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An artist's rendering of the Nancy Best Fountain in Klyde Warren Park, which will feature the world's tallest water jets. Construction on the \$10 million project will begin in the summer with completion expected in December 2021.(Courtesy of Klyde Warren Park)

By [Cheryl Hall](#)

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Nancy Best, a longtime board member of Klyde Warren Park, and her educational entrepreneur husband, Randy, are giving the park and the city a \$10 million Christmas gift unlike anything the world has ever experienced.

And it's expected to be ready for a holiday unwrapping next year.

The Dallas couple's foundation is paying for a next-generation, interactive, "super fountain" that will shoot jets of water up to 95 feet into the air — higher than any other immersive fountain in the world.

It will be one of the most distinctive free water parks in the country.

The water will come down like raindrops, while kids — and adults — play safely in a shallow wading pool or people-watch from the splashless sidelines.

Every evening, the fountain will come alive with an hourly aquatic "fireworks" display of soaring water that's lit by a kaleidoscope of colors and dancing to soundtracks — a show that will be visible for miles.

The Nancy Best Fountain will be at the Pearl Street entrance on the east side of the park where the big red Christmas ornaments are this year.

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It seems destined to become a global icon of Dallas and a beacon to downtown.

“The only way to describe this fountain is spectacular,” said Jody Grant, chairman of the board of the Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation. With just a tad of Texas bravado, Grant likens it to the nightly light show at the Eiffel Tower. “When you look at aerial photos of Dallas in the future, we firmly believe this is the ‘blimp shot’ you will see.”

Construction of the triangular project — with each side being roughly 100 feet long — will begin in the summer, and completion is slated for December.

“One thing that is great about this project is that it won’t take long,” said Randy Best, a longtime park supporter. “Most things you wonder if you’ll live to see them. This is a quickie.”



Klyde Warren Park board member Nancy Best and her husband, Randy Best, are giving the park and the city a \$10 million Christmas gift that is paying for a next-generation, interactive, “super fountain.”

The fountain is being created by Los Angeles-based Fluidity Design Consultants, led by Jim Garland, who’s been called “the Elton John of fountains” and a maestro of “spray, splash and sound.”

Garland is well acquainted with Klyde Warren Park, having designed the park’s three existing water features.

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He and his team were responsible for the two granite fountains that span four blocks in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the \$90 million redo of the main fountain garden at Longwood Gardens, the former estate of industrialist Pierre S. du Pont in Kennett Square, Pa.



Jim Garland, founder of Fluidity Design Consultants in Los Angeles, transformed the main fountain garden of Longwood Gardens, the former estate of industrialist Pierre S. du Pont in Kennett Square, Pa. The redo, which cost \$90 million, is considered an aquatic masterpiece.
(Daniel Traub)

But Garland has never designed a fountain quite like this.

“It’s a musical fountain with choreographed changing colored lights that you can literally dance in and be a part of,” Garland said from his L.A. office. “We haven’t seen that before.

“It’s also going to make very, very high jets — you might even say dangerously high,” he said with a laugh. “Heights that nobody’s ever seen before. It’s an important evolution in the world of fountains. There’s no other fountain like this one. It really is a best-in-class.”

A dab of danger

He’s pleased that a bit of mayhem has been added to the mix.

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Jim Garland is the founder of L.A.-based Fluidity Design Consultants.

“We’re working with a play consultant on another job and she said something we’d never heard before: ‘If a play environment is too safe, kids find it boring. It’s got to be exciting. A little feeling of danger adds a lot to the fun,’ ” Garland said. “This will definitely have that. Once you get past that moment of fear of seeing raindrops from so high in the sky, then it’s great and exciting.”

He said he isn’t exactly sure how high the spouts will soar. They’ll easily go at least 55 feet. But his company has just found new technology that puts 95 feet in the realm of possibility.

The jets will be automatically controlled to account for wind conditions. That will spare people in the park who don’t want to be inundated and keep the windows from getting wet in the neighboring Arts District buildings.

The wading pool will be a quarter-inch deep over a nonskid, polished surface.

Garland figures he and his Fluidity crew have created more than 200 mega-fountains and play splash pads around the globe.

He worked with Michael Vergason Landscape Architects in Alexandria, Va., on the three fountains at Sundance Square in Fort Worth that opened in 2013.

Vergason says the popularity of interactive fountains in public spaces has grown exponentially. “They have a great effect on kids, and kids bring in families. So it becomes a great activator,” he said.

The ones in Sundance Square have changed the way people use downtown Fort Worth.

“Water features work particularly well in Texas because it not only is magical in the way it attracts people to it, but in a serious way it is a cooling element. Water makes a lot of sense from an experiential standpoint,” he said.

Vergason is blown away by the height of the Klyde Warren jets. “Ninety-five feet? That’s monumental,” he said.

The main Sundance Square fountain has 264 vertical jets that go from zero to about 12 feet. “The height is modest by comparison,” he said. “Jim’s the best fountain designer in the U.S. for sure.”

The mechanics of the Nancy Best Fountain will be secured and camouflaged by three stainless steel tree sculptures in a middle island. “They prevent people from getting into the danger area,” Garland said. “But more than that, they’re going to be extremely beautiful.”

The fountain is part of the park’s ambitious \$100 million Phase 2.0 project. It comes on the heels of an announcement in October that Dallas-based Jacobs, a global technology and engineering giant, is donating \$8 million to add a 36,000-square-foot multi-use green space on the western edge of the expansion.

When completed in 2024, Jacobs Lawn will host markets, festivals and other recreational community events. In the winter, it will be converted into an ice rink being designed in conjunction with the Dallas Stars.

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Energy billionaire Kelcy Warren, who gave \$10 million to name the park after his son in 2012, has given an additional \$20 million toward the expansion.

For anyone who doubts the economic impact that the park has had on Dallas, Jody Grant offers these stats: In 2013, Dallas County appraised the private properties that surround the park at \$2.5 billion for tax purposes. Today it's valued at \$6.2 billion.

That translates into an incremental increase of \$73.6 million being split among the Dallas Independent School District, Dallas College (formerly the Dallas Community College District), Parkland Hospital and the city, he said.

Nancy Best joined the park's board several years before it opened in 2012 and was instrumental in the schematic stages.

"Sheila [Grant, co-founder of Klyde Warren and who is married to Jody Grant] and I have talked about a signature fountain for years," she said.

"As you know, *The Dallas Morning News* said we are one of the best water parks in the city, which was never our intention. We wanted a fountain that would be beautiful, fun and interactive and have music that adults would love but that children could play in and love.

"It would bring people to the east end of the park and just be a great thing for families. And that's what we're going to have."

Sheila Grant says she's been walking on air ever since the Bests told the Grants about the gift. "It's important to emphasize this was their idea, and not a request, which makes the gift that much more touching and meaningful."

The gift couldn't come at a better time, she added. "It is a symbol of hope at the end of 2020 — a traumatic and difficult year. What a fabulous Christmas gift — one that will never be forgotten."



Kids play in the water feature at Klyde Warren Park's Children's Park. Jim Garland designed the park's three existing water features. (Courtesy of Klyde Warren Park)