



## Conservationists to restore stone lions in Newark's Branch Brook Park

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By

**NEWARK** — The pair of limestone lions gracing the Music Court in Branch Brook Park for more than 50 years were lifted off their concrete lairs this morning and trucked to a Pennsylvania workshop.

Conservationists there will restore the two sculptures, based on archival notes and photographs. The cats are expected back in the Essex County park by summer.

Crafted by sculptor Karl Ritter from Indiana limestone around the turn of the 20th century, the 8-foot-high lions guarded the castle-like Prudential buildings at Broad and Bank streets from 1901 until the buildings were demolished, in 1956. They were then donated to the county's park commission.

The 3,000-pound cats, sculpted with teeth bared, have stood sentinel each on one end of the court's broad staircase since 1959.

Since then, the stone lions have taken a pummeling from the weather and from over-eager observers.

Portions of their claws, tails and tongues have gone missing. A coat of paint, meant to protect the limestone, has peeled and flaked. Parts of their feline form are spotted with moss. The lions also bare a few graffiti marks.

"They've been abused over the years, so it's time for a little TLC," said T. Scott Kreilick, whose conservation firm is overseeing the work.

After being wedged off their concrete pedestals on the cold, blustery morning, the lions were wrapped in moving tarps, strapped to chains and airlifted onto reinforced wood pallets. They were to be transported by flatbed truck to a studio in West Philadelphia, Pa.

There, sculptor Pavel Efremoff and a team conservators will refurbish the carvings. "We'll make sure the stone matches the tone and texture" of the original, Kreilick said.

When they are brought back, it's expected they will be renamed for Prudential's former CEO, Arthur F. Ryan, and his wife, Patricia Ryan, co-chairwoman of the Branch Brook Park Alliance, who donated \$1 million in 2008 for repairs at the 359-acre county park, located in Newark and Belleville