



Press Release
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A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS: \$10M MILLION ANNIVERSARY CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS LAUNCH AT SWEDISH COTTAGE

*As the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre approaches its **150th anniversary** in 2027, the Historic House Trust of New York City, City Parks Foundation, and NYC Parks announce a major capital improvement effort to preserve and enhance the beloved **Central Park landmark**.*

On **Friday, March 20, 2026**, the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre celebrated **World Puppetry Day** and 150 years in Central Park with a **groundbreaking ceremony** emceed by puppets Garth (and his puppeteer Tau Bennett) and Gino Vino (and his puppeteer Sebastiano Ricci). The event launched a major \$10.4 million exterior and interior renovation of the building, setting the stage for a vibrant era of renewal and opening a new chapter in its story. **Manhattan Borough President Brad Hoylman-Sigal** presented a proclamation at the ceremony, declaring Friday, March 20, 2026 “The Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre Appreciation Day” in the Borough of Manhattan. Located in the heart of Central Park, the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre has delighted generations of children and families with its distinctive marionette performances and intimate storytelling. This anniversary initiative will ensure it continues to do so for generations to come.

Originally constructed in 1876, the storybook structure was built in Sweden from native pine and cedar, dismantled, and shipped to the United States to serve as Sweden’s pavilion at the **Centennial International Exhibition** in Philadelphia. **Frederick Law Olmsted**, the designer of Central Park, was so impressed by the building’s craftsmanship and utility that he secured funding from the City of New York to purchase it. In 1877, the structure was dismantled once again and reassembled on the west side of Central Park.

Over the years, the Swedish Cottage served many purposes before becoming a **marionette workshop** in 1947 and, in 1973, the theatre New Yorkers know and love today. Since then, the theatre has introduced countless young audiences to the performing arts through affordable, **family-friendly productions** that celebrate creativity, craftsmanship, and cultural heritage. With the last major renovation occurring **30 years ago**, it’s now time to reimagine and enhance everything this historic landmark has to offer.

“New Yorkers come to Central Park not only to enjoy its natural beauty, but also to experience the vibrant and unique cultural offerings that make it a true reflection of our city. The Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre has entertained and inspired generations of visitors, and this ambitious renovation project both preserves its physical beauty as a treasured historic house and modernizes its theatrical space,” said **NYC Parks Commissioner Tricia Shimamura**. “I’m grateful to our partners at the Historic House Trust and City Parks Foundation for their collaboration as we work here and across the five boroughs to improve and steward the remarkable public spaces New Yorkers love.”

About the Capital Improvements

The planned renovations will invest in critical upgrades that preserve the Cottage’s **historic character** while significantly **improving the experience** for audiences, artists, and staff, and enabling more **flexible**

use of the theater for performances serving all ages. Planned improvements include restoration of the building's exterior and interior features, modernization of theatrical and technical infrastructure, building mechanical upgrades, accessibility enhancements, and sustainability upgrades to ensure the theatre remains vibrant and welcoming for generations to come.

The Historic House Trust is overseeing the initial phases of work to rehabilitate the historic exterior of the Cottage in partnership with consulting designer [John G. Waite Associates, Architects](#) and Sienia Construction. The \$3.5M restoration is made possible through generous support from the Office of the Mayor and New York City Council. "For 150 years, the Swedish Cottage has sparked imagination and joy, carrying generations of visitors into a storybook world of craft and artistry," said **Giulietta Fiore, Executive Director of the Historic House Trust**. "This restoration honors that legacy while preparing the theatre for today's audiences and tomorrow's storytellers."

The upcoming interior renovation, to be managed by City Parks Foundation, with conceptual design by CharcoalBlue theatrical consultants, will include a new, state-of-the-art auditorium that features a flexible stage and puppetry bridge, new seating, new A/V systems, and enhanced acoustical treatment; updated backstage areas and improved public spaces with digital signage and museum displays; and improved technical, mechanical and electrical systems.

"Investing in the Swedish Cottage is an investment in the city's cultural future," said **Heather Lubov, Executive Director of City Parks Foundation**. "These improvements will allow us to continue introducing young theatergoers to the magic and craftsmanship of marionettes, while also expanding the capacity of this gem of a building — in the heart of the city's most visited park — to reach more audiences and present a wider array of performances, including readings, musical showcases, lectures, intimate rehearsals and so much more. We are so excited by the many possibilities we see for this intimate space."

Funding the Future

Generous public funding for the interior improvements has been provided by Congressman Jerrold Nadler; jointly through New York State Senator Liz Krueger and then-New York State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal (now Manhattan Borough President); through New York City Council Member Gale Brewer; and through then-Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine (now New York City Comptroller). City Parks Foundation continues to seek private support to supplement public funding.

Congressman Jerrold Nadler said:

"The Swedish Cottage is a magical place for New York families, and I am proud to provide \$3.15 million in federal funds to ensure it remains so for generations to come. Central Park is where so many of our children learn to ride a bike or spend an afternoon at the playground, and the Swedish Cottage is where many of those same children get their very first taste of art and culture. By improving accessibility and modernizing the building's infrastructure, we are making sure this beloved landmark is safe, welcoming, and ready to delight audiences for the next 150 years."

New York State Senator Liz Krueger added:

"I am delighted that the City Parks Foundation is breaking ground today on an ambitious renovation of the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre. The Marionette Theatre is a beloved and unique part of the fabric of New York City that offers free and reduced-cost performances to tens thousands of

children each year, and the work that is starting today will ensure that it will be able to continue doing so well into the future."

Council Member Gale A. Brewer remarked:

"Congratulations to NYC Parks and City Parks Foundation. The Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre is a treasure in Central Park and New York City. As we look ahead to its 150th anniversary, it is worth reflecting on the generations of families who have come here and the joy it continues to bring to children. I was glad to support funding for its restoration. Preserving historic institutions like this is important. They are part of our history and continue to serve the public in a way that is accessible and meaningful for all ages."

New York City Comptroller Mark Levine said:

"The Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre is a Central Park staple, and has been an incredibly enriching part of the Upper West Side, Manhattan, and New York City community for 150 years. I am so proud to have played a role in supporting its renovation in my former post as Manhattan Borough President, and I am thrilled to see those efforts come to fruition today as we break ground on renewed life for this treasured institution. When we invest in cultural spaces like this, we invest in a city that prioritizes community. I am thankful to City Parks Foundation, Historic House Trust and the Parks Department for making this happen, and I look forward to the next several generations of vibrant storytelling at The Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre."

Impacts & Programming

During the approximately 12-18 months of construction for the exterior restoration, the Cottage will be open for performances of its newest production, [*Little Red's Hood*](#), on **weekends only**. The Swedish Cottage may close completely at certain times during the interior renovation. The **PuppetMobile will continue uninterrupted**, as it has each summer. Stay updated on performance schedules and potential closures @cpfnyc.

Little Red's Hood, featuring a dozen hand-made marionettes crafted by the Cottage's expert puppeteers, spotlights Little Red, a smart, young city dweller who is obsessed with her smartphone. Wulfric, a misunderstood wolf with a sweet tooth, crosses paths with Little Red on her travels to deliver cupcakes to her Grandma, and that's when the trouble begins. The show offers a comical lesson on the importance of disconnecting from our digital lives and enjoying real life moments with friends and family.



About the Partners

Historic House Trust of New York City is a nonprofit organization that provides preservation expertise and advocacy for 23 publicly owned historic house museums across all five boroughs, including the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre. Working in collaboration with NYC Parks and community-based nonprofit partners, the Historic House Trust is committed to the long-term preservation and public accessibility of these irreplaceable New York City landmarks.

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City Parks Foundation is dedicated to invigorating and transforming parks into dynamic, vibrant centers of urban life through sports, arts, community engagement and capacity building, and environmental education programs for all New Yorkers. City Parks Foundation's programs — located in 330 parks, recreation centers and public schools across New York City — reach nearly 300,000 people and organizations each year. NYC Parks and the Foundation jointly operate the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre and its traveling CityParks PuppetMobile, which have delighted generations of audiences.

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NYC Parks is the steward of more than 30,000 acres of land — 14 percent of New York City — including more than 5,000 individual properties ranging from Coney Island Beach and Central Park to community gardens and Greenstreets. We operate more than 800 athletic fields and nearly 1,000 playgrounds, 1,800 basketball courts, 550 tennis courts, 65 public pools, 51 recreational facilities, 15 nature centers, 14 golf courses, and 14 miles of beaches. We care for 1,200 monuments and 23 historic house museums.

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