

Newark's Military Park undergoing a revival befitting a historic, downtown treasure

In the midst of downtown Newark, [Military Park](#), a spot that endured wars and riots and urban decline, is quietly being revived.

Workers have pulled up old bricks, removed trees and grass and pushed benches aside temporarily. They have stripped the park down to its core, leaving a collection of monuments jutting from cement bases and sandy dirt, surrounded by piles of stone, construction equipment and chain link fencing. It is like watching an old treasure being refurbished.

After years of delay, the six-acre park, which is located within walking distance of [Rutgers Business School](#), is undergoing a \$3 million make-over inspired by the renovation that transformed New York City's Bryant Park.



"WARS OF AMERICA," THE EPIC GUTZON BORGLUM SCUPLTURE HAS STOOD IN THE CENTER OF MILITARY PARK SINCE 1926.

In a city where revitalization has gathered some fresh momentum, crowds waiting for lunch-time buses along Broad Street, stand with their backs turned to the park project. Occasionally, someone pauses to read a sign that explains details of the make-over, but most people rush right past the spot on their way to somewhere else.

Benjamin Donsky, the project manager for [Biederman Redevelopment Ventures](#), which is carrying out the work inside the chain link fence, expects that will change. "Military Park has the potential to be Newark's town square," he said.



BY MID-SUMMER, WORKERS HAD LAID NEW CEMENT AT THE SOUTH END OF MILITARY PARK NEAR RAYMOND BOULEVARD.

There will be plenty to draw people in: Live performances and farm markets. In the center of the park, a long-neglected sword-shaped reflecting pool will be filled in and turned into a signature garden.

The circular brick patio in the center of the park across from the Robert Treat Hotel will be reconfigured into a rectangle and anchored by renovated restrooms, a park office and a new concession stand. One of the park's most problematic features, an intimidating cement-walled entrance to an underground parking lot, will be refurbished with glass walls and lights.



THE SIGNATURE GARDEN VISUALIZED BY BEIDERMAN REDEVELOPMENT VENTURES.

The renovation will involve major landscaping. Gardens will be created around the park and American Elms will be planted in straight lines in the French allée style. Its collection of monuments – there are 16

in all, including a set of matching cannons, a bust of President John F. Kennedy and “Wars of America,” a sculpture done by Gutzon Borglum as a tribute to America’s war dead.

Despite its treasures, neglect had caused the park to deteriorate. It had become a park that people were more likely to avoid than find attractive.

"It was a mess," Donsky said, recalling his initial impression.

Donsky, who received his master’s degree in city regional planning from the [Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy](#) at Rutgers, said when Newark officials set out to revitalize the Military Park, they wanted to apply the same model used to revive Bryant Park.

Daniel Biederman, Donsky’s boss who is considered an urban parks expert, carried out the four-year-long Bryant Park restoration and helped to create what was then considered an experiment, a not-for-profit corporation that would manage and maintain the midtown landmark with revenue generated through park events and special assessments paid by neighboring properties.

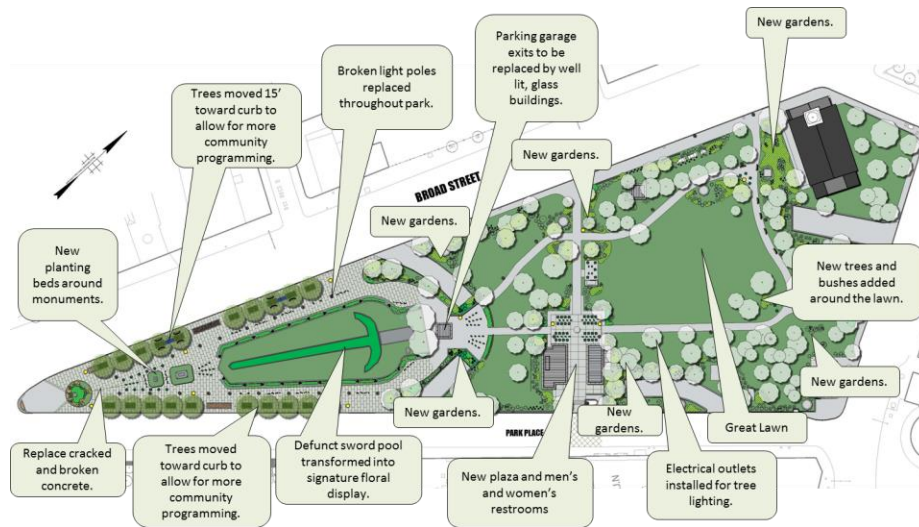


PROJECT MANAGER BENJAMIN DONSKY DURING A RECENT VISIT TO MILITARY PARK.

Military Park Partnership is expected to work similarly. The partnership is made up of Prudential Financial, MCJ Amelior, the foundation run by philanthropist Ray Chambers and his family, the city and Theater Square Development Corp, a subsidiary of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

Once the work at Military Park is completed, Biederman Redevelopment Ventures will manage it. While the initial park activities will depend on philanthropy, Donsky said after three years, the goal is for the park to be self-sustaining with revenues generated from park events, the café lease and corporate sponsorships.

“The physical changes are a necessary, first step, but this is much more about creating a long-term sustainable future for Military Park,” Donsky said.



Donsky envisions a mix of people – residents, office workers and shoppers – all gathering together in the park. His vision includes yoga classes, live performances, a bustling lunch crowd at the café.

“The more people you draw, the more buzz you create and all of a sudden, the park becomes well known,” Donsky said. “This park will make people change their perception of what downtown Newark is all about.”
-Susan Todd