

Take A Stroll, Help A (Japanese) Garden

By Louise Law

Remember the marvelous Japanese stroll garden in Mill Neck which we spoke so highly of last year in this paper? Seems these days it has its neck on the chopping block.

Put simply, the fate of the John P. Humes Japanese stroll garden is in the hands of people who are willing to volunteer time and a little money to keep the charming little site going. According to Laura Palmer, executive assistant at the Mill Neck garden, the garden is in "dire straits" for 1994.

A sloping and forested land in keeping with the Japanese reverence for nature, this stroll garden surprises, delights and brings the visitor to a point of meditative reflection, we have noted. But if the place can't sustain the cost of maintenance and hosting visitors, who will benefit from the opportunity to meditate?

Just this past May residents in the area asked the same question, and after an emergency fund-raising campaign managed to finance the opening of the garden for two days a week, the Humes garden was host to something like 500 visitors.

That campaign managed to provide for staff and supplies to maintain the garden for a season — but only with the added help of an active group of volunteers giving generously of their time, contributing to the physical maintenance of the garden and providing other assistance.

Japanese gardens are "high maintenance gardens," notes curator Stephen Morrell. Aside from other necessities of maintaining its unique look, he notes, the extensive network of paths has to be swept every day.

As you might know, the design principle of a Japanese garden is that nature is the ideal and that tranquility is the goal. And if you think about it, the harmonious blending of the contrived with an existing North Shore woodland demonstrates a wonderful interaction between humans and the natural topography. The four full rolling acres of this Mill Neck property still manage to recreate this concept of working within a tiny space to give it the illusion of size.

Important in the design of a Japanese stroll garden, I'm told, is the concept of hide and reveal and movement along the diagonal. In keeping with this, instead of following a straight axis down from the entrance, the path at the John Humes garden veers right and left. Not only does this divert views — it reveals vistas sequentially as one proceeds through the garden. This heightens the effect and exaggerates the sense of space.

Another consideration made use of at the garden is the concept of yin-yang or the balance of opposites. Stones (yang) are the bones; plants (yin) are the flesh of a Japanese garden. Together, they create balance. And water? Well, that's the blood, say the folks at John Humes stroll garden.

Another important aspect of the

garden, I learned, is its symbolism. In the case of this particular garden, there is an idealized landscape symbolizing a mountain setting by the sea. The gravel paths represent mountain streams that form pools at various levels and cascade downward over symbolic waterfalls, eventually flowing into the ocean (represented by a pond).

In the pond itself is a tortoise island, located by the pond in the tea garden. A moss mound forms the shell. Stone are the head, feet and tail. There's even a symbolic seashore by the pond.

An interesting phenomenon to be found in the garden is the way stepping stones are used. Now Japan may have its bullet trains — but they also have their garden paths, which are specifically designed to control the rate at which you move through the garden. To tell you the truth, I did find myself slowing down to step carefully on the stones and stopping to notice the numerous plantings of Japanese versions of native plants.

Among them? Japanese versions of Jack-in-the-pulpit, ferns, snake root, maple, witch hazel, holly and white pine. As it turns out, the temperate climates of northeast Asia and Eastern U.S. regions are pretty similar — and so the flora contain many identical species and counterparts. The John P. Humes garden does a nice job of blending these two floras.

And architecturally speaking, the little teahouse near the end of the path

forms a remarkably charming respite after having passed through the pathways. This portion of the garden strives to provide an atmosphere which resembles a retreat from worldly problems. The design of the tea garden is mostly evergreen plants for their subdued atmosphere. A stone water basin is set nearby so that guests may cleanse themselves before entering. To the rear is a bamboo and reed display area for bonsai and other demonstrations.

The John P. Humes Japanese stroll gardens belong to the North Shore Wildlife Sanctuary and were given to them by Mr. Humes in 1980. Ambassador Humes and his wife came back from a trip to Japan in 1960 with a teahouse, a Japanese landscape gardener and the gardener's wife.

Operated with funds from the Humes Foundation, financial management nowadays comes from the Garden Conservancy, a national organization working to preserve exceptional American gardens by facilitating their transition from private to non-profit ownership and operation.

Mr. Morrell says they have a dedicated core group of Friends of the Garden but need support in the form of membership and volunteer assistance to keep the garden accessible to the public. Hopefully, he said, the garden can be open every Saturday next year.

Membership in the Humes garden includes a seasonal newsletter, "The Stepping Stone." For information or to book tours call 676-4486.

Long Island Children's Museum Opens

The Long Island Children's Museum, a new cultural and educational hands-on experience designed for children ages 2 through 12 and their families, opened Sunday, Nov. 21 in Garden City. The museum will provide participatory activities in exhibits which explore the arts, sciences, technology and community and world cultures.

The museum is located at an interim site at 550 Stewart Avenue, occupying more than 5,000 square feet of space donated by Long Island Lighting Company (LILCO). Museum officials are currently working to obtain a permanent site.

Cablevision Systems Corporation, another major Long Island corporation, will sponsor "Communication Station," one of the five opening exhibits. "Communication Station" invites visitors to experiment with various means of sending and receiving information, and includes a small-scale *News 12 Studio*, where children can discover how television creates the illusion of reality.

"LILCO is proud to be involved in the development of a community project of this importance that will enrich the lives of thousands of Long Island families," said Dr. William Catacosinos, chairman and CEO of LILCO.

In addition to "Communication Station," four other exhibits will be featured at the Garden City site. They are:

- *What If You Couldn't? ...* Developed by the Boston Children's Museum, this exhibit gives children the opportunity to "experience" the challenges encountered by people with various disabilities. Funding for this exhibit was provided by NYNEX.

- *Working On The Railroad* invites visitors to punch their own tickets and board a train to the imagination, where they can learn about signals, steam engines and train music and take a video trip from Jamaica to Montauk. This exhibit was created with the help of the Long Island Rail Road.

- *stART* emphasizing individual expression and group interaction, this large-scale sculpture made from everyday objects and recycled materials gives kids the chance to participate in an ongoing, collaborative art project.

- *Bubbles*, created by the Boston Children's Museum, with funding from the National Science Foundation, reveals basic principles of engineering, architecture, biology and geometry. Activities include making bubble screens, bubble cubes, bubble hon-

eycombs and other unusual shapes.

The Long Island Children's Museum will also feature special events, such as performances, workshops, story-times and multi-cultural celebrations.

The Long Island Children's Museum

is a not-for-profit corporation chartered by the New York State Board of Regents. The founding board of trustees is comprised of Long Island parents, educators, artists and business leaders.



Santa In A Bucket

A holiday parade through Huntington last week, put on by the merchants of the village, featured Brownies, Girl Scouts, goats disguised as reindeer, ladies with chicken hats, a petting zoo and even Santa in a bucket — fire truck bucket, that is.