

Let Freedom Ring

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By **Georgio Valentino**



Sculptor Joe Segal splits a block of Georgia marble while constructing the “Let Freedom Ring” Chimes Project at Dr. Robert B. Hayling Freedom Park in Lincolnton on Wednesday, March 22, 2018. The interactive public art installation celebrating local Civil Rights leaders and Lincolnton’s black community will be dedicated on April 4, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. [CHRISTINA KELSO/THE RECORD]

On a muggy March afternoon, as the April 4 dedication ceremony approaches, sculptor Joe Segal stands at the site of the Let Freedom Ring Chimes Project and describes his contribution, the reclaimed marble bench “Toward.”

“Seen from a distance, this glowing white arc of stone seems like a perfect form,” says Segal. “But when you get closer, you see that it is a work in progress. It is rough. It’s not totally resolved. There are some jagged edges. It symbolizes the state of civil rights in this country. We’re not there yet but we’re heading in the right direction. Hopefully.”

Segal’s work is but one element of a multifaceted public art installation celebrating the Civil Rights Movement and Lincolnton’s African-American community. The date of its dedication was not chosen at random; it marks the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

The name of Segal’s bench is also a nod to Dr. King, who famously pronounced, “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice.”

The Chimes Project was conceived by local organizations Compassionate St. Augustine and Keep Riberia Pointe Green and supported by the city as well as local fundraising. In addition to Segal’s bench, it boasts an obelisk by Huntsville, Alabama-based artist John “Jahni” Moore and a functioning array of 10-foot-tall pentatonic chimes, all located at the southern tip of Dr. Robert B. Hayling Freedom Park.

The 11-acre passive park is an ideal home for such a project. Established at the confluence of the Matanzas and San Sebastian rivers in 2016, it is named in honor of the local Civil Rights Movement leader who invited Martin Luther King Jr. to St. Augustine in 1964.



[CHRISTINA KELSO/THE RECORD]

The Chimes Project is a natural next step for Keep Riberia Pointe Green, the grassroots organization that fought developers and lobbied city officials to create the park from landfill.

“All of our scenarios for the future of the park included a congregation area,” says Cash McVay, one of the group’s founding members. “That was always our vision. At the same time, the Chimes Project was looking for a home. They were separate efforts that found meaning together.”

It was Caren Goldman, founder and executive director of Compassionate St. Augustine, who pitched the Chimes Project as a follow-up to the 2015-2016 temporary public art installation Obelisk Art 450.

“The core values this project carries forth are the same values that underpinned the Obelisk project,” says Goldman. “Those are the intrinsic values of freedom, democracy, human rights and compassion. To those we’ve added tolerance and civility.”

Together they presented the Chimes Project to the city commission, who approved it unanimously in the summer of 2016. The biggest challenge has been a series of delays caused by hurricanes Matthew and Irma.

For Segal, who has worked with both organizations in years past, the project ticks all the boxes.

“Keep Riberia Pointe Green wanted a sustainable and aesthetically pleasing gathering place,” the sculptor says. “Compassionate St. Augustine wanted to make the project collaborative and inclusive.”

To address the first set of requirements, Segal designed a circular plaza in harmony with the panoramic view. He used marble salvaged from a demolished Jacksonville bank, following the principle of creative reuse on which the park itself is founded. To address the second set of needs, Segal included 55 individual granite tiles featuring artwork created by students of the Boys and Girls Club, the Webster School and St. Johns Youth Academy.

The project is also Segal’s way of paying tribute to the community he has called home since relocating from his native New York over three decades ago.

“I’ve been living in Lincolntonville for 34 years,” he says. “This is where I became an artist. I have always loved the community and culture. I’ve always tried to be very respectful of where I was living and learn as much about history as possible.”

The dedication ceremony is set to take place on site at 11 a.m. April 4.

Compassionate St. Augustine is also developing a complementary fourth-grade curriculum to be used statewide. It will highlight the history and heritage of Lincolntonville, which Goldman suggests is often ignored by touring school groups.