

## **Interview with Andy Chakalis**

Could you tell me who you are and a little bit about you self?

*My name is Andy Chakalis project coordinator for the renevation and replanting of the Greek Cultural Garden here in Cleveland Ohio. Representative of the Holonic Preservation Societ, which is the lead organization in taking on the renevation and replanting project for this garden the organization along with the Cultural Garden Federation of Cleveland were the two partnering organizations to lead this project. The Holonic Preservation Society looked at this as a potential project seeing there mission is to preserve the Greek culture in North East Ohio. So this fell underneath the umbrella of there mission statement there was a formal vote by the board of trustees members to take this initiative we wanted to do it correctly from a preservation and conservation stand point so what we would do would have a long life span for the garden and the benefits of the people seeing this particular garden site. We approach the garden restoration and renovation project as if we were taking on a fine work of art like a painting or a sculpture. And so we did a very through analysis of the garden, it's info structure it's plant life condition we sought out original drawings and terrain drawings as a possible through archives through the city of Cleveland. We entertained to do this properly we would need someone professional to come aboard and help us through this and we sought the services of Jim McKnight a landscape architect. And I think Jim has done a stellar job with being very sensitive to the original planting sceam, but also very aware of the conditions that we face in a contemporary sense of maintaining plant life so forth a complete survey was done not only from Jim but also from engineering standpoints of the stone work that was in terrible shape the west slope of this garden there were stair cases that descended down to the MLK blvd that were completely covered over with dirt and grass growing over them and that was a pleasant surprise as we began to unearth the garden that those elements suddenly appeared.*

You had no idea that those were there before?

*On the drawings they were to be there but we really didn't see them. The city lawn mowers were actually running over the staircases and mowing lawn, so it just kind of speaks for how long they were basically neglected or just un attended to. So those were pleasant surprises. So as we did the pulmonary surveys we realized to what degree the info structure stone work fountain all the elements there was and original irrigation system at the site all the gardens at one time they were the type that you see many years ago. Someone would walk around with a bucket with these little sprinkling heads and pop them in and when they were done watering they would take them out so forth we did a through exam, of that irrigation system and found out that it was completely non functional so that brought to the table of not only with the planting and the other info structure we would have to look at the cost of putting in an irrigation system that was not on the horizon when we first took on the project but we added that to the bench mark of conditions. Long story short we gave this garden back it's renovation replanting in 1996 to coincide with cities bicentennial the work started about three years prior to that which encompassed first of all the commitment the analysis and then the rudimentary beginning*

*of some type of work so our volunteers that were committed to the project came out and we thought that maybe one day of clean up would do it. Well we realized after 800 bags of debris from the central court alone we had a long way to go, but in our pulmonary work sessions the garden actually unfolded its character its granger. The potential was being seen by individuals working at the garden on a weekly basis and mind you all of this was all volunteer we received a stipend first by the Hold and Trust which we used as seed money to assist us in our fund raising to bring in necessary dollars so we used that as the catalyst to communicate in our community and other communities that there was an organization to put forth a stipend and we certainly matched that one and went beyond. We used those dollars primarily for some stone work we pressure washed the entire structure down to basically unearth as I mentioned the staircases and so forth on the west slope and the upper walk ways which also had been covered over we documented this before we started any work photographically and we have that as a permanent record with the project and our archives of the Holonic Preservation Society the work itself continued into the bicentennial which at that time we were the host garden for the One World Day in 1996 and we at that time turned over the garden to the city officials at a ceremony that was held here and that afternoon. Much activity there were Greek dancers other nationality dancers it was a very festive day we had lolly the trolley a local trolley firm bring in people from various points of departure with in the Greek community and we also made those trolleys available to whom ever would like to come into experience that day. So it was a very festive and worthy of a job well done. We continue to maintained the garden on an annual basis we new that it was a commitment long term not short term we were the first to come in and try to renovate a garden in this corridor we wanted to believe that if we would demonstrate as a community that other communities would follow and that has happened and we are very pleased that it's just neighbors helping neighbors we've seen activity in the Slovenian garden, the Italian garden, and the Hebrews garden in various gardens along the corridor so we were very pleased to see that initial idea with us coming forth little by little that's becoming a reality and we also at our ceremonies for our rededication we mentioned to city officials that we want not only the assisting gardens brought up to a world class standard but also have other gardens become part of this necklace and were strongly avocation for other communities to take a position in this cordoned that is to demonstrate world peace we've seen let's say we've been active with the Indian Community the Scottish community, we know the African American community is moving forward. So in some ways those are positive signs to see this corridor reflect the city as it is in the 2000s the current gardens that are going through renovation and much attention now are of an earlier time but it is significant to the immigration movement into Cleveland and it's nice to know my generation is giving respect to the past generation who were instrumental in actually the ideas. Fund raising and making these become a reality for all people to enjoy so we were taking the baton and running with it for a while and hope to pass it on. The landscape plan that is in front of us on the easily is the plan that is without the plan I think we would have failed in the goals of the project the plan has glued us together to stay the course to measure our accomplishment with the replanting. With the info structure without the plan I think we would have wondered into some accomplishment but not total accomplishment. So I would advocate strongly that our experience proves that the plan is the document that holds us together there have been slight modifications in plant selections here and*

