A COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER
PUBLIC ART PROJECT COMMEMORATES SEPTEMBER 11, 2001
County Executive Andy Spano and Artist Frederic Schwartz
The Making of the The Rising
A Community Comes Together for an Inspirational Public Art Project

By Jim Ormond

There are times when only a work of art can fulfill the need to express a sense of the profound and serve as a beacon of healing and hope. Such is the case with The Rising, Westchester County’s memorial to County residents who lost their lives on September 11th, 2001. Visually, the piece makes a powerful statement. Set in the eastern corner of Kensico Dam Plaza, the 109 intertwining stainless steel rods that make up the memorial gleam in the sunlight. Walking up to the monument, one is struck by the simple beauty of the geometry inherent in its design. Architect Frederic Schwartz envisioned a circular base, from which each of the 109 rods (each rod representing one of the Westchester victims) ascends to a high point wherein they are all joined. “The joining of each of these rods at the top of The Rising represents us coming together as a community. That we are all part of a larger whole,” says Schwartz.

Beyond being tangibly manifested in the design of the sculpture, a ‘unified community’ is what made The Rising possible in the first place. As with any public art project, a widely-shared commitment to the value of art in the landscape and a cooperative spirit were essential to the process. The finished memorial that the public will see on September 10th, during a special unveiling at Kensico Dam Plaza, is the result of careful planning and the hard work of many people.

In the case of The Rising, County Executive Andrew Spano got the ball rolling during his State of the County Address in 2002. Spano announced that the County was committed to creating a memorial to the Westchester victims of the September 11th, 2001 tragedy and asked a core group of victims’ family members to serve on the committee that would guide the process. From the outset, the committee and family members saw the new memorial as a destination for remembrance, reflection and hope for the future.

The committee chose Kensico Dam Plaza, with its central location and natural beauty as the ideal site for a memorial. Shortly thereafter, County Executive Spano announced a competition to select a design for the memorial. Thirty seven designs were submitted by artists from throughout the United States and Europe. The Committee deliberated long and hard and ultimately chose The Rising by renowned architect Frederic Schwartz. Committee member Rosaleen O’Neill, whose 34-year old son Sean perished on September 11th, said she was moved by the design’s elegance and simplicity. She described it as a “shining cathedral reaching to the sky.”

To make the inspired design and large-scale scope of the project a reality, an ambitious fundraising effort, involving both the public and private sectors was launched. County Executive Spano and his colleagues on the Westchester County Board of Legislators demonstrated their commitment to seeing the project through by authorizing $350,000 for the project. Private fundraising initiatives were also critical. Jim Houlihan, managing partner of Houlihan-Parnes, organized the aggressive fundraising campaign for the Friends of Westchester County Parks, raising more than $500,000 from the private sector in less than three months. An initial gift of $100,000 from the Louis R. Cappelli Foundation got the Friends fundraising campaign moving. Congresswoman Nita Lowey was then able to secure a grant from the federal government of nearly $500,000 to match what the Friends of the Parks raised.

The principals in the project, including Schwartz architects, donated countless hours of their time. The staff of the Westchester County Parks Department spent two years preparing the beautiful landscaping and stonework of the site, including laying the foundation for the ‘Circle of Remembrance,’ the base of the memorial which lists the names of the victims on granite tablets.

To give the public a sneak-peak into all of the planning that went into making the memorial, Westchester County has arranged a special exhibition entitled “A Community Comes Together: The Making of the Rising, Westchester County September 11th Memorial.” The exhibition, which is curated by the Hudson River Museum, will be open to the public starting September 7th at the Westchester Arts Council’s Arts Exchange. The multi-media exhibition will chronicle the memorial’s five-year development with video, photographs, architectural drawings and other relevant materials. “The completion of The Rising marks a significant milestone for Westchester,” says County Executive Spano. “It is unique in the world and making the transition from concept to construction involved protocols and techniques that had never been tried before. It is important for the public to know — once they visit the memorial — exactly what went into creating it.”

Exhibition:
“A Community Comes Together: The Making of the The Rising”
(thru September 26)
Arts Exchange
31 Mamaroneck Avenue
White Plains
Gallery Hours Tuesday-Saturday,
12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
*Also open September 11 from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Westchester Arts Council is coordinating family workshops and related events on Saturday, September 9th. Call (914) 428-4220 or visit wwwWESTARTS.com.