

'Artist' at work . .

. wall is his canvas

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Edgerton Park, the former estate of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Brewster, who left their 22 acre expanse to the City of New Haven over a quarter of a century ago, rests on the Hamden-New Haven border. This former 18th-Century English-style park built in 1909 is sitting there quietly falling apart. Its bridge is close to collapse. Its paths are broken and overgrown. Its lights are out and its very walls, massive, impressive stone blocked walls which run three quarters of a mile around the property are in such disrepair that the stones are dangerously loose and close to falling down.

A non-profit group, The Edgerton Garden Center, Inc., has taken on the task

intensive repointing," explains Capasso. "This will involve removing all the deteriorated mortar between the stones and then repointing them with fresh mortar and, at the same time, maintain the original historic look of the wall." Capasso said the most difficult part of the job was to find the exact color of red sand to blend with the mortar so that it would match the color of the original mortar used in 1909. "I had to look everywhere to find the perfect color of red sand," he admits, "but finally I discovered an exact match in a mortar supply company in North Haven." Privately, Capasso admits he was "a little worried for a while, but when I found the sand, it wasn't just close to the

tion/repair, provided \$40,000 for the same purpose was raised from elsewhere. Within six weeks after we submitted the application in December, we had raised the \$40,000 from the private sector, but we will not receive the matching \$20,000 from the historical commission until Guiseppe completes his work and we, as a non-profit group, can demonstrate to them that we have invested \$40,000 in physical restoration and repair and meet the standards of such work set forth by the commission." DeVane adds that "Guiseppe's great attention to detail, like finding the exact right color of sand, are the types of standards the commission looks for. They want the original historical look and integrity of the wall and park to be maintained and so does our group. The

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of restoring the park at an estimated cost of over \$2 million. The first priority of this restoration group is to restore the east wall along Whitney Avenue.

"While the wall may not strike you at first glance as the item most in need of repair," explains Margaret DeVane, secretary of the non-profit group, "it is unquestionably the first place to start in restoring Edgerton Park. The stones are so loose they qualify as being dangerous, and, after all, without the wall, you wouldn't really have Edgerton Park. I say this because the wall is absolutely crucial to maintain the integrity of the Victorian design of this park. It was built to create a sense of being in the country and, without the walls, the park would be exposed to busy Whitney Avenue and all the surrounding urban neighborhoods, completely destroying the tranquility intended by the park's original design."

East Haven master mason Giuseppe Capasso, 37, won the City of New Haven's bid to begin the restoration of the east wall of Edgerton last June 18th. He began work on the wall during the first week of August.

"The major problem with the wall is that the stones are so very loose they need

right color, it was the perfect color." Capasso is an admitted perfectionist in such matters of detail.

Working an average of ten hours a day with the two employees of his small family-owned masonry company, G & L Capasso Restoration, Capasso is treating each stone and its repointing and mortaring as if they were precious art works. "I like to restore historic sites," he says, "and I have a genuine respect for the work of the original builders. I want to feel as if they would approve of what I am doing as I restore the work they did many years ago."

Capasso is only restoring a section of the east wall right now. "Unfortunately, I can only do one-fourth of the three-quarter mile wall at this time," he says. "They decided on this section of the east wall because it was in the state of the worst decay and posed the most immediate danger of collapse."

DeVane explains that "Last August Edgerton was placed on the Connecticut Register of historical sites and then, in October, the park became eligible for a 1:2 matching grant - the Connecticut Historical Commission would commit \$20,000 to physical structure restora-

\$40,000 we have now, however, will only pay for restoring one-fourth of the three-quarter mile wall which encircles the park."

DeVane says of Capasso, "We are so fortunate to have an artist like Guiseppe doing the restoration. We looked at some of his previous restoration work, such as Lighthouse Point, and his obvious attention to the smallest details was evident to us from the start. He was the perfect master mason for our project. Only an artist would go to such pains to match the original work so closely as he has been doing, and his dedication to restoring the wall to its original historical appearance and strengthen it at the same time is rarely found among tradesmen of any kind these days."

Capasso was trained by a great master mason as a boy in his small home town of Mersacola, Italy. The son of a farmer with six acres, Capasso admits he never liked farming. "But when I was twelve years old, a man, a Mr. Philip DeLucia, captured my imagination and my interest. My mother had hired him to work on our house, and I watched him for days as he built and repaired. I knew at once that that was what I wanted to do for work." Capasso asked DeLucia if he could be his apprentice and DeLucia agreed to train him. For five years, Capasso studied and worked under DeLucia. He started at age twelve and left DeLucia when he was seventeen because his parents decided to move to America.