

riker hill today



Meet One of Our Artists: Sue Sachs

Sue Sachs' passion for teaching art led her to the Essex County Riker Hill Art Park. In 1981, Sue became one of Riker Hill Art Park's first resident artists and founded the Riker Hill Artists' Association. She has been teaching her craft at a number of schools, museums, and at Riker Hill for more than 35 years, bringing her love and expertise for metalwork jewelry to dozens of adults. The tradition of classes continues today thanks to the dedication of resident artists such as Sue Sachs.

A Legacy of Teaching



Sue Sachs' fine metal and jewelry class



Art Centre at Riker Hill - Essex County's oldest continuously operating art group



Carla Horowitz's pottery class



Ivan Bratko's adult sculpture from live model class

For more information:

Essex County website: www.essexcountynj.org
RHAP Association website: rikerhillartists.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/RikerHillArtParkArtists/
Instagram: Riker Hill Art Park Artists

Essex County Riker Hill Art Park
284 Beaufort Avenue, Livingston, NJ 07039

Directions:

From Points East / Garden State Parkway: Take Route I-280 West to Exit 4A (Eisenhower Parkway South). Turn Left onto Beaufort Avenue.

From Points West: Take I-80 East to Exit 47A and merge onto I-280 East. Take Exit 4A (Eisenhower Parkway South). Turn left onto Beaufort Avenue.

The park entrance road is on the left. Proceed up the hill.

This publication was produced to celebrate Riker Hill's 40 years as part of the Essex County Park System and its 35 years as the Essex County Riker Hill Art Park.

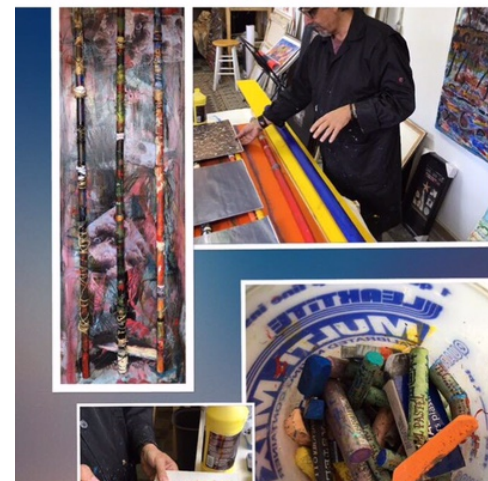
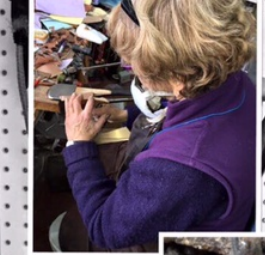
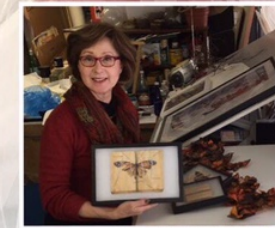
More than 35 years ago, developing an artist colony was an effective re-use of the former missile base. Today, the artists in residence at Essex County Riker Hill Art Park reflect the diversity and depth of talent of our thriving Essex County arts community. We invite you to witness the beauty of the rolling hills and spectacular views form the park and experience the creativity happening inside the studios.



- Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.
Essex County Executive

essex county

riker hill art park



Essex County Riker Hill Art Park is a fully functioning and comprehensive art facility featuring working artists in many mediums including glass blowing; sculpture; pastel, oil and acrylic painting; mixed media; drawing, painting and clay sculpting from live models; ceramics and pottery; textile and fiber arts; costume jewelry; fine metal jewelry and objects; book arts and illustration; assemblage; printmaking; photography; video/film; and installation.



Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., Essex County Executive, and the Board of Chosen Freeholders

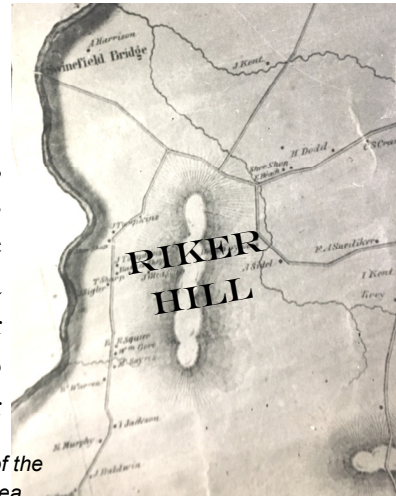
Putting Essex County First



history of riker hill

Dinosaurs and Colonial Squatters

Riker Hill in western Essex County has a history rich with Mesozoic monsters, colonial-era witchcraft, and 20th-century defense. Two hundred million years ago, small dinosaurs roamed the area, leaving their footprints which were discovered in the late 1960s. In the middle of the 1700s, the place became a concern to local landowners when, as the tale goes, a squatter named Peter Riker and his mother, rumored to be a witch, occupied the wooded hill. Attempts to remove them from the land were followed by strange happenings. Whether or not the stories about the Rikers were true, today the hill still bears the family's name.



Early map of the
Riker Hill area

Amid the peaceful rolling hills of Livingston, Cold War weapons made casual neighbors to suburban subdivisions from 1954 to 1974. The United States Army's Nike Air Defense System comprised a chain of anti-aircraft missile sites encircling major US cities, designed to intercept Soviet transcontinental nuclear bomber aircraft. Each Nike site consisted of a radar tracking and a missile launch facility. Riker Hill's elevation, one of the highest in the county, provided the optimal location for one of the project's radar

installations because it provided a clean line of sight for the defense of the New York Metro area. Dubbed Control Area, Nike Battery NY-80, the radar station was responsible, in the event of an air attack, for tracking enemy aircraft and transmitting guidance information to missiles after launch. By the 1970s, advances in weapons systems made countermeasures against bomber aircraft obsolete.



Radar tower

The Essex County Parks

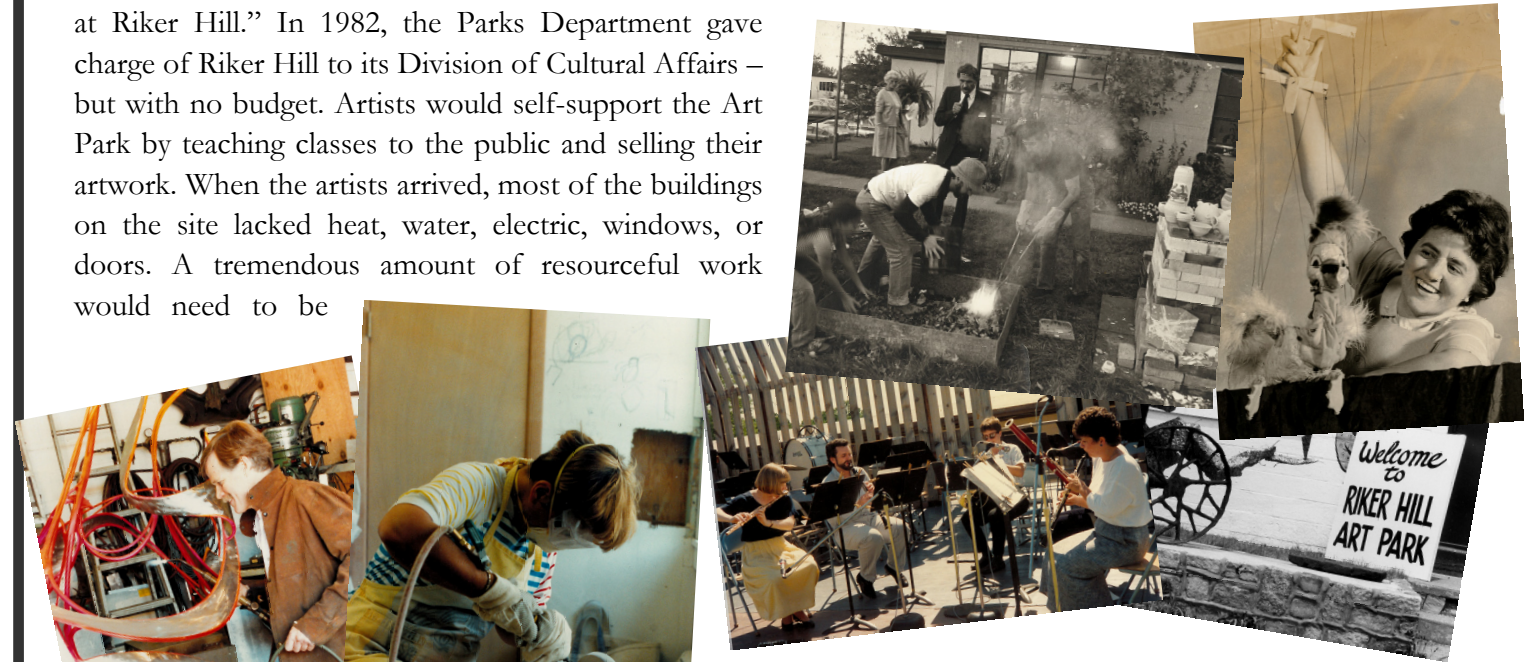
The Riker Hill Nike Battery Control Area was decommissioned in 1974 and listed as surplus federal property. Essex County Parks entered a competitive application process for the land, which drew the interest of other state and local agencies. The county's ownership of the 43-acre former Nike site, at the price of \$1, was finalized in 1977 with the recording of the deed. For the first few years, Essex County operated a geology museum on the site, showcasing the dinosaur footprints and fossils discovered at a nearby quarry. Budget and poor attendance at the small and isolated museum resulted in its closure. However, the underused former military installation, with its squat cinderblock buildings, otherworldly half-deconstructed radar towers, and legacy of the Cold War, had inspired a different purpose.




Essex County Creates The Art Park

Local artists, in cooperation with the Essex County Parks Department, proposed the creation of a “self-sustaining complex of artists’ studios or craft facilities at Riker Hill.” In 1982, the Parks Department gave charge of Riker Hill to its Division of Cultural Affairs – but with no budget. Artists would self-support the Art Park by teaching classes to the public and selling their artwork. When the artists arrived, most of the buildings on the site lacked heat, water, electric, windows, or doors. A tremendous amount of resourceful work would need to be

undertaken to transform the barren and ascetic facility built for destructive war into a lively place of creative expression.



The Artists and Community Build the Art Park



Building #509 was the first to be occupied by the nascent artists colony—it was the only heated structure on the site. Local corporations donated materials, including lights, furniture, and even windows and doors. Artists worked together, with county support, to renovate the facility. In the first three years, five outdoor sculptures were donated to Riker Hill, giving it a true art park atmosphere. By the summer of 1986, a thriving arts community occupied all the buildings and the celebrated Summer Performing Arts Series began. The series was so popular that a stage had to be built the following year to accommodate more and larger performances such as the Livingston Symphony Orchestra's first ever outdoor concert.

Riker Hill Continues to Evolve

In the decades that followed, Riker Hill Art Park has continued to present popular and creative events year-round, such as Jazz Under the Stars, astronomy sessions, Native American Pow Wows, public group visits, studio classes, and curated art shows drawing from a diverse regional network of craftspeople. Over 30 artists rent studios at Riker Hill and present a semi-annual Open House and Fine and Decorative Arts Sale. Their work represents more than a dozen distinct disciplines. Riker Hill has become a comprehensive and inspired art park.



Whale Tails