

NORTHWEST PASSAGES

THE PEOPLE AND PLACES OF NORTHWEST WASHINGTON

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Preschoolers make happy trails for Zoo's elephants

By MEGHAN KENEALLY
Current Correspondent

The little elephant wore little elephants to see the big elephants. While it sounds like a line from a children's book, it's actually what happened when a class of preschoolers from the Washington Hebrew Congregation took a trip to the National Zoo on Thursday.

Through three bake sales and parent donations, the class, whose mascot is the elephant, raised \$500 to donate to creation of the National Zoo's Elephant Trail. And one little elephant — Anabeth Koss — chose a T-shirt decorated with two pink elephants for the big day.

The students had voted at the beginning of the year for their class mascot, with elephants winning the majority of the vote (Goldie Aronson said she cast her vote for the elephants because she liked “that they play”). The theme has been integrated into the classroom throughout the year, through lesson plans and art projects. Unlike previous years, however, the theme didn't just stay inside the classroom.

“This is the first year we have done something like this,” said Kelly Duffy, one of the teachers. “The students came up with the idea of raising money for elephants, and we had a couple par-



ents who knew people at the Zoo and had heard about the Elephant Trails. We gave the kids a couple of ideas of places to donate money, and they chose the Zoo.”

Duffy said the donation was “just the perfect melding of ideas with the elephants and the class theme, and their needing the money and being in the District. Keeping it local is great because it's in the District and the students would be able to see the connection, tie it in with a field trip and eventually they'll be able to see the result of their efforts.”



Bill Petros/The Current

Friends of the National Zoo executive director Bob Lamb shows students from the Washington Hebrew Congregation's preschool what their Elephant Trail brick will look like. The students donated \$500 to the exhibit.



The students sold homemade pies, cakes, cupcakes and gluten-free chocolate-chip muffins to raise their portion of the donation. Parents provided the rest. The class decided it would raise

enough money to buy a brick for the National Zoo's Elephant Trail, which will be engraved and dedicated to the class. Two sizes of bricks are available for purchase, for \$500 and \$1,000, respectively. Donations may also be made to have a life-sized elephant footprint dedicated, for \$10,000.

“I think it's a great idea,” Bob Lamb, executive director of

Friends of the National Zoo, said when the class presented its check to the Friends group, which is collecting most of the donations. “We hope other schools think about this because it's a great way to connect the younger generations to something that will be around for a long time.”

Elephant Trails is a campaign launched in March 2008 by the National Zoo that will increase the space dedicated to Asian ele-

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HOME & GARDEN

Monastery's roses experience revival

By LINDA LOMBARDI
Current Correspondent

It's clear from the peaceful atmosphere of the grounds that few tourists find their way to the Franciscan Monastery in Northeast D.C. And on this beautiful spring day, they're missing more than just the unique church building with its reproductions of sites from the Holy Land.

“In D.C., there's no bigger rose collection than this,” says Ben Hill, president of the monastery's Garden Guild.

The roses, planted in 11 formal beds and elsewhere around the grounds, total 1,200 plants, according to Hill. They're in bloom right now, and what's more, they're currently experiencing a revival thanks to the volunteers of the Guild.

The monastery was built in 1899, with the



Bill Petros/The Current

The Franciscan Monastery houses the city's biggest rose collection.

first roses planted in the 1920s by a monk named Brother Meinrad Wiget, who was gardener there for more than 60 years. From the

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Weekend of free tours offers a walk — or 100 — through Washington history

By OLGA KHAZAN
Current Correspondent

Before Ben's Chili Bowl began serving half-smokes and milkshakes in 1958, it was a nickelodeon theater showing silent films during the Depression. Just down the road at True Reformers Hall, Duke Ellington played his first concert for just 75 cents a seat. And on the same street, Industrial Bank became one of the first minority-owned businesses in the nation when it opened in 1913.

These are a few of the hundreds of historical gems to be uncovered during

WalkingTown DC, a series of more than 100 free walking tours that will reveal the hidden side of the city this Saturday and Sunday.

The twice-annual event organized by Cultural Tourism DC will guide Washingtonians and out-of-towners through neighborhoods, landmarks and architecture in neighborhoods from Northern Virginia to Takoma Park. While some of the walks will wander through tourist favorites like Georgetown and Capitol Hill, others will venture into less-frequented neighborhoods like Brookland and Anacostia.

“Lots of people are curious about the vari-

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Olga Khazan/The Current

Tourgoers at Duke Ellington's house

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ELEPHANTS

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phants. Renovated shelter and exercise trails, as well as conservation and education programs, are all goals of the campaign.

Phase 1 of the project, expansion of the elephant facilities at the Zoo, is scheduled to open in late

July. This expansion includes a new habitat area, swimming pools and the "signature feature" of the new facilities: the elephant trek, an uphill climbing path for the elephants. Phase 2 of the expansion involves renovating the existing facilities, updating the heating system to geothermal heating and creating a new amphitheater.

"We're making a big commit-

ment to the project: 3.5 acres of land," Lamb said.

The total cost of the project is \$53 million, \$36 million of which will come from federal appropriations through the Smithsonian Institution. Of the remaining \$17 million, which will all come from donations, \$11 million has already been raised in the past two years.

ROSES

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1930s to the 1970s, says Hill, the rose beds were "spectacular," and many people came to the monastery just to see them. But as the number of monks declined here and elsewhere, the gardening was given over to hired landscapers, and the roses — which need specialized attention and individual care — deteriorated.

The Garden Guild formed in 1998 and originally concentrated on raising money to support the garden through activities such as an Easter lily sale and spring plant sale. Gradually, they started taking on more and more hands-on projects as well, says Hill, starting with installing a herb garden. Now, the formal rose beds are each assigned to a volunteer, who is responsible for pruning, deadheading and fertilizing each bush.

While old types of garden roses can live up to 100 years, the hybrids in the formal beds last only around 15. There is one bed left that might still contain some roses planted by Brother Meinrad, which the Guild is going to try to maintain for as long as possible. Otherwise, the group is working on replacing and renewing the rest of the beds, a project it started in 2005. Hill says this year's display "is probably the best ... we've had in five or six years."

Hill is self-deprecating about his rose expertise, but he's clearly a serious hobbyist. He's a member of local rose clubs as well as president of the Garden Guild, and when asked about the varieties of nearly identical white roses in one bed, he can tell them apart just by scent. His interest in roses has a nostalgic component

— his mother grew the flowers when he was a child in Northern California, and right outside his bedroom window there was a climbing rose.

"Every night when I went to bed, and every morning when I woke up, I smelled them," he says. And that's not his only olfactory memory of the time — he was also in charge of preparing the manure tea his mother used to fertilize them.

The challenges of growing roses here, though, are much different from his mother's experience. "In Northern California, all you have to do is put them in the ground," he recalled.

In this climate, without certain chemicals like fungicides, they'll succumb to diseases. "We look for the ones that are least toxic," Hill says of the sprays the Guild uses. It's a view that's consistent with modern environmentalism, but also with the teachings of St. Francis. Familiar as the saint often depicted standing at a birdbath and the patron saint of ecology, St. Francis taught that all of God's creation is sacred.

Aside from the formal rose garden, the grounds of the monastery include a wooded valley with reproductions of significant religious sites like the Grotto of Lourdes as well as a few almost secret, peaceful nooks where Hill says he comes to read when he wants to concentrate on a particularly difficult book. The serene atmosphere and natural beauty, he says, "is entirely in keeping with St. Francis' teaching."

The grounds of the monastery, at 1400 Quincy St. NE, are open to the public at no charge daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For directions, go to myfranciscan.org. For information about the Garden Guild, including volunteering, e-mail Pat Frye at pfryeland@aol.com.

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