

They've been swayed: Huge hammock rocks

The Boston Globe

By Jack Nicas, Globe Correspondent | August 19, 2010

The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway just got a lot more comfortable.

Downtown yesterday, several architects, a few students, a couple of lawyers, and a businessman swung together in the breeze on a 33-foot-long hammock, a two-week art installation unveiled this week that may become a permanent fixture on the Greenway.

"You know, people walk by without speaking [to one another] in this city; that's the rule," attorney Charles Kazarian, 57, of Arlington said, as he reclined on the multicolored web several feet above the grass. "But you sit next to people on a hammock, and you're talking to them."

It began with a tweet. About a year ago, Hansy Better Barraza, 34, a Roslindale architect and professor at Rhode Island School of Design, saw a post on Twitter offering a \$1,000 grant for an "awesome idea." She knew she had one.

"It just so happened that I was so upset that morning that I couldn't hop on my neighbors' hammock," Barraza told the dozen lounging on the hammock yesterday. "I said: 'Oh, my God, you know what's needed? A public hammock, a communal hammock for everyone to come together.'"

With that idea, she won the first-ever grant from The Awesome Foundation, which donates \$1,000 to an interesting project each month. Four permits later, she secured a space on the Greenway on the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Oliver Street.

With the help of donations and volunteers, the hammock came together: 4,278 feet of rope made from recycled bottles woven over curved steel pipes. Barraza has asked Guinness World Records to declare the hammock, which is about 264 square feet (about the size of a large parking space), the biggest portable hammock.

Since Sunday, when the weaving was finished, curious pedestrians have been hopping on, lying back, and sometimes nodding off.

"We've had lots of kids playing on it, rolling around; a lot of people just taking afternoon naps," said Philip Glenn, 24, a recent RISD graduate from Worcester who mans the hammock eight hours per day on Barraza's behalf, talking about the project, accepting donations, and making sure users sign waivers for liability reasons.

Barraza will host a kick-off party for the hammock with live music tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. And for five days next week, parents are encouraged to bring their children at 3 p.m. for stories read in English, Spanish, and Mandarin.

The hammock is open noon to 8 p.m. daily (volunteers tie it up at night) until Barraza's permits end on Sept. 4. She said she will then offer it as a public gift to the city.

The conservancy that manages the narrow 1.3-mile park said yesterday it is considering keeping the hammock. The city has looked for ways to improve the Greenway, such as recently adding free Wi-Fi and six new food stands, amid criticism that it lacks vitality.

To the workers on their lunch break and tourists alike yesterday, it was simple: The hammock should stay.

"It's a big hammock," said Peter Evans, 24, who works at a nearby investment firm. "How could you go

wrong?"

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