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Contact: Jeff Mills, Executive Director
Connecticut Chapter, American Society of Landscape Architects
Phone: (860) 454-8922
executivedirector@ctasla.org



Connecticut Landscape Architects to Celebrate their Profession on Frederick Law Olmsted's Birthday (4/26/12)

If he were still alive, Frederick Law Olmsted — the genius behind such landscape gems as New York’s Central Park and Bridgeport’s Beardsley and Seaside Parks — would blow out 190 candles on his birthday next Thursday. Born in 1822 in Hartford, Olmsted is widely considered to be the founder of modern landscape architecture — a profession that combines design and ecology to create places where people live, work, and play.

To celebrate National Landscape Architecture Month and “Connecticut Olmsted Day” (so designated by the Connecticut legislature in 2005), members of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (CTASLA) will be hosting two events on Thursday, April 26 — a mid-day demonstration in Baldwin Plaza and a formal evening program at the Bijou Theater — that showcase how Olmsted’s legacy thrives in modern times.

From 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., several landscape architect professionals and a group of landscape architecture students from the University of Connecticut will descend upon Bridgeport’s Baldwin Plaza to conduct a live “urban design” demonstration. Using easel drawings and public input, team members will show how this underutilized urban space can be re-imagined as a vital part of the city fabric.

Baldwin Plaza, a small green space adjacent to the Fairfield County Courthouse on Main Street, and framed by Broad St., Cannon St., and Fairfield Ave., will soon be deconstructed by the state during repairs to a parking structure. Concept sketches developed during the public “charrette” on Thursday will be refined by members of CTASLA and presented to the city as it considers options for converting this space into an exciting pedestrian destination.

Steve Hladun, of the City of Bridgeport Parks and Recreation Dept., said “We are looking for a site plan with ideas to reactivate the site, something that will open up people’s minds as to the possibilities of the site to become a more functional and vital downtown public open space.”

What's the best use of Baldwin Plaza? A green park? An outdoor performance space? A flea market? Water features? The public is encouraged to come participate, or simply

watch, as landscape architects ply their craft to benefit this green corner of the Bridgeport urban experience.

Later in the day, CTASLA will host an event at the Bijou Theater, featuring a showing of the acclaimed documentary, "Women In The Dirt," featuring the case studies of seven women landscape architects who practice in California, followed by a panel of six prominent Connecticut practitioners, who will discuss their process and vision for blending cultural elements with natural elements to create successful outdoor spaces.

Mayor Bill Finch, a huge fan of Olmsted and advocate for urban parks, will kick off the evening program with a keynote address. Thomas R. Tavella, FASLA, president-elect of the national ASLA, will also speak. The program begins at 4:00 p.m. and culminates in a cocktail party beginning at 7:30 p.m. Birthday cake for Frederick Law Olmsted will be served! Registration information can be found at <http://www.ctasla.org>.

Sponsors and suppliers for the day's activities include Planters Choice, Shemin Nurseries, Artistic Design LLC, Landscape Forms, Aristeia, Inc., O'Brien & Sons, Aqua-Lawn, Inc., and Apex Lighting, Inc. The cocktail party is being generously sponsored by Unilock, Inc.

About ASLA: "Green since 1899," ASLA is the national professional association for landscape architects, representing more than 15,000 members in 48 professional chapters. The Connecticut Chapter is comprised of 275 members across the state. ASLA and its local chapters promote the profession of landscape architecture and advance its practice through advocacy, education, communication and fellowship.

Landscape architecture is a comprehensive discipline of land analysis, planning, design, management, preservation and rehabilitation. Landscape architects protect public health, safety and welfare through environmentally conscious planning and design. Like architects and engineers, landscape architects are licensed in the state of Connecticut.

Learn more about landscape architecture online at <http://www.asla.org>. To learn more about the Connecticut Chapter of ASLA, see <http://www.ctasla.org>.

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