

## From Gas Tanks to Green Oasis

Agresource supplied 1050 cubic yards of Burlington County compost for this project in the summer of 2008.

**Volume XXVI, Number 5430 Monday, Jun 13, 2011**

Photo by Daniel Avila

Last Monday, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe opened Elmhurst Park, a former brownfield turned greenspace, in Queens.

The \$20-million six-acre project began in 2007 at the request of the community for more open space. The park replaces the former KeySpan gas tank site and features a new playground, a decorative fountain, lighting, new trees and landscaping, fencing, walking paths, benches, and the renovation of an existing building that will be used for maintenance staff.

The Mayor and Commissioner Benepe were joined at the park opening by Congress Member Joseph Crowley, Queens Borough President Helen Marshall, Assembly Member Margaret Markey, Council Member Elizabeth Crowley, and National Grid Community Affairs Program Manager Renee McClure.

Elmhurst Park is the former location of the two KeySpan Newtown gas holders, known as the Elmhurst gas tanks, which were 275-feet in diameter and visible from the highway. In the late 1990s, the KeySpan Company (now National Grid) removed the tanks, and, in 2001, it began remediation of the site as per a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Voluntary Cleanup Agreement. In 2004, KeySpan agreed to sell the land to the City for \$1, and it was officially transferred in 2005. The creation of Elmhurst Park advances the goals of PlaNYC, the City's long-term environmental sustainability plan.

The construction of Elmhurst Park began with the addition of new perimeter sidewalks, street trees, underground utilities, retaining walls, fencing and plantings. Storm water will be collected over approximately half the site in an underground retention system consisting of perforated pipes and broken stone wrapped in filter fabric to reduce the amount of water flowing into the sewer pipes in the street. In addition to the new playground, decorative fountain, paths, benches, site security lighting and additional plantings, the park features people-powered play pieces, in the spirit of the energy-storing history of this site. Children can pedal a stationary bike to provide a light effect on a nearby column. The playground is suitable for tots as well as older children. Its spray shower area doubles as a performance space and can be adapted for use of a portable stage. In 2012, the final phase will be complete with the construction of the comfort station.

More than 620 trees were planted, along with shrubs and perennials. Park construction included creating a woodland garden as a quiet sitting area for seniors within the existing grove of 16 trees, which was expanded with dogwoods, woodland shrubs, bluebells and ferns. Evergreens were used on the perimeter to screen off-site parking lots and warehouses. The Elmhurst community's early history as a place of orchards and farms is recalled by a new orchard of crab apples, on the hillside facing the Long Island Expressway. Close to Grand Avenue, new Zelkova trees were planted around a small oval green intended.

In April 2009, the Parks Department received the Big Apple Brownfield Open Space Award for its work on Elmhurst



Park. The Big Apple Brownfield Award program recognizes the most creative and innovative brownfield projects in New York City.

Many landscape architects and resident engineers worked on this project including designers Helen Ogrinz and Nancy Prince, with contractor William A. Gross Construction Associates.