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## Chicago to Versailles: A triumph in beauty

Lake Shore Drive art  
expert's effort restores  
fountains at palace

**By Lucinda Hahn**  
Tribune staff reporter

VERSAILLES, France —  
“Catharine, I don’t think the  
women in the 18th Century  
smoked in the garden,” fashion  
designer Arnold Scaasi chided  
Catharine Hamilton on Satur-  
day night, after an opulent array  
of international socialites, no-  
bility and politicians cheered  
the rebirth of one of the Palace  
of Versailles’ most important  
gardens—a \$4 million restora-  
tion project Hamilton started  
seven years ago in her Lake  
Shore Drive living room.

“I bet they did that and a lot of  
other things too,” Hamilton  
shot back, considerably moved  
after an emotional ceremony  
that unveiled the Trois Fon-  
taines Bosquet—a magnificent  
series of three ascending foun-  
tains built in the 17th Century  
for King Louis XIV but left dor-  
mant and in disarray for 200  
years.

When Hamilton, who de-  
served her indulgence after the  
stress she has endured over the

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and, after a tense few moments of suspense, water poured forth slowly in an intricate blend of cascades and then burst into 20-foot streams that sparkled in the setting sun.

"Here it comes ... Bravo!" cried New York City businesswoman Elizabeth Stribling, who watched along with prominent Chicagoans such as Liz and Jules Stiffel, Gretchen and Jay Jordan, Libby and David Horn, and Kay and Frederick Krehbiel, some of whom had contributed donations of more than six figures.

"You could really feel the gravity of the occasion historically," said Steven Rockefeller, whose great-grandfather, John D. Rockefeller Jr., started a tradition of American philanthropy to Versailles in the 1920s when he gave the palace, then dilapidated, what would amount to about \$20 million in today's money.

The launching of the fountain was the high point of a grand evening dubbed Le Grand Bal du Bosquet. Arriving from Paris by limousine and motor coach, couture-clad guests mingled in the courtyards as paparazzi snapped their photos against the palace's elegant facade. Hamilton, arriving with her husband, David, wore a Scaasi-designed strapless dress cut from cloth of silver.

After the fountain's launch, guests strolled to dinner in the Orangerie, where Louis XIV stored his precious orange and lemon trees during the winter. The vaulted space easily seated the 600 revelers with room to spare for dancing to Jimmy Buffett and his band (who waived their fee for the event).

The ball was the climax of a six-day extravaganza that helped raise the final funds for the restoration. Tickets cost from \$5,000 to \$25,000, and, despite the hefty price tag, all were sold. Revelers include heiresses, European nobility and statesmen.

### **Kissinger stays in U.S.**

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stayed stateside for Ronald Reagan's funeral, but Kissinger's wife, Nancy, was the guest of honor at a cocktail party at the U.S. Embassy in Paris.

One socialite noted that some women would be wearing hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of jewels "on one arm."

The fountains, set in a grove,

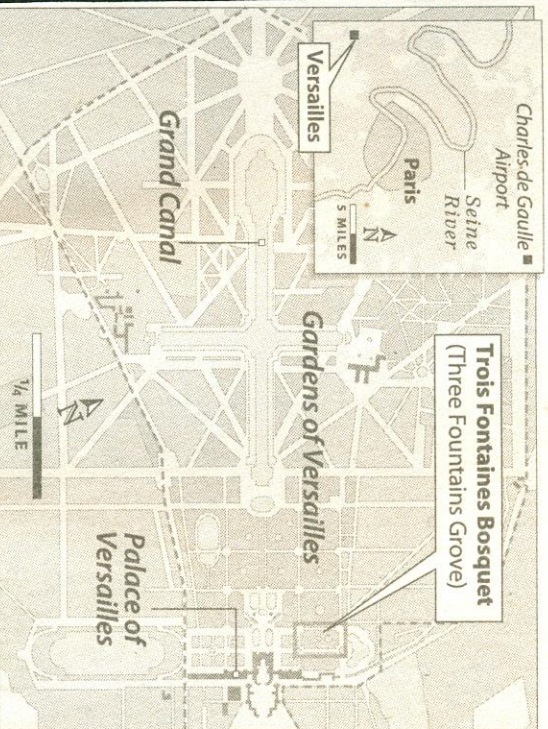
# VERSAILLES: Fountains neglected for centuries



Chicagoan Catharine Hamilton (right), husband David and daughters Tennessee (left) and Elizabeth attend Saturday's opening of Trois Fontaines Bosquet in France. AP photo by Remy de la Mauviniere

## Chicagoans help restore a French treasure

A seven-year effort started in Chicago raised \$4 million to restore three fountains at the Palace of Versailles near Paris.



Source: ESRI

Chicago Tribune/David Jahntz

prompted by a Gallic pal—start-uped the Friends of Versailles. Inspired by her appreciation of Le Notre, who is considered a genius of classical and European garden design, she recruited an international network of prominent friends and volunteers, including many of France's social elite.

The Hamiltons own a Paris apartment and a chateau in the Normandy countryside. She thought it would take two or three years to raise the restoration funds; it took seven years to amass the required \$4 mil-

lion. The French government contributed about one-third. Now, the fountains, set on three ascending terraces and linked by waterfalls, look as they did at the end of Louis XIV's reign.

Before, recalled Michael O'Malley, president of Chicago-based Cosmedent Inc., "it was just vacant and overrun."

He spoke during a lavish dinner Thursday in the palace's Salon d'Hercule, where luminaries such as Rockefeller and courier Jacqueline de Ribes supped under the huge Veronese painting "The Meal in the House of Simon the Pharisee."

The dinner was one in a whirlwind of events in Paris and Versailles last week leading up to the grand unveiling of the fountains. Much of the money for the restoration was raised from the proceeds of the gala and two other balls, in 1999 and 2002.

Gretchen Jordan, a Chicago interior designer who attended the 2002 ball, said, "At one dinner we ate on china that was so expensive they wouldn't let the caterers wash it. They brought in people from the insurance company to do the dishes."

Despite tickets selling out weeks ago for Saturday night's event, on Thursday several people from the U.S. called the ball's organizers, trying—successfully—to attend.

"Versailles has been very accommodating about letting us go over the limit of 600," said Jonathan Marder, a New Yorker and one of dozens of volunteers who helped organize the affair. The guest list included royals such as Prince Amyn Aga Khan, the brother of the Aga Khan, and Britain's Princess Michael of Kent.

There were also barons, including Guy de Rothschild of the French banking empire and kings of fashion, such as Pierre Cardin.

Publisher Robert Forbes, former Salomon Brothers CEO John Gutfreund and his wife, Susan, and noted Dallas art collector Margaret McDermott also were on the guest list. McDermott, who is 93, told Ca-

tharine Hamilton: "I just want to go to Paris one more time!"

Among dozens of Chicagoans who flew to Paris: Irene Pritzker, socialite Bonnie Deutsch, and hedge-fund whiz Kenneth Griffin and his wife, Anne, who were married at Versailles.

### Champagne, of course

The festivities kicked off with champagne receptions at the private residences of Princess Laure de Beauvau Craon, former president of Sotheby's France, and at the Hamiltons' 4,000-square-foot apartment, just off the Champs Elysees.

In the Hamiltons' vestibule, with its 18th Century stone floor, former astronaut Buzz Aldrin mingled as his wife, Lois, recalled: "I got so tired of hearing 'Count this' and 'Countess that,' I said, 'This is my Prince della Luna.'"

Unfortunately for Lois Aldrin, it was only the beginning. That evening, Comte Hubert d'Ornano and his wife, Comtesse Isabelle, held a dinner in their Left Bank home, where guests dined amid walls covered with 18th Century paintings of her royal Polish ancestors.

On Thursday, New York socialite and interior designer Susan Gutfreund held a noon cocktail party, greeting each guest in her 18th Century mansion in Paris. Among the crowd packed into her living room were Count Charles and Countess Helene de Mortenat.

It was unseasonably hot early

in the week, and women fanned themselves with programs during a long speech by the minister of culture at the Palais Royal, former residence of Louis XI.

II. The heat imposed itself on Nadler too. She had hoped to wear a vest to the ball made from the skin of a wild goat she bagged while big-game hunting in British Columbia.

Other events included a lunch at the Luxembourg Palace and a reception Friday night at the Elysees Palace, with Bernadette Chirac opening her private gardens to the guests. (Jacques Chirac was meeting with a Chinese finance official elsewhere in the palace.)

On Thursday night, the Orchestre de Paris performed Mozart at Versailles' opera hall, built for the wedding of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. In the Royal Box, de Ribes' diamond accessories sparkled in the minimal lighting.

After dinner in the Salon d'Hercule, Rockefeller recalled the damage control his great-grandfather performed when Versailles was falling apart in the 1920s and 1930s.

Since then, American philanthropists have donated about \$150 million to Versailles. As the week's events at the palace continue, the tradition continues.

"They're so beautiful," Catharine Hamilton said of the restored fountains. "For those of us who have worked so hard, it's just very moving. Those gardens will outlast us for hundreds of years."