*there but those have been unpractical issues availability but over all the document, it was the compass that was steering the ship for us. So we all felt comfortable after approving the plan and you should know the plan was reviewed by a number of individuals both from a horticultural standpoint engineering stand point and also various city official stand points so the document really has glued us all together from various organization from various expertise arias to assure us that we are on the right course. In the plan once again reflects the historic significance of the garden and it does not modify or change any of the original design features of the garden so it's pretty comprehensive.*

Was the city of Cleveland any assistance to you?

*Yes, we wanted to approach this in a partnership, and I will say that we knew we had limitations the city but we also had strengths and we wanted to demonstrate to the city through the presentation of a plan to the mayor at that time our seriousness and the degree of expertise that we wanted to bring to the table.*

*The city did in fact a great deal when ever possible all of the various departments that we called upon for assistance at various times we found that there was a tremendous response in either departmental heads or individual workers in the field.*

How long have you been involved with the garden?

*Basically I became involved, there was a gentleman by the name of Pete Catabolis (spelling ?) who was the garden delegate through the OCGF for a number of years I spoke to Pete Catabolis pertaining to the organization of the Holonic Preservation Society and saying that it would be perhaps a project worthy for them to consider so I have been involved in the project since 1993 so I continue to serve in the capacity to what ever we can do rake leaves trim, fertilize there is a host of volunteers. But all of our membership in the Holonic Preservation Society are endorsing in supporting this project it's not just me alone I just happen to have a very good comfort level and mind you when we took this over we thought that a few weeks would do it well hardly the case it's taken a great deal more but I think that the rewards are being seen right in front of us now with the plant life maturing the gardens are now kept far better than what they were when we started. We've seen wedding ceremonies taking place here when we started this project I don't think anyone would have wanted to have a wedding in the sight we had at first looked at. So those are healthy signs we just have to activate more support more broad base programming more activity take place in the gardens it's a public space, I compare this to central park in New York City.*

Are there any plans for that?

*There are many ideas brewing from various advantage points there should be concerts there should be folk festivals, poetry reading there are many educational value to the community. Schools to anchor in a foot hole into this corridor from a horticultural a science stand point the Done Brook initiative may unfold some possibilities I am very pleased to see CSU put forth the initiative from a historical stand point to document and*

*record this legacy that is part of the Cultural Gardens. The organization has to put that up as a priority. I think that will happen. I think University Circle should play a more important role in the activity reach into the Cultural Gardens. The bike path that has been placed down the corridor has introduced many people to become aware of the Cultural Gardens.*

What is the design of the Greek Garden?

**The Greek Garden is the only garden that has the sunken garden feature of all the gardens the sunken area is to symbolize the shape of the Greek cross by the staircases that move from right to left and also descend into the central court the two columns on the right and left of the entrance and the door columns from Parthenon Athens Greece the wall beyond the fountains to symbolize the wall from acropolis from Parthenon the two litchis are inscribed with names of painters, poets, historical in time sequence reflects the history that the Greek culture has given to Western Civilization. There will be two urns put in the garden that will be used to dip in the fountain and use the water to water the plant life in the garden like they did in Greece. The staircase that descend on the south and north side is also as if you were in Athens Greece walking up to Acropolis Greece. The plant life has reference to Mediterranean elements. When they are done there will be about 10,000 new plantings.**

Are any of the plants imported from Greece?

*No, there is some soil brought into the garden.*

The Greek and Italian garden are the only two connected by formal sidewalk do you have anything to say about that?

**There are connecting points to all the gardens but not a formal bridge between them. The people benefit between the Greek and Italian.**

**It's great to see the Greek and Italian as neighbors in this corridor there is so much influence from one to the other**

**If you encompass all of the gardens that's when it really sinks in that "WOW" there is tremendous legacy of all these cultures coming together into Cleveland and those who inspired the original ideas for those should not be forgotten.**

What is your hope for the future of the gardens?

*We want to see gardens that represent the make up of our community today American Indian, African American, the French should be heard there is a host of communities that should be present in this corridor.*

*That's long term we need a pavilion a center for people to meet for visitors to park and walk into the gardens finding that location will be a tuff one. More education keeps it open and available and free for the public to experience not just the people from Cleveland but also people from all over.*