

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 10, 2004

## Stomp all over the city on a monster of a map

By Murray Dubin

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Walk all over people.

Step on Southwest Philadelphia, waltz over the Wissahickon, and give Kensington a little kick.

Go ahead. Do a little spin atop Rittenhouse Square.

At the newest exhibit at the Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia, the city is literally at your feet.

A detailed Rand McNally 2004 city street map - including some of the Pennsylvania suburbs and South Jersey, as well - covers the floor of a large exhibit room inside the city's history museum.

Actually, the map of more than 1,600 square feet is the floor. Visitors can walk on Lincoln Financial Field, tromp through Pennypack Park, or stride the 11 miles of Broad Street - in about 20 steps.

It is a strange urban perspective, making every person a Gulliver and the city of 130 square miles compact and manageable.

"It's pretty amazing, and that seems to be the common reaction," said Keith Ragone, creative director of Assemblage, the design studio that helped make the map a reality.

The museum needed something with aah and oomph, something that said Philadelphia, would be permanent, and would "bore neither adults or children," said Viki Sand, the Atwater's executive director. "The map will

provide the basic organizing platform for every exhibit we do."

The biggest piece of cartography ever done by Rand McNally, the map was fabricated by a Canadian company and inspired by a famous Philadelphia figure with the initials B.F. - no, not Benjamin Franklin.

And early next year, the map will inspire a new game.

The map, on a specially made Formica base, is the centerpiece of the new "Experience Philadelphia!" exhibition, which asks some very basic questions about the city, such as "Where in the world is Philadelphia?"

Among the answers are 666 miles from Chicago, 4,375 miles from Rome and, at 39 degrees, 59 minutes and 53 seconds north, about the same latitude as Ankara, Turkey.

But before there was an exhibition, the museum needed a core. "In this 175-year-old building, we did not have a space for school groups, to give a talk or to show a movie," Sand said. "We also needed an orientation to Philadelphia."

And, she said, the Atwater needed "an anchor."

Easy to say, but how do you find that one exhibit that will attract everyone, the urban equivalent of the walk-through heart at the Franklin Institute?

You listen to your friends.

Let's backtrack to 1999 and meet Liz Dow, president of Leadership Inc. and an Atwater board member. Leadership Inc. mobilizes business leaders to serve the community.

Dow knew a man named Medard Gabel and had him come in to coordinate a leadership class' participation in the World Game, a way of making people more aware of global economic interdependence by placing them on a huge, basketball-court-size map of the world.

Gabel and the late Buckminster Fuller - our B.F. - created the World Game, and Gabel headed the World Game Institute for many years.

"That was the inspiration for what's on the floor of the Atwater Kent today," Gabel said. "It has power as



a learning tool, to see people walking on that floor and seeing across boundaries, not just geography, but culture and economic."

The World Game map was made of laminated paper and had to be rolled up and transported in a large tube. "People had to take their shoes off," he said.

Dow tried to get funding for a World Game remade for Philadelphia several years ago, but it never happened. But she didn't let the idea die, and she put Gabel and Sand together last year.

For Sand, the idea of a map answered all her problems about an orienting anchor exhibit, except for one.

What sort of map? From the city Planning Department? Topographical? Specially made by a cartographer?

While everyone struggled with the perfect map, Sand, who has lived in the city for less than three years, decided she needed one for herself and bought a Rand McNally city map.

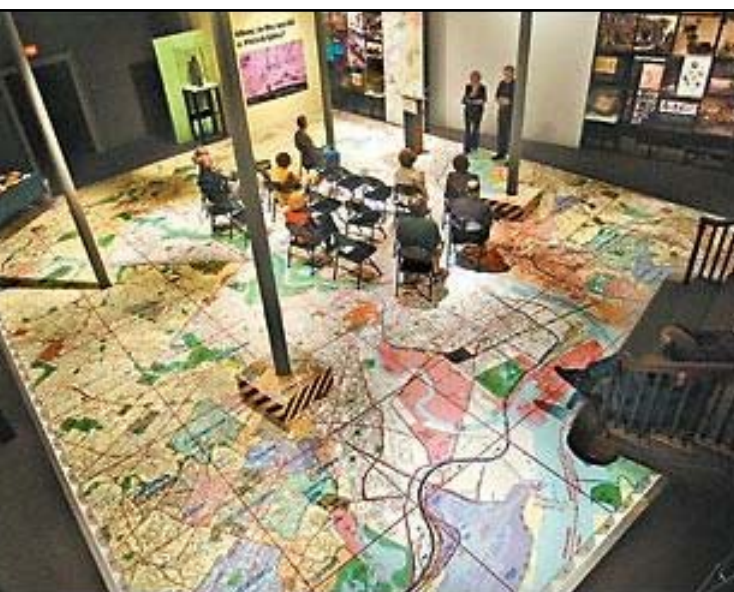
Perfect. "We needed to think of the region, and the quirky shape of the map lets you have a big chunk of New Jersey and the suburbs," she said.

Designer Ragone found Folia Industries in Huntingdon, Quebec, to make the map. And Rand McNally was happy to add a few features to it, such as the Atwater Kent Museum and Citizens Bank Park.

The museum spent \$60,000 on the map and the exhibit that surrounds it. Gabel is still working on and testing the "Philadelphia game," and expects to have it finished early next year. The museum hopes that everyone from government officials to schoolchildren will participate.

"Everyone wants to find something on the map, and it just engages everyone," Ragone said. "You just see the world differently, in a way you don't often get to do."

© 2004 Philadelphia Inquirer and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. Photos by John Costello.



Atwater Kent  
**Museum** of Philadelphia

[www.philadelphiahistory.org](http://www.philadelphiahistory.org)

15 South Seventh Street  
215.685.4830

**HOURS:** 10 am to 5 pm

Exhibitions are closed Tuesdays,  
but the museum store is open daily.