



Everything New Orleans

## Peristyle in New Orleans City Park will glow after repairs

Published: Wednesday, February 01, 2012, 7:30 PM Updated: Wednesday, February 01, 2012, 9:58 PM



By **Frank Donze, The Times-Picayune**

The Peristyle, one of the oldest and most distinctive architectural elements in **City Park**, is getting some cosmetic surgery. The \$175,000 makeover includes concrete repairs to its ceiling and Ionic columns, pressure washing, a new paint job, and a modern touch: LED lighting.



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Photos by Michael DeMocker

The four lions guarding City Park's Peristyle will also get a makeover.

"The old lady is more than 100 years old, so she needs a lift and tuck," said John Hopper, the park's chief development officer.

Hopper said the facelift also includes "rhinoplasty" for the four, oft-photographed sculpted lions that guard the Dreyfous Avenue attraction overlooking Bayou Metairie.

The project, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of February, is being paid for largely with money raised by the

Friends of City Park.

An example of neoclassical architecture, the Peristyle made its debut as a dancing pavilion in 1907 during an era when outdoor concerts were popular in New Orleans.

The Peristyle was "conceived as an elegant sheltered platform where finely dressed ladies and gentlemen could dance to the strains of romantic night music," according to a history of City Park written by the park's volunteer archivist Sally Reeves and her husband, Bill.

"Its spaced columns, or peristyle, preserved an open-air effect." It also "allowed dancers to be seen and music heard, and provided a framed view of the moon's reflection on adjacent lagoon waters," the historical account says.

When the pavilion opened, the concert season expanded from two to six months.

But over the years, the local fascination with dancing beneath the stars waned.

Park administrators adapted, using the space to host everything from weddings, cocktail parties and picnics to dog shows, square dancing and political events.

"It's been a little bit of everything," Hopper said, noting that the Peristyle also has been featured in movies, most recently in the New Orleans-shot "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

The popularity of the venue, which rents for \$575 a day, has endured.

With the exception of the holiday season, when Celebration in the Oaks takes over the park, officials say it is booked nearly every Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Designed by architect and then-City Park board member Paul Andry, the construction price tag for the Peristyle was \$15,330.

That would barely cover the cost of the new-fangled addition that soon will illuminate the pavilion after dark.

Though on a much smaller scale, the LED system planned for the inside of each column will be an attraction similar what is seen outside the Superdome nightly, with color-changing lights marking different occasions, including the Fourth of July and Mardi Gras.

"Depending on the event or the season," Hopper said, "it has the potential to be anything from a classically lit Peristyle to something with pizzazz."

*Frank Donze can be reached at [fdonze@timespicayune.com](mailto:fdonze@timespicayune.com) or 504.826.3328.*



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A young scooter rider passes the Peristyle, which is surrounded by construction scaffolding.