

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

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## Citygarden opens to an approving public

BY ELIZABETHE HOLLAND



July 1, 2009 - Faith Giebe (left), and Kiersten Olds play in fountain in City Garden while visiting Kiersten's mother during her lunch hour. (Brittanie Williams/P-D)

**ST. LOUIS** — For months, occupants of downtown office towers watched construction workers shape a two-block stretch of dirt and grass and heretofore dead-end dreams into an architectural and horticultural melange.

On Wednesday, people swarmed from the towers and elsewhere for a closer look at the opening of Citygarden, an urban sculpture park on the Gateway Mall.

"I think it's wonderful," said Karin Hagaman, 40, of St. Louis, as she gleefully experimented with an interactive, ground-level piece of artwork that incorporates chimes. "It's so good to see all these people here. This was such dead space all that time, and now it's spectacular."

Created by the St. Louis-based Gateway Foundation, Citygarden is a 2.9-acre expanse bordered by Eighth and 10th streets and Market and Chestnut streets. Gateway purchased all of Citygarden's art,

and is paying for construction costs, estimated at \$24 million to \$30 million.

St. Louis owns the land, improved the site and is responsible for providing water and electricity.

For years, the land was considered a sad waste of prime space. But Wednesday, visitors delighted in the makeover: a multi-faceted park divided almost seamlessly into themes representing river bluffs, flood plains and a cultivated urban garden.

Visitors snapped photos of the detailed landscaping and its 24 sculptures by international artists. They ate lunch and noshed on ice cream. Some walked from sculpture to sculpture with maps explaining the artwork. Maps, snapped up from boxes throughout the park, were in big demand during lunchtime.

A large screen drew a throng of onlookers to stare at an odd video of a woman stacking chairs. Some scoffed, but kept watching to see what might happen next.

All ages were drawn to the water exhibits.

Some tested the water in swimsuits. Some kicked off their shoes. Joan Chadwick, kept her leather loafers on as she and two friends hopped from boulder to boulder across a pond.

"We survived," said Chadwick, 58, of St. Louis, with her shoes still dry. "It's awesome. We're thinking about going through the pop-jet fountains next ... I had an idea that this was going to be kind of cool, and it is."

Children clambered up immense white rabbit sculptures at the kid-friendly park, testing their balance on stretches of walls and benches and finding themselves soaked in a dash across a plaza embedded with water spouts that erupted from below with little warning.

Josias Rodriguez, 22, of Monterrey, Mexico, posed for a friend's picture by positioning his arms to make it look as if he was squeezing a giant human head that had been sculpted by Polish artist Igor Mitoraj.

"I think it's my favorite," Rodriguez declared. "It's really good."

Christina Bertenshaw, of Chicago, fancied the piece from a different perspective. The 5-year-old climbed inside the head with her sister, Joanna, and looked out through its pod-shaped eye sockets. Christina had one complaint: "The windows are too small."

Her father, Tom Bertenshaw, mostly gushed about the park, comparing some of its components to the much praised Millennium Park back home. He lauded Citygarden for, among other things, its flow, child-friendliness, use of water, inclusive name, and labels on landscaping throughout the park.

"It would be nicer if it were bigger, but you can never go wrong with a park," said Bertenshaw, 51. "It's something you guys should be proud of. Anything that revives a city without gambling is a good thing."

Don Bresnan, of Union, said he also was impressed, although he, too, had a criticism. "Now they need to fix that at the other end," he said, pointing toward the much-denigrated Richard Serra sculpture at the western end of the Gateway Mall. "Twain," Serra's steel sculpture that was dedicated 27 years ago, seemed a lonely wallflower Wednesday in comparison to its celebrated neighbors just yards away.

"I appreciate art, believe me, but I believe that would look better in front of Southern Scrap," Bresnan said.

Citygarden is free and open 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. The city and the foundation share roles in maintaining a pristine atmosphere.

Gateway will provide security patrols, spokesman Paul Wagman said, but will treat it like a normal city park. He declined to give details.

St. Louis police spokeswoman Erica Van Ross said no officers are specifically assigned to the park, and no special regulations or enforcement efforts apply.

She wrote in an e-mail, "We will handle it just as we do with any other downtown area that has crowds that gather."