

Two Tons of Fun: “Two-Ton” Tony Galento Plaza Day

July 19, 2010
Orange, NJ

HANDS, Inc.
15 S. Essex St.



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Dear Orange,

I am Tony Galento Plaza. I am located at the Orange train station. I am named for a local boxing legend. Right now you rush past me to hop on your train or leave me quickly to get in your car and drive off. You don't even check me out while you sit there waiting. But I could be so much more to you. Plazas around the world with my size have markets, outdoor dining, picnics, festivals, concerts. They are places where neighbors meet and visitors relax. Give me a chance. Let me be your safe, beautiful public space. Always,

(Two-Ton) Tony Galento Plaza

How do we transform a parking lot into a plaza? What do commuters want to see at the Orange train station?

These were the questions we set out to answer with a daylong festival at Tony Galento Plaza. Our interest in the plaza developed during a comprehensive planning process for the Heart of Orange. The University of Orange met with planners and studied the entire area bordered by Main Street to the north, Scotland Road to the west, Central Avenue to the south, and Oakwood Avenue to the east.

Just north of Orange Train Station are two parking lots and a grassy knoll. The Heart of Orange planning committee went there with a planner from Paris, Michel Cantal-Dupart, in April 2009. "This plaza is the key to the city's future. But," -- and as he said this he turned and waved at the garbage-strewn parking lots with their scraggly bushes and sagging chain link fences -- "Would you call this a welcome?"

The Heart of Orange Planning Committee took in the sight through the eyes of our distinguished visitor and we had to admit, it was not very welcoming. Once Michel Cantal-Dupart had explained its importance we were able to appreciate the emphasis that other planners had given to the spot.

The JGSC Group, while consulting on Main Street, told the city, "We identified two great needs of this city that could be resolved with a single stroke. The city needs a public square. In addition, the city needs to bring together the downtown train station with commerce on Main Street. We propose to resolve these two needs with the creation of a public square in Tony Galento Plaza."

Landscape architect Tim Delorm is another planner who finds this area to have wonderful potential for our future. "It's a remarkably large area," he pointed out, "with enough room for a new set of buildings and a great central square."

If the planners are right, then Tony Galento Plaza is a really important place. And taking it from its current drab state is a really important project that can put Orange on the map as a dynamic little city. In order to make the best possible plan, lots of people need to get in-

volved: people who walk through, businesses located in the area, commuters using Orange Train Station, and the key local institutions like the Post Office and the Library.

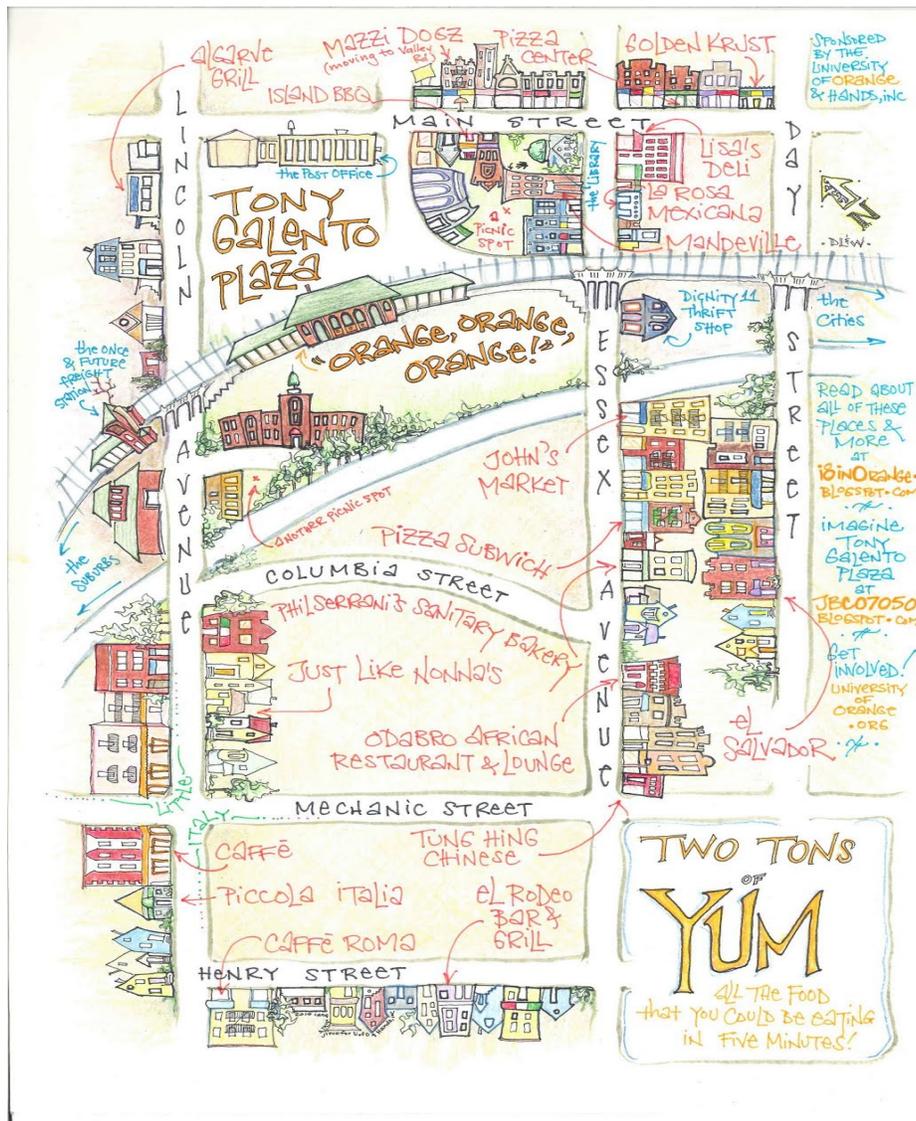
In order to get started, the University of Orange and HANDS, Inc., organized “Two Ton Tony Galento Plaza Day” on July 19, 2010, with support from Mandeville Restaurant, Golden Krust Restaurant, ORNG Ink, and Garden State Urban Farms.

Who Was Tony Galento?

Tony Galento was a heavyweight boxer, famous as much for his sense of adventure as for his prowess in the ring. He once fought a bear and another time he ate 50 hotdogs before a fight. After retiring from the ring, he ran a bar and a boxing club in Orange. He is remembered by many local residents. “Even late in life, when he was in a wheelchair, he had a great sense of humor,” one local resident told us. “I’ll always remember him for his laugh.”

Two Tons of Fun

We wanted to bring the spirit of this famous Son of Orange to the plaza that bears his name. In preparation for the festive day in his honor, we asked artists to help. We asked architects to help us create street furniture. We asked restaurants and urban farmers to help us provide delicious food to passers-by. One of the most exciting endeavors was the creation of “Two Tons of Yum,” a hand-drawn map of the restaurants that ring the plaza.



We used a survey that asked the following question:

- Imagine Tony Galento Plaza: right now Tony Galento Plaza is mostly used as a parking lot. But if we could keep the same amount of parking AND have a beautiful plaza, what would you like to see?

The day began on the eastbound side of the tracks when we surprised morning commuters with free coffee and newspapers. We asked them if they would fill out our survey, asking what they would like to see at the train station and in the plaza.

The Grassy Knoll was transformed into a Picnic Nook with the addition of benches and chairs, all made for the occasion. The artists arrived with full size drawings of Tony Galento and the Bear. These were posted on the large white wall that overlooks the Nook. People arrived with their lunches, and enjoyed eating al fresco. People discovered the drawings and wanted to take their pictures with Tony and the Bear, which turned out to be a lot of fun. People pretended to be knocked out by Tony or to ROAR like Bear.

In the evening, we offered homecoming commuters tasty food from Mandeville and Golden Krust, lemon ice from Caffe Roma, as well as fresh vegetables from Garden State Urban Farms. Many stopped to chat and eat and fill out our survey.

What was it like to experience the plaza?

Tony Galento Plaza is a charming place to spend a summer day. In the morning we appreciated the beautiful and historic train station. The train conductors gave us a cheerful greetings. The commuters were an interesting group of people with many connections to the Oranges. The shady, grassy Picnic Nook had room for lots of us to enjoy lunch, and plenty of people passing. Many stopped to say hello, take a book from our “book nook,” pose for a photo with Tony and Bear, or to fill out a survey. The benches gave it a cheerful, parklike atmosphere. In the evening, we got to know the westbound side of the train station, just as charming as the eastbound side. The station building on that side is closed but we all agreed that it had lots of potential for housing a welcoming pub. We brought the drawings of Tony and the Bear and even people posed for photos. The spirit of Tony Galento – enterprising boxer and humorous townsman – gave a special character to the day that we all took away with us. It gave us a much better idea of what the plaza could eventually be.



