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Chestnut Hill Conservancy honors historic gems

Five landmarks join the Architectural Hall of Fame



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Posted Thursday, December 5, 2024 12:00 am

by **Carla Robinson** (/browse.html?byline=Carla Robinson)

The Chestnut Hill Conservancy was scheduled to present seven awards for outstanding architectural and cultural heritage projects and induct five historic properties into its Architectural Hall of Fame at its inaugural Preservation Party on Tuesday evening.

The event, held at the century-old Venetian Social Club, was designed to showcase projects ranging from community-driven initiatives to technical restoration work across Chestnut Hill, marking a significant evolution in the organization's recognition of preservation excellence.

"This year produced many firsts for The Conservancy," said Shirley Hanson, founding leader of the Conservancy and Preservation Committee Chair. "It is the first time we have publicly sought nominations for the Preservation Recognition Awards. Never before have we held a competition for the awards, and we added a blind review panel to be the final decision-maker for award winners."

The newly established Community Action Award went to the Hirst-Duhring House preservation project on Rex Avenue, where local residents successfully balanced redevelopment needs with historic preservation. The project, led by the Rex Avenue Neighbors Association, protected heritage trees while sensitively adapting an Italianate structure that has long been a neighborhood landmark.

Environmental innovation merged with historical preservation in the Chestnut Hill House project, which earned the Sustainable Stewardship award. The ambitious renovation incorporated geothermal HVAC systems, comprehensive stormwater management solutions, and habitat restoration while maintaining the property's historic architectural integrity, setting a new standard for sustainable preservation practices in the region.

A community-driven initiative to revitalize the Water Tower Recreation Center and WWII Memorial, known as the Light Up the Tower project, received recognition for exemplary stewardship.

"Our project was possible because of the efforts of many volunteers and donors who recognized its value," said project chair Mary Corcoran Pomichter. "We are continuing to honor the work of those who came before us, like the Chestnut Hill ladies who, over 100 years ago, first raised funds for a playground that would become the Water Tower Recreation Center."

Historic RittenhouseTown's Homestead and Bake House restoration garnered attention for its comprehensive approach to preservation. The project addressed critical structural issues including masonry repairs and rising dampness while successfully reviving a historic beehive oven. The restored bake house now serves as a centerpiece for public programming, connecting visitors with Philadelphia's colonial heritage.



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Technical preservation achievements dominated several categories, including the meticulous restoration of a Depression-era stone arch on Wissahickon Park Trail. Preservationists employed specialized lime-based mortar and pH-neutral cleaning methods to ensure the arch's long-term stability while maintaining its historical authenticity. On Seminole Street, craftsmen undertook the challenging replacement of a Victorian-era slate roof, carefully selecting and installing historically compatible materials to preserve the street's architectural character.

The evening was also scheduled to celebrate the induction of five properties into the Architectural Hall of Fame, selected through public voting.

The Rex House, constructed circa 1750, represents one of Germantown Avenue's oldest surviving buildings, featuring additions from 1801 and 1920 that chronicle the evolution of Philadelphia's architectural styles. The 1884 St. Martins Station, designed by Washington Bleddyn Powell, stands as a testament to the area's railroad heritage, while the Tudor-style former Streeper's Pharmacy from 1892 showcases the distinctive work of architect George T. Pearson.

Lori Salganicoff, as she nears the end of her decade-long tenure as Executive Director, reflected on the Hall of Fame's significance since its 2015 establishment. "The Architectural Hall of Fame celebrates Chestnut Hill as one of America's most architecturally significant communities," Salganicoff said. "It showcases outstanding examples spanning four centuries and a natural landscape that weaves seamlessly throughout the community. Chestnut Hill is not just a historic place but a vibrant example of how great design can shape the future."

The selection process for this year's awards involved an unprecedented level of expertise, with jurors including Cory Kegerise, former Community Liaison for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and current National Park Service specialist; David Hollenberg, retired University of Pennsylvania Facilities Director; Suzanna Barucco, historic preservation consultant and Jefferson University faculty member; Hanna Stark, Director of Policy and Communications for the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia; and Dan McCoubrey, architect and Philadelphia Historical Commission member.

Founded over 55 years ago, the Chestnut Hill Conservancy is the nation's first accredited land trust and has protected more than 105 acres of land. Their comprehensive archive of 52,000 items documents the area's rich architectural heritage, contributing significantly to Chestnut Hill's prestigious designation as a National Historic District.

Tuesday's celebration was supported by lead sponsor Chubb and various local construction and architectural firms.

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Life sprouts in historic community garden (/stories/new-life-sprouts-in-historic-community-garden,34745)

The legacy of Chris and Helen Nicholson lives on.

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Tipsy Cafe's annual turkey giveaway feeds hundreds (/stories/tipsy-cafes-annual-turkey-giveaway-feeds-hundreds,34740)

Since Anh Vongbandith opened Tipsy Cafe & Catering on Germantown Avenue in 2020, her shop has given out Thanksgiving meals each year.

(/stories/tipsy-cafes-annual-turkey-giveaway-feeds-hundreds,34740)

'Home for Christmas' (/stories/home-for-christmas,34753)



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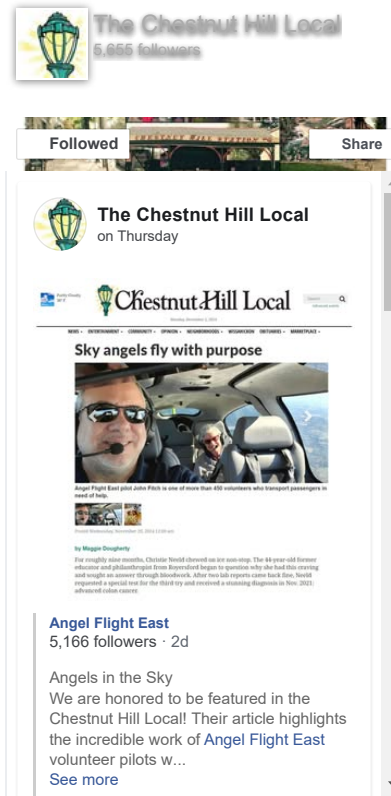
Cold War anthology mines fiction of the atomic age (/stories/cold-war-anthology-mines-fiction-of-the-atomic-age,34752)

Jimmy Pack still remembers "The Day After," a 1983 TV movie about nuclear war. That terror has evolved into a scholarly pursuit.

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