

BEST OF
2009
AWARDS

Firefighter's Memorial Park- Union City, N.J.

Award of Merit: Landscape/Urban Design

The Firefighter's Memorial Park is a tribute to the North Hudson Regional Fire and Rescue firefighters fallen in the line of duty, and it's not just a memorial: appropriately enough, the park, opened this August, is full of water.

Union City, N.J. Mayor Brian Stack decided to use the state Green Acre funds to build a free municipal pool. The city picked an old Masonic temple which, at the time, served as a community recreational center that was underused and falling apart, according to John Capazzi, principal of RSC Architects, designers of the project. What the site did have were million-dollar views. What it didn't have was a lot of space as it was perched at the top of the 100-ft cliffs of the Palisades.

"Can you put a pool on the site?" asked the mayor, according to Capazzi. "Sure we can," Capazzi said.

The team, with ARCO Construction Group serving as the GC, decided to build half of the park on a platform hovering over the cliffs, resting on stilts. In order to get down nearly 100 ft to the ground below, a scaffolding system was suspended from the structural deck, and the team devised new, untried methods of shoring and stabilization. In order to lower excavators, pneumatic drilling rigs, concrete and framework, they used large cranes and special rigging at the top of the site.

"We had to find areas that were level, and we did some chopping of the rock and created foundations to support the steel columns to support the platform," Capazzi said. "The design was done from scratch."

During excavation of the sewage lines, the crew made a rare find of old relics, and the history of the site was integrated into the new park. The keystone of the Doric-



style Masonic lodge, engraved with "1921," was placed at the park's entrance, and a Masonic crest from the old facade now decorates a wall next to the main pool.

A granite monument at the gates to the park honors the fallen firefighters. Inside is an Olympic-size swimming pool with varying depth levels, surrounded by seating for competitions, as well as a wading pool and a firefighting-themed sprinkler playground, all overseen by four life-guards.

The old building on the site was replaced with a 27-sq-ft one that is now used for changing and maintenance areas. A garden walk leads from the entrance all the way to the back of the site to a gazebo. In a last aesthetic flourish, the gazebo space itself is stepped up in order to shield the fencing for what the design team considers the biggest attraction in the most densely populated area of the country: unfettered views of New York City across the river.

Key Players

Developer/Owner: City of Union City

General Contractor: ARCO Construction Group, Elizabeth, NJ

Project Design Team: RSC Architects, Cliffside Park, NJ

Structural Engineering: Christie Engineering, Bedminster, NJ

MEP Engineering: Linwood Engineering Associates, New Milford, NJ

Pool Design: Integrated Aquatics, Doylestown, PA

Site Surveying and Civil Engineering: Medina Consulting, Newark, NJ