

PHILMONT



Andrew Amelinckx/Hudson Catskill Newspapers

Local residents walk the Philmont labyrinth Saturday at its dedication ceremony. The project was initiated by the Walking the Dog theater and alumni of Emerson College in England.

# Town celebrates new Labyrinth

By Andrew Amelinckx  
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Some walked slowly with their heads down, while others took the path at a brisk pace smiles across their faces. In the background musicians Ashley Mayne and Jim Wann quietly played music.

These local residents were experiencing a new labyrinth in Philmont's village park on Main Street, which was dedicated Saturday.

"Welcome to your Philmont labyrinth," intoned David Anderson at the dedication of a maze-like stone path 42 feet in diameter that winds around in a circle and is based on one located at France's Chartres Cathedral.

Anderson and Benedicta Bertau, theater directors for Walking the Dog Theater, a local non-profit theater company, were the impetus behind the project that brought a far-flung group of people together to make it a reality.

According to Roman Kuznetsov, 14 years ago 28 students from a number of different countries met at Emerson College in England.

Kuznetsov is Russian and currently lives in Germany.

than to say 'yes,'" he commented.

Robin Andrews, a village trustee, said the village was grateful that the group had come and given them "this gift."

Labyrinths, said Andrews, are usually associated with "sacred institutions" and pointed out the uniqueness of the one in Philmont for being in a public space that allowed residents to enjoy it in whatever way they saw fit.

Philmont's mayor Skip Speed said he believed the labyrinth would help give the village "the luster it used to have."

Benedict McCaffrey, representing Congressman Scott Murphy, called it a "grand object" that could help people find the "divine spark" within themselves and others.

Smith, introducing Georges Boucher, a baker who grew up in the town of Chartres, said, "miracles were happening everywhere."

Boucher now resides in Philmont and is a baker for Hawthorne Valley Farm in Harlemville.

He said they decided that every seven years they would reunite and that this year they wanted to do a service project.

The idea for a labyrinth came from a project the students had participated in at Chartres Cathedral near Paris.

Anderson said that they were given a special viewing of the labyrinth built in 1200 and that the "the experience stayed" with them.

Kuznetsov said that the difference between a maze and a labyrinth is that the former has a number of directions in which you can go, while a labyrinth has only one entrance and exit.

"In a maze you can get lost," he said. "A labyrinth is where you can find yourself."

Besides the international group of Emerson Alumni, many locals helped with the project.

Anderson called it "a community-wide effort" and said that a lot of children, some as young as two, had helped.

He said that the project wouldn't have been possible without Linda Gatter, owner of the restaurant Local 111 and an architect as well as stone mason Tim Smith.

Anderson called Gatter the brains behind the project.

Gatter held a benefit for the project and donated all the food this past Tuesday.

"Over 100 people came," said Anderson. "We ran out of food."

Smith, speaking during the dedication, called the labyrinth a "public monument for peace and self-reflection."

According to Smith, the space was once a private tennis court, but now had been "reclaimed and recycled."

He dedicated the labyrinth to the area's children and for future generations.

Anderson thanked the village trustees for their support.

It's a lot easier to say 'no'

"It's very exciting," he said of having a little piece of home here. "The world is very small."

Stan Martin, a former Ford dealer from the area, who was at the dedication, had a story of his own concerning Chartres. It was during World War II and he was stationed in England as a member of the U.S. 8th Airborne Corps. They were flying missions to bring gasoline to Gen. George Patton who was then fighting for control of the French town of Metz.

"He was running out of gasoline," said Martin.

It was during one of these missions that Martin found himself in the town of Chartres and decided to visit the cathedral. He ended up staying the night there but hadn't bothered to look up until it began to rain.

There was a big hole in the roof," he recalled. "I nearly caught pneumonia."

He said the cathedral was beautiful, but hadn't seen the labyrinth at the time.

Bertau, after the ceremony, stood looking at the labyrinth.

"It's incredible," said Bertau of seeing the project completed, adding that it was also "humbling."

She said it felt wonderful to have worked on something unique that she hopes will last for a very long time.

Before the crowd began walking the labyrinth Anderson extolled them to "have a conversation with your life" as they winded their way along the stone path.

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