

CNHI Newspapers

The Turtle is shining bright for the holidays

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A bit of holiday glow is now shining on the Turtle from nearby Cataract House Park.

A 14-foot blue spruce Christmas tree was donated to the park thanks to National Grid.

The tree was initially on the property near an upcoming substation construction project in Buffalo.

Unable to move the tree to another part of that property, National Grid officials sought a place to donate the tree for the holidays. After a National Grid employee posted about the tree's availability, local community leaders working with state park officials facilitated the tree's new holiday home in downtown Niagara Falls.

A National Grid team cut the tree and delivered it to Cataract House Park on Dec. 17. The public is invited to visit the tree throughout the holiday season and explore the surroundings of Cataract House Park, the Turtle and downtown Old Falls Street. The park is located at 110 Old Main St.

Representatives from Niagara Falls State Park, the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center and Friends of the Turtle are hoping the tree spreads extra holiday cheer to visitors and residents alike. Cataract House Park has a significant history. It was named after the 1825 Cataract House Hotel, which once stood on the property where a wait staff of people of African descent facilitated one of the most important stops on the Underground Railroad. Many freedom seekers found freedom only hundreds of feet through its doors at the base of Niagara Falls.

The land upon which the Cataract House Park resides is the traditional territory and ancestral home of the Neutral Nations, the Anishinaabe Nations and the Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

After the Cataract House Hotel burned down in 1945, the area became a park. A few decades later in the 1970s, the Native American Center for the Living Arts, commonly known as the Turtle, was envisioned, designed, built and operated from 1981 through 1995. The building's symbolic design refers to the Haudenosaunee Creation Story in which the world was created on the back of a sea turtle. Throughout its time as an operating arts and cultural center, the Turtle has become a distinct visual feature of the area fronting Niagara Falls State Park.

No longer open to the public, it is awaiting a second chance to once again serve as a space for Indigenous creativity, celebration and homecoming.

To learn more, visit niagaraturtle.org.