

# Revitalization effort focuses on Lincoln Park

---

 [www.pressherald.com/2013/06/17/leader-of-the-park\\_2013-06-17/](http://www.pressherald.com/2013/06/17/leader-of-the-park_2013-06-17/)

By KAREN ANTONACCI Staff Writer

The nearly 147-year-old Lincoln Park, nestled on the southwest corner of Congress and Franklin streets, has a new group of friends who want to give it a face-lift.

Frank E. Reilly describes himself as the “spear carrier” for The Friends of Lincoln Park organization, as he leads the effort to restore Portland’s first park.

## Additional Photos



Frank E. Reilly is shown in Lincoln Park in Portland Thursday. Reilly is heading up a community effort to revitalize the park. Tim Greenway/Staff Photographer



Lincoln Park in Portland, as it appeared circa 1910. Courtesy photo



A bicyclist rides by the fountain in Lincoln Park in Portland on Thursday. The fountain spire is being reforged and will be placed on the fountain when completed. Tim Greenway/Staff Photographer  
Search photos available for purchase: [Photo Store](#) →

“It’s part of the city’s history,” said Reilly, a playwright, among other things, who came to Portland by way of San Francisco 10 years ago.

“It’s so important to the people that live here to restore the city, and to the companies around here and to the tourist business. I mean it’s a draw, a natural draw — a beautiful park.”

Lincoln Park has seen better days, in Reilly’s opinion. He pointed out the cracked sidewalk pavement, the spire missing from the fountain added in 1867, a year after the park was built, and the portion of Franklin Street that used to be park space.

About a year and a half ago, Lincoln Park was home to the Occupy Maine camp, a portion of the larger national Occupy movement that had a variety of goals but generally protested perceived income inequality. Occupy Maine started with as many as 40 tents there in October 2011, although the number dropped off deeper into the winter.

The Occupy group was forced to leave the park after a court order Feb. 1, 2012, after weeks of tension with the city.

Reilly is a history buff and walks through the park three times a week to attend a yoga class on Congress Street.

He decided to start an effort to restore the park after hearing a talk on its history given by the city, he said.

Murray, Plumb & Murray, a law firm two blocks down on the corner of Pearl and Middle streets, is helping Reilly with the effort, partly because the firm has a sentimental tie to the space. In 1973, Peter Murray, Peter Plumb and Stephen Murray were practicing law separately but decided to have lunch in Lincoln Park while waiting on a pending matter at the county courthouse, across Federal Street.

“They talked about it and ultimately decided to form their own law firm, and we have a dedicated little bench near where that lunch happened,” said Christopher Branson, a partner at Murray, Plumb & Murray.

Reilly, city workers and employees from the firm met May 1 to clean up the park, in part to celebrate the firm’s 40th anniversary, Branson said.

Branson is helping Reilly file paperwork with the federal government to obtain tax-exempt status for the organization, which now has about three dozen members, Reilly said.

The park was originally called Phoenix Square, in keeping with its origins, according to Maine State Historian Earle G. Shettleworth Jr. During The Great Fire that raged through the peninsula beginning on July 4, 1866, the Portland Fire Department leveled the buildings on the 2.5-acre square.

Firefighters were hoping to starve and contain the blaze but were unsuccessful. Afterward, the city bought the burned land for \$87,420 to build a public space that could double as a green space for the then-residential area and a firebreak in case disaster struck again. In 1867, the park was renamed in honor of the U.S. president assassinated in 1865.

Now, the park is surrounded by Franklin Street, the Top of the Old Port parking lot, a fire station, and the county courthouse.

Because the park is city property and on the National Register of Historic Places, any changes must be approved by the city, according to Deb Andrews, the historic preservation program manager. Troy Moon, the city’s environmental programs manager, said in an email that the city estimates it would cost about \$470,000 to repair the sidewalks and the wrought iron fence that encircles the park.

The Friends of Lincoln Park are currently searching for an engineering firm to donate services so the water in the fountain could be recycled instead of “going down the drain” as it does currently, Reilly said. They also want to eventually see some updates made to the park, such as light posts.

Reilly said the organization hasn’t set a fundraising goal, but is also accepting donations of services or materials. The Friends of Lincoln Park can be contacted at [LoveLincolnPark.org](http://LoveLincolnPark.org).

*Karen Antonacci can be contacted at 791-6377 or at:*

*[email protected]*

Share

[Read or Post Comments](#)

Were you interviewed for this story? If so, please fill out our [accuracy form](#).

[Send questions/comments to the editors](#).