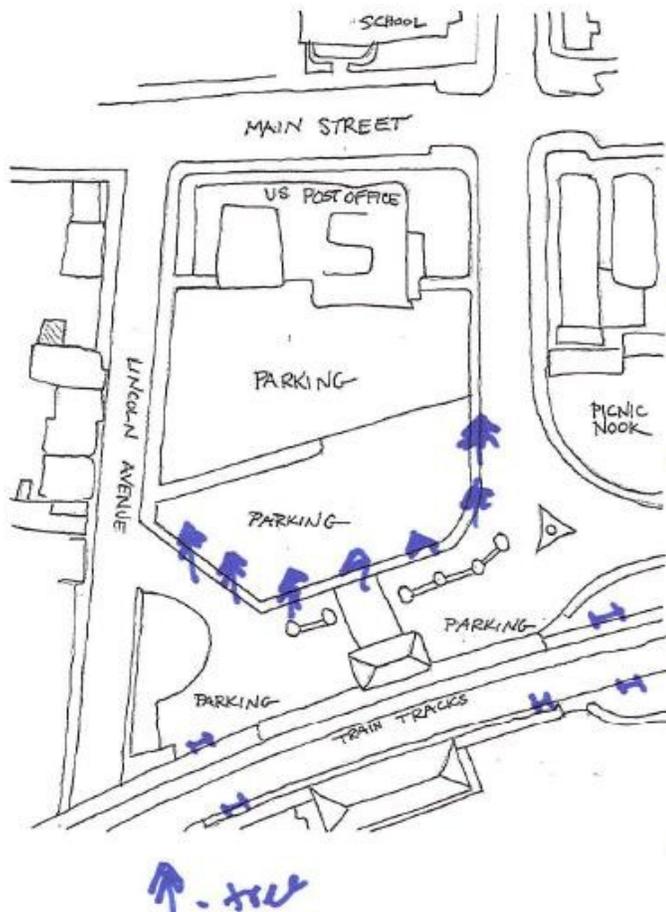
IMAGINE TONY GALENTO PLAZA DAY 2010



What do people want to see?

Ninety-one people filled out our survey. They want the station buildings opened and would like some services, especially coffee, newspapers and dry cleaning. They would like it to be cleaner, especially the tunnel that leads from one side of the train to the other. They yet don't think of it as a place to stop, but many were open to the idea of a pub or restaurant. Here are some of their responses:

1. More benches
2. Coffee, newspaper, pastry // drycleaners // Pub wouldn't work [because] commuters coming & going
3. Down below = horrible. The smell. Open waiting area.
4. Bottom area = dangerous. [Put a] mural w/good message // guys pee there.
5. Murals // wall art: tribal // floral decoration
6. Open the stations for hot + cold weather // put businesses in, coffee, food, etc.
7. Keep waiting room open longer // Make it more attractive
8. Trees, walkways // Reopen the station // More lights // More NJTransit + Orange Police walking patrols // Flowers // Bike paths // More parking // appreciate lighting
9. Flowers // a mural
10. A new paint job – add some color
11. Clean up that tunnel. It smells! Better platform – the step down is too steep.
12. [drawing: park at picnic nook]
13. School (circled on map) // parks and restaurants [sic]
14. Teenage café or pub
15. [picnic nook shaded green]
16. Food plaza // concessions
17. Keep it clean // more business



Imagine Tony Galento Plaza

Right now Tony Galento Plaza is mostly used as a parking lot. But, if we could keep the same amount of parking places AND have a beautiful plaza, what would you like to see in the plaza?

- Clock visible from both platforms
- open bathrooms on both sides.
- water fountain.
- Station open longer in the winter.
- more benches

We concluded: We Need A Real Plaza for Tony!

At the end of Two Ton Tony Galento Plaza Day, we thought, “What could be less like our legendary hero than the current plaza that bears his name?” We concluded, “We need a plaza worthy of Tony Galento’s name: a place for fun, and meeting people, and enjoying a good laugh.”

The Heart of Orange Plan has made that one of its 21 goals. Here’s how we get there:

- 1) Create a planning process that includes all of the people who are interested in the area
- 2) Develop a vision that everyone likes
- 3) In meantime, start having fun in TGP with movies and picnics and other kinds of activities.



