where the Park would be "whitened-up" and taken-away from the community.

These different approaches to Park renovations, along with the conflicts inherent in leveraging funds from the City to make the renovations, were the ground for all the compromises that followed. We attempted to balance a view of the Park as a landmark against the notion of the Park as a community resource. In looking back today, I wish we could have done even more to make Central Park the people's park. While we did create real and tangible recreational and educational resources, such as the North Meadow Recreation Program and the Dana Discovery Center, and while the North End of the Park today is safer, more beautiful and far more user-friendly than it was in 1989, there is much more that could be done. Aggressive outreach to bring perimeter residents into the Park is still called for, as is more youth programming (despite the City budget cuts). In addition, realistic, aggressive efforts to provide services to the homeless and IV drug users that still inhabit the Park's North End are called for. While we've made great strides forward, we've still got a distance to go.

4. How has this project made the community a better place to live? Why should it win this Award? Please be as specific as possible.

As indicated in my response to question 3, the North End of Central Park is safer and more user-friendly than ever. Fear of the "dangerous areas of the Park" has been diminished and children, along with their families, are using the Upper Park's newly renovated recreational areas far more frequently. The ever-increasing presence of Parks personnel and the enlarged number of Park Enforcement Patrol and New York Police Department patrols has been obvious to all and has created a safer and more secure atmosphere. It is my belief that the Central Park Conservancy *must* be considered a strong contender for this prestigious award based on their response and outreach to the people of Harlem. In a genuinely earnest manner they invited the community to function as an active partner in addressing the problems that came to light after the incident. There has never been such an outpouring of community involvement. Residents were delighted that officials finally responded to their calls for support. The experience of having complaints fall upon deaf ears is one of the most frustrating elements of community life. No longer shall that be the case for the residents of neighborhoods that surround the North End of Central Park as long as the Community Advisory members and the Central Park Task Force remain resolute.

5. If a community group came to you for advice in carrying out a similar project what would you tell them?

While all communities are unique and have different attributes related to their specific circumstances, some general recommendations can be made. I believe that it is of paramount importance that some basic level of agreement be established among all community leaders and representatives. Moreover, in addition to elected officials at the City and State level, and civil service employees such as police, firemen, etc., a concerted effort must be undertaken to gather the opinions and ideas of the grassroot leaders of the community, those people who can capture and convey the beliefs and concerns of the people in the neighborhoods. I honestly believe that dreams can become realities when decision-makers listen to those they serve and remain tuned-in to their needs and desires.

6. If, in five years from now you were to judge that this project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

While the maintenance of a safe environment and the continued growth of educational and recreational services recently established would be good indicators of our success, I would like to see an even more explicit indication of the progress we've made. I would like to see an annual community tribute in the North End of Central Park. This tribute would convene the community and serve as a reminder of both how far we have traveled and how far we have to go. In addition, I believe that in five years, if the Central Park Task Force Community Advisory Committee and the Fund for the North End can continue to come together on a regular basis, perhaps as frequently as three times year, to audit our failures and our successes, and to make concrete plans to move ahead, then we will have established a vital and continuous community resource.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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If possible, answers should be typed directly on this form or a photocopy. If the form is not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds. Please limit answers to the area provided.

Name Desiree Hardaway Title former Board Director

Organization 1270 Fifth Avenue Cooperative Telephone (212) 996-0932

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Signature Desiree Hardaway

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play? For example, was there a public review process in which you took part?

Please see the attached sheet for all answers.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them? With hindsight, what, if anything, would you do differently?

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play? For example, was there a public review process in which you took part?

As the community relations chairperson for my coop board, I participated in information meetings sponsored by the Central Park Conservancy. As the project began to evolve, the Conservancy and the New York City Parks Department recognized the need for continued community involvement and formed a security task force for the northern end of Central Park. I volunteered to serve on this task force.

2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?

The coop owners I represented were concerned about 1) security in and around the redeveloped space, 2) construction timetable, 3) access to the new playground, 4) proper maintenance of the area, 5) inherent problems with additional pedestrian traffic to the new space, 6) increased noise from planned outdoor performances, 7) increased car traffic and parking problems inherent with establishing a restaurant on the site.

3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them. With hindsight, what if anything, would you do differently?

N/A

4. How has this project made the community a better place to live? Why should it win this Award? Please be as specific as possible?

Yes. Prior to redevelopment, neighborhood residents seldom frequented the area. The Meer was plagued by algae and encased by a concrete wall; we avoided it at all costs. With the creation of a new playground, a more naturalistic shoreline, and the Dana Discovery Center, the northeastern end of Central Park now exhibits vibrant signs of life. Whether weekend or weekday, people of all ages can be found around the area reaping the benefits of the redevelopment. Almost routinely now, people, young and old, fish, bike and jog around the Meer. This summer, families congregated in the area for picnics and children's birthday parties, and children and adults enjoyed the Dana Discovery Center's exhibits and programs. Since the project was completed numerous neighborhood residents have even incorporated the area into their daily routine, opting to walk along the water's edge instead of the streets as part of their daily commute to and from work. The redevelopment literally revitalized the northern park area.

5. If a community group came to you for advice in carrying out a similar project, what would you tell them?

I would suggest that the group contact the Conservancy and follow its example in dealing with the community. The Conservancy actively solicited input from community residents throughout the entire development process. After plans were formalized, Conservancy representatives presented and explained the project to concerned neighborhood groups and fielded suggestions and criticisms of this project. Early "buy in" by the community contributed to the successful reception of the project.

6. If, five years from now, you were to judge that this project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

I would still consider the project a success if: 1) people, inside and outside the neighborhood, continue to flock to the Meer in record numbers, 2) the area remains well maintained, 3) the Dana Discovery Center continues to sponsor educational, recreational and cultural programs that reach out to the community.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This sheet is to be filled out by someone who was involved, or represents an organization that was involved, in helping the project respond to neighborhood issues.

If possible, answers should be typed directly on this form or a photocopy. If the form is not used and answers are typed on a separate page, each answer must be preceded by the question to which it responds. Please limit answers to the area provided.

Name DERRICK GIBBS Title Member
Organization Central Park Community Advisory Committee Telephone (212) 416-8145
for the Upper Park
Address 1270 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10029

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Signature Derrick Gibbs (Responses ARE personal and not intended to be representative of the organization)

1. How did you, or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play? For example, was there a public review process in which you took part?
2. From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning this project?
3. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in making them? With hindsight, what, if anything, would you do differently?

1. **How did you or the organization you represent, become involved in this project? What role did you play? For example, was there a public review process in which you took part?**

The Central Park Community Advisory Committee for the Upper Park was brought to my attention by a local politician in the Fall of 1990. As a result of our prior interaction he was aware of my interest in the development of the neighborhood in which I reside as well as my use of Central Park. I was most intrigued to learn that an advisory committee had been created to provide community input into a project with a potentially tremendous impact on the immediate neighborhood.

Although the Central Park Conservancy had already begun implementation of their plan for restoration of the Harlem Meer, the advisory committee performed a useful role. Within a couple of meetings it was apparent that the Conservancy realized that the eyes, ears & feelings of community residents would be important considerations as the project progressed. Information was dispensed about the scope of the project and technical details. Where there were non-technical considerations the of the advisory committee's input was sought. For example, when the park was closed for construction around the Meer, the access to the adjacent playground was cut off. After the advisory committee expressed its view that this would provide a prolonged deprivation of a valued resource, an agreed upon solution was reached to create a temporary access point in the stone wall.

2. **From the community's point of view, what were the major issues concerning the project?**

As a resident of a cooperative overlooking the Harlem Meer, I had a unique opportunity to represent the views of 204 of my fellow cooperators.

To begin with, the initiation of this project signalled a response to the prevailing view that resources and services are not evenly distributed to this section of the city as compared with other sections. But having commenced the project, the issue of safety arose. We felt that a tremendous resource such as the Harlem Meer would mean little if citizens could not feel safe walking along its contoured paths. Police and patrols emerged as a priority.

A second issue that emerged was outreach to the community. We realized that only a small segment of the population used the park. A challenge that the project needed to address was how to interest a larger segment of the population in coming to the park.

Finally, a third issue focused on the relationship of economic empowerment and "community ownership" of this project. To the extent that the development of this area would create jobs or business opportunities, we wanted to ensure that neighborhood residents would compete on an even playing field. We felt that an economic interest tied to the enhanced aesthetic value of the meer would forge a multi-faceted and deeper relationship to this resource.

3. **What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? How did your organization participate in them? With hindsight what, if anything, would you do differently?**

Not applicable.

4. **How has this project made the community a better place to live? Why should it win this award? Please be as specific as possible.**

The best way to respond to the question of how the Harlem Meer Reconstruction Project has made the community a better place to live is by relating a personal experience from my summer of 1994. As I sat on a bench looking out over the Meer toward the Dana Discovery Center I watched the birds gliding over the tree tops and skim the water. Over to my right, dozens of children were playing on a recently refurbished playground, their

squeals of delight and playful laughter joining the chorus of summer sounds. Off in the distance an unknown drummer played rhythmically as an appreciative crowd looked on.

Suddenly I remembered how this area had been in the years of my adolescence and young adulthood. To be sure, the park and the Meer have always been an attraction, at least when the meer was not covered by algae. However, the number of people using the park and the current level of activity is incomparable with earlier years. Now there is color and vibrancy; and when I think of the past I have a sense of dullness. Now the Meer is a place where I take my children; then, childless, I often forsook this same space, opting for the southern sections of the park.

In short, the Harlem Meer has become a magnet, drawing local and greater community residents during all four seasons. It is like an object taken off the shelf and having been dusted, repaired and polished, suddenly reveals more beauty than it has ever shown before. It is a place with an acceptable past that is not equal to its present or the even greater potential for its future. In my opinion this project is a center around which the community can take pride and a tradition of outdoor activity can be enhanced.

In this era when cooperation between community groups and quasi-governmental or planning organizations do not always proceed smoothly, the Harlem Meer Reconstruction Project yielded a spectacular transformation without rancor or hostility. I believe the combination of results and a seamlessly woven partnership are prime ingredients which merit conferring the Rudy Bruner Award on the Harlem Meer Reconstruction Project.

5. If a community group came to you for advice in carrying out a similar project what would you tell them?

Start the process with the empowering belief that a project planned for your community should include communication that flows between the planners and the community. The entity planning the project should provide full disclosure of the technical aspects of the project, the budget, funding sources, environmental impact and the governmental review process, if any. The community members should write a list of their concerns and prioritize them. The dialogue between these two entities, with their respective goals, should lead to a completed project in which all interests have been discussed and addressed.

6. If five years from now you were to judge that this project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

To the extent that you can quantify the success of the Harlem Meer Reconstruction Project you will look for such criteria as increased numbers of people walking, running and bicycling around the meer, anglers fishing in it and individuals going into the Dana Discover Center. These types of results can be measured by anyone sitting with a counter mechanically checking off persons going by.

Success will also be measured by a visual inspection. The Dana Discovery Center will not be covered in graffiti, green algae will not cover the meer and the shore line, grass and trees will be maintained.

Equally as important are the more ephemeral indicia of success. These are gleaned by the look of wide-eyed accomplishment when a boy catches his first fish, the silent rapture of young lovers walking together on a spring day or teams of neighborhood residents periodically participating in the cleaning of their playground.

All of these aspects of success taken together will herald a community awakened to reclaim one of its resources. In fact, this is a community taking increasing pride in its section of the park by utilizing and maintaining it. And, ultimately this will be one of the most significant measures of the success of the Harlem Meer Construction Project.

OTHER PERSPECTIVE

Name Nan Davis

Title

STABB CO-ORDINATOR,
CENTRAL PARK TASK FORCE

Organization Central Park Task Force on Use &
Security

Telephone (212) 675-7050

Address

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Signature

Nan Davis

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1. What role did you play in the development of this project?
2. From your perspective, how was this project intended to benefit the urban environment?
3. Describe the impact that this project has actually had on its surroundings and on the people in the project area. Include any data or supplementary materials that support your conclusions.
4. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

1. What role did you play in the development of this project?

After the rape of a jogger in Central Park in 1989, the Central Park Conservancy set up a Central Park Task Force on Use and Security to generate ideas on how to make the Park safer. After the Task Force gave its report to the city in 1990, I was appointed Staff Coordinator of the Task Force (an unsalaried position). I oversaw the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations and served as a liaison between the Task Force, the Conservancy, various community groups, and individuals living near the Upper Park. To this end, from 1990-1993 I met regularly (usually two to three times per week) with members of the Conservancy and Parks Department staff and monthly with community participants. The restoration of the Harlem Meer and the creation of the Dana Discovery Center were among the main items we concentrated on in our discussions, as they were thought to be essential to the rejuvenation of the Upper Park.

2. From your perspective, how was this project intended to benefit the urban environment?

First and foremost, it was intended that this area be a refuge for people who live in the city. Central Park is the place many New Yorkers go either by themselves or with their friends and families to "get away" for the weekend, to go for a stroll, to play, to relax after work, or to sit and contemplate nature's beauty. This is especially true for people living in the area surrounding the northern end of the Park, many of whom don't have the financial resources to take vacations or otherwise leave the city. Second, it was hoped that the restoration of the Meer and the creation of the Dana Discovery Center would draw more people into the Upper Park, thus making this area safer. (The Task Force report noted that when more people in an area are engaged in legitimate activities there is less likelihood of illegal activities going on at the same time.) Third, the restoration and beautification of a neglected and desolate part of the environment was thought to be important in and of itself. And fourth, it was hoped that the reclamation of this area would serve as a stimulus for and means of support and encouragement to the surrounding communities' efforts to improve their neighborhoods.

3. Describe the impact that this project has actually had on its surroundings and on the people in the project area. Include any data or supplementary materials that support your conclusions.

A strong tie has developed between this part of the Park and the people who live in the surrounding areas. Community residents no longer feel that they must go below 96th Street to enjoy the beauty and serenity of Central Park or to utilize its facilities. It has truly become a neighborhood park. Families use the Dana Discovery Center on weekends for family workshops, as a place to hold birthday parties and for special events (such as a Halloween pumpkin carving celebration). In summer, thousands of people come to fish on the Meer, or to sit or walk around its shoreline. Regular Central Park users who never before came above 96th Street now frequent this area. Schools and community-based organizations use the Dana Discovery Center as an auxiliary classroom. Once a dismal landscape that people tried to avoid, this area has become an integral part of people's lives.

4. What trade-offs and compromises were required during the development of the project? Did you participate in making them?

Since we had limited programming funds for these projects, we had many discussions on how we could, from the very beginning, encourage positive use of this area. For example, since we could not afford boating on the Meer, what could we offer for those people who would want something

more active than sitting or strolling? We came up with fishing, which has proven an enormous success. We thought of which hours might be the most vulnerable in terms of a scarcity of users (in summer, 4:00-7:00), and then decided to hold music performances on the Plaza at those times in hopes of attracting people into the Park. We wanted people to know about the tremendous changes in the landscape and different educational and recreational activities we were offering, but we had no money for TV, radio or subway advertising. So we published a relatively inexpensive but comprehensive brochure and poster which we distributed widely in nearby communities and concentrated on trying to get news stories about the official public openings of the new landscape and Discovery Center. During the months before the Discovery Center opened to the public, the building itself was thought to be vulnerable to vandals. We felt relatively secure about daylight hours, but worried about what would happen after dark; we could not afford to hire night-time security. We met with the captain of the Central Park Precinct and asked that the police pay special attention to the evenings, which they did. (I believe there was only one very small incident during the entire summer.)

5. What was the least successful aspect of the project? With hindsight, what would you now do differently?

The exhibit at the Dana Discovery Center should be more easily accessible without staff intervention. While it's very effective with school groups when either a staff person or a teacher who has been trained to use it works with the class, its use is more limited for those who wander in without the benefit of staff guidance. Even if we had been aware of this, it is unlikely that we would have been able to fund an additional staff position. But we could have put our efforts into developing a volunteer docent program (which we are attempting now) in the six to nine months before the building opened.

6. What can others learn from this project?

Several things. First, the tremendous importance of public spaces and the importance of community involvement in creating them. The Dana Discovery Center and the Harlem Meer are being well used and well maintained by the surrounding communities because they were consulted on their needs and desires for the area. Second, the importance of looking at the big picture during the planning process, rather than at the separate, small parts that make up that picture. This project has been successful because we never lost sight of what we were trying to do: revitalize the Upper Park. Dana and the Meer in and of themselves were not the goal; rather they helped us to achieve that goal. All of the decisions we made—from maintenance issues, to planning issues, to design issues, to programming issues to security issues—kept his focus. Third, the importance of staff communication and coordination. At our weekly meetings people from all departments (operations and maintenance, design, landscaping, security, visitor services, development, public relations) met together to share information, set goals and then monitor whether we were achieving those goals.

7. If, five years from now, you were to judge that the project was still successful, what characteristics would convince you of that fact?

If the Upper Park continues to be seen as a vital, energetic and desirable area, visited by people from everywhere but especially by those from the surrounding communities.