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Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy Kicks Off Celebration of 150 Years of Olmsted in Buffalo, The First Urban Park System Designed in America

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Yearlong Celebration to Include Unique Events and Commemorative Opportunities

(Buffalo, NY – *January 16, 2018*) – The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, the first nonprofit organization in the nation to manage and operate an entire urban park system, gathered today to celebrate Frederick Law Olmsted’s legacy as 2018 marks the 150th year of when he came to Buffalo and forever changed the landscape of the community. Joined by dignitaries, the Conservancy unveiled a commemorative logo, and announced a schedule of events designed not only to celebrate this historic time, but also to educate the community on the creation of the Buffalo Olmsted Park System.

“One hundred and fifty years ago Buffalo’s city leadership embraced what would become a legacy endeavor for this great city, and for its great park designers, Olmsted and Vaux. Olmsted proclaimed that ‘a park is a work of art’ and considering those in Buffalo had the foresight to engage this civic investment; essentially today our city holds the master gallery of park artwork in living display. Buffalo was the first to set the trend,” said Stephanie Crockatt, executive director. “Throughout 2018, the Conservancy and our many partners will bring attention and excitement to this exceptional fact. We are holding a dynamic Olmsted-ucational week in late April surrounding Earth Day, Olmsted’s Birthday and Arbor Day, including the launch of a new App of the park system. During mid-August we will celebrate the actual 150-year mark of Olmsted in Buffalo with park system wide activities to culminate the excitement and democracy of these spaces. We will also hold our regular spring luncheon and fall gala, not to mention a few surprises. This sesquicentennial milestone is significant and deserves a celebratory year where we can all take pride in our City, our legacy greenspace, and our special place in national history.”

The design of Buffalo’s park system was a unique milestone in Olmsted’s remarkable career. It was his first full system of interconnected parks and parkways, and represents one of his largest bodies of work. His company’s presence in Buffalo spanned nearly 40 years in completing the system. Olmsted was inspired by Buffalo’s layout, famously declaring it to be the “best planned city...in the United States if not the world.” Buffalo’s entire Olmsted Park System is listed as a cultural landscape on the National Register of Historic Places, and is one of a handful of Olmsted park and parkway systems in the U.S.

“Today’s kick-off celebration to mark 150 years of Frederick Law Olmsted parks and parkways is a milestone for the City of Buffalo, which is enriched by these beautiful green spaces. I look forward to all the upcoming events, which are being planned by the Conservancy to mark this exciting time,” Mayor Byron W. Brown said. “In 2010, my administration forged a public-private partnership with the Conservancy to ensure these treasures are well-maintained. The City of Buffalo will have invested nearly \$25 million for capital improvements in Olmsted Parks through 2018, in addition to other supports and services that help keep these parks among the best in the world.”

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The concept of a series of parks connected by a network of “linear parks” was not only new to Buffalo it was new to America. The Buffalo Olmsted Park System was Olmsted’s first such attempt in the country, and it is arguably his greatest contribution to the city.

“Frederick Law Olmsted’s vision to create a city within a park continues to impress visitors here 150 years after its inception,” Visit Buffalo Niagara President and CEO Patrick Kaler said. “The Buffalo Olmsted Park System winds its way through every visitor’s experience here, as many of our top attractions are within or adjacent to his legacy. We are grateful that this great American visionary left his mark on our city, and that the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is working so diligently to maintain and restore that legacy.”

Buffalo’s relationship with Olmsted began in 1868 when William Dorsheimer, a prominent Buffalo attorney and legislator, sought him out to develop a plan for a park within the city. Olmsted was approached because of his successful completion of Central Park in New York City, Buffalo wanted a similar grand space.

Olmsted visited the city leaders in August of 1868, recommending his plan for not just one park, but also a comprehensive public park system. This vision was backed by a committee of five prominent Buffalonians, including Dorsheimer, Pascal P. Pratt, Sherman S. Jewett, Richard Flach, and Joseph Warren, and was quickly supported by Buffalo’s mayor, William F. Rogers. By 1870, the Olmsted firm was retained to begin final design and construction of the new park system.

“Before Buffalo’s parks were built, Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed Central Park in New York City (1857) and set the standard for great urban parks. When Olmsted came to Buffalo, he did more than design a great park, he designed the first park and parkway system in the nation,” said Kevin Kelly, President of Delaware North Travel Hospitality Division and the local Chairman of the 150th celebration. “This vision connected unique parks with ribbons of green that ran through the city’s residential neighborhoods, bringing the parks to the people. These great men of Buffalo were true innovators, knowing the value of bringing outside expertise in and how to keep an open mind for new ideas and ways of doing things. Imagine if they were afraid of hear other opinions or accept new and unique ideas – what a different place Buffalo would be today – we are grateful for their innovation.”

From the beginning, residents of Buffalo welcomed Olmsted’s innovation with open arms as huge crowds flocked to the new parks. In 1880, for example, more than 5,000 people per day (7,000 on weekends) visited Front Park alone.

“It is a pleasure to be here to celebrate this milestone in Buffalo’s history and to do so as national chairman of the yearlong celebration is a true honor,” stated Doug Blonsky, President and CEO, Central Park Conservancy and Honorary Co-Chair of the 150th Celebration. “I look forward to helping tell the story of this incredible asset. Your Olmsted Parks are community treasures and resources that bring wealth to your region and generate real economic impact. I have seen that firsthand throughout my career with the Central Park Conservancy and as we celebrate this year by building awareness and enhancing education about the Olmsted Parks System in Buffalo, I will help ensure that story is told not only to our neighbors but to the world.”

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About the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy:

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is the first nonprofit organization in the nation to manage and operate an entire urban park system that consists of 850 acres of beautifully designed historic parks, parkways and circles. Celebrating 150 years of Olmsted in Buffalo, The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is a not-for-profit, membership-based, community organization whose mission is to promote, preserve, restore, enhance, and maintain the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed parks and parkways in the Greater Buffalo area for current and future generations. More than 2.5 million people use Buffalo's historic, award-winning Olmsted Park system annually for recreation, relaxation and rejuvenation. The parks were designed by America's first landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted more than 149 years ago. Basic maintenance of the parks has been greatly improved since the 2004 groundbreaking public-private agreement with the City of Buffalo and Erie County. Since that time, the Olmsted Parks Conservancy, now partnering with the City of Buffalo, has retained full responsibility for the management and care of these green spaces which are listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places. Most recently, the American Planning Association recognized Delaware Park as one of the 2014 Great Places in America and The Guardian named the Olmsted park system as one of the best park systems in the world. www.bfloparks.org

The Buffalo Olmsted Park System includes:

Six parks: Cazenovia Park in South Buffalo, Delaware Park in Delaware/Parkside District, Front Park at the Peace Bridge, Martin Luther King, Jr. Park at Fillmore Avenue, Riverside Park at Niagara and Tonawanda Street, and South Park at McKinley Parkway

Seven parkways: Bidwell, Chapin, Lincoln, McKinley, Porter, Red Jacket, and Richmond

Eight landscaped traffic circles: Agassiz, Colonial, Ferry, Gates, McClellan, McKinley, Soldiers, and Symphony