

# AUTOMATIC VACUUM COLLECTION (AVAC) COMPLEX & OCTAGON PARK



*Above, the AVAC facility. Below, the fire station on the building's northern side.*



Department's Special Operations Command Division. Dispatched from this facility are squads for the Rescue, Mask, Hazardous Materials, and Scuba Support units.

The greenery ahead of you begins the recreational haven known as **OCTAGON PARK**. Opened in 1992, it features a regulation size soccer field, six all-weather tennis courts, and a baseball field (all with nighttime lighting); 200 community gardens; two picnic and barbecue areas; and a comfort station. The park was designed by the award-winning firm of Weintