

THE RIVERTOWNS Enterprise

The Hometown Newspaper
of Hastings-on-Hudson,
Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley
and Irvington

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 34 • NOVEMBER 18, 2022

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

The dedication ceremony on Nov. 13

Sculpture brings aqueduct to the surface

By Rita Walton

The Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct held a dedication ceremony on Sunday, Nov. 13, for the Croton Arch of Triumph, a new sculpture installed near the Keeper's House on Walnut Street in Dobbs Ferry. The sculpture is a full-scale replica cross section of the Old Croton Aqueduct, an underground pipeline that delivered water to New York City from the Catskills.

Designed and built by sculptor and architect Dionisio Cortes Ortega of Harlem, with assistance from masons Juan Gaspar and Uriel Cruz, and from Reform Architecture, the Arch helps users of the Old Croton Aqueduct Trail — walkers, runners, and cyclists — visualize the tunnel below them.

"I imagined the Arch as a monument to the hidden infrastructure of the city, in particular the water system," Cortes Ortega said. "But it's also a monument to the government, the people, and the engineers in the 1800s who came up with the solution of aqueducts to provide clean water to deal with the catastrophic issues of their time, like fire and pandemics."

Cortes Ortega, who has a bachelor of architecture degree from The Cooper Union, built the first iteration of the Arch at the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens in 2020 as part of a fellowship on monuments. For the Arch in Dobbs Ferry, the Friends organization, known as FOCA, received funds from the New York State Park and Trail Partnership Grants program, which is administered in partnership with the non-profit Parks & Trails New York.

"My inspiration was seeing a cross section of the Aqueduct tunnel in a book called 'Water-Works' by Kevin Bone, one of my professors at Cooper Union," Cortes Ortega explained. "I reimagined that as an arch. The title 'Croton Arch of Triumph' is a play on the Arc de Triomphe [in Paris] and on what we choose to celebrate."

As the rain stopped and the morning warmed up on Nov. 13, the crowd discussed Aqueduct history among themselves.

"I'm a volunteer here," Eddie Jabbour of Hastings said about the Keeper's House, which is open to the public on weekends. "I would say that maybe two-thirds to three-

quarters of the people that come on the trail don't know what's beneath their feet. But this dramatizes what's under there, and that's so important. I'm a nerd. Did you know that the foundation of the main New York Public Library was originally the distributing reservoir for this aqueduct?"

"I've seen it," responded Shirley Matyscak of Yonkers. "I'm a nerd like you. In the basement of the library, you can see the foundation of the original reservoir."

"It's amazing!" Jabbour replied. "And just think, the people who built the Aqueduct in the 1800s were largely Irish immigrants who built it by hand. And this was before dynamite, before steam power even."

"And it declines 13 inches per mile, patterned after Roman aqueducts," Matyscak noted.

The 41-mile Old Croton Aqueduct was constructed between 1837 and 1842. Supported by a stone foundation, the brick-lined conduit brought water to New York City until 1955. In 1968, New York State purchased the 26.2-mile portion of the Aqueduct between Croton Gorge Park and the Yonkers-Bronx border, which became the Old Croton Aqueduct State Historic Park.

Sara Kelsey of Irvington, a FOCA board member, coordinated the installation of the Arch. Made of brick and local granite, it

took 20 days to erect.

"I think everyone will spread the word to take pictures here," Kelsey said. "It was built on-site and it's very strong. There are steel posts inside the stone, so it's very solid. Kids can jump around. It's built to last."

Joanna Riesman of Hastings, another FOCA board member, started the dedication ceremony by standing in front of the Arch and thanking those involved in the project. Riesman said she was "delighted to welcome this new addition to our state park, that makes what everyone's walking on visible to them."

Dobbs Ferry resident Mavis Cain, president of FOCA, thanked that nonprofit's board, the funding agencies, and elected officials, and then introduced the artist.

In his remarks, Cortes Ortega said the Arch is a monument to "foresight — a quality we're in need of today as we experience social, health, and economic crises."

Greenburgh Town Council member Ellen Hendrickx and Westchester County Executive George Latimer made brief comments. Westchester County Legislator MaryJane Shimsky, who was elected to the New York State Assembly on Nov. 8, summed up by stating that "thinking about this little bit of history and how we prevailed gives us fortitude to go forward with new plans and projects."



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Dionisio Cortes Ortega addresses attendees during the dedication