

AFRICAN BURYING GROUND

# Memorial park set to open in May

Multiple events planned to celebrate

**By Jeff McMenemy**

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PORTSMOUTH — City officials have announced a series of events to celebrate the planned completion of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park at the end of May.

The official opening of the park will be highlighted by “a reburial” of the remains recovered from the burial ground on Saturday, May 23 at the Chestnut Street location. The ceremony will start at 9 a.m.

“We are returning the Chestnut Street site to sacred ground; the Portsmouth community has found a meaningful and powerful way of honoring those buried beneath the street,” said Vernis Jackson, chair of the African



Burying Ground Committee, in a statement. “These events are about remembering the dead and returning the remains to the earth, as well as acknowledging the site’s history and celebrating the community-wide effort that has made this project possible.”

Other events will include the African Burying Ground Ancestral Vigil, which will be held at the New Hope Baptist

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Church on May 22, with services at 7 a.m., 7 p.m. and midnight, according to the city.

There will also be an unveiling of the art work at the memorial park at 8:30 a.m. on May 23.

Community Development Director David Moore, one of the people coordinating the celebration, said the African Burying Ground Committee expects “hundreds of people” will turn out for the events in May.

“We are planning on somewhat larger crews than have turned out for past events,” Moore said Wednesday.

Moore acknowledged the city’s long winter has impacted the schedule for completion of the project, but committee members expect to be ready on time.

“Weather is a factor in any construction project but we think we have sufficient contingencies in place,” Moore said.

The committee has raised a total of \$1.1 million for the project, including donations from “individuals, families, businesses and the city of Portsmouth,” Moore said.

The city gave \$250,000 toward the project, Moore said.

The committee is still \$60,000 short of its fundraising goal, Moore said, but they are hoping to raise the remaining monies by “the completion of the project,” he said.

To donate to the project or to learn more about the events in May, visit <http://www.africanburying-groundnh.org/story.html>.

Crews will be returning to the Chestnut Street site of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park in the coming weeks once the snow melts to finish work on the project.

“We have reached out to the abutters to make them aware of the remaining work and schedule,” Jackson said. “They have been incredibly supportive of this project for which we are grateful.”

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## African Burying Ground celebration

**May 20:** On-site event with artist and sculptor Jerome Meadows, Portsmouth Middle School students and the community for artist discussion and to view student-designed tiles in the park’s decorative railing.

**May 22:** African Burying Ground Ancestral Vigil at New Hope Baptist Church on Peverly Hill Road. Services at 7 p.m., midnight and 7 a.m. with opportunities throughout the night for

members of the community to participate.

**May 23:** Unveiling of art work on-site at the burying ground, 8:30 a.m.; reburial ceremony at burying ground, 9 a.m.; public celebration in the Portsmouth Middle School auditorium, 10:30 a.m.; Blind Boys of Alabama concert at The Music Hall, 7 p.m.

For full schedule and details, visit [www.AfricanBuryingGroundNH.org](http://www.AfricanBuryingGroundNH.org)