

Charity hopes funds will flow into replica 17th century fountain

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Drop a coin for the homeless. The replica of the Wignacourt Fountain will be fully functional next week. Photos: Chris Sant Fournier.

Four centuries after the Wignacourt Fountain was inaugurated in Valletta's Palace Square to celebrate the arrival of running water to the capital, the precious liquid will be streaming through a life-size replica to entice passers-by to drop in some of their coins in aid of the homeless.

Volunteers yesterday toiled in the heat to assemble the replica, with a base of 16 feet and a height of 25 feet, that will remain in Palace Square for about a month as part of YMCA Homeless's fund-raising project.

The model was reconstructed from an iron frame, polystyrene and wood by the Titti group that make carnival floats. It was then coated with roof compound for waterproofing. Once complete, the handmade model was dismantled and transported to the square where it was carefully re-assembled.

Today water tests on the replica will start and, following some fine-tuning, the fountain will be fully operational next week, YMCA Homeless chairman Jean Paul Mifsud said.

The fountain will operate for an hour in the morning, at about 11 a.m., and an hour in the evening which is to be confirmed once the lighting is set up. On days when it is not windy it will operate for longer.

"The idea is to create a daily attraction and encourage people to throw coins into the fountain," he said adding that people could even throw in their remaining Maltese coins.

The original fountain was first inaugurated by Grandmaster Adof de Wignacourt in Palace Square in 1615 to celebrate the moment when water first arrived from Rabat to Valletta via the aqueducts. It was later moved in front of the law courts.

A replica of the fountain can be found at the St Philip Garden in Floriana.

He added that YMCA also planned to recreate a column that used to stand alongside the fountain in the 17th century.

The column was built by Grandmaster Hughes de Verdale to taunt Cardinal Prospero Colonna, who was based in Rome. On top of the column, the grandmaster had placed a wolf (part of his coat of arms) squatting and seemingly defecating on the column. The column was removed from the square and there are no traces as to its whereabouts. The latest records available date back to the 1700s when it was restored.

Apart from enhancing cultural education and tourism around Valletta, these initiatives fall under the YMCA Old Valletta Project - through which three-dimensional detailed models of Valletta across the centuries will be developed and made available to the public through an interactive website and DVD.

Money collected through the project will go in aid of the YMCA Homeless Shelter Dar Niki Cassar.

The fountain is being built with the support of the Water Services Corporation, Pace and Mercieca, Pillow Spaceframe, Macpherson Paints, AFS, Wurth, Raycut and Marsa Lite.

Anyone who wishes to sponsor the Old Valletta Project or who has material to contribute to the website can send an e-mail to info@ymcahomeless.org or call YMCA on 2122 8035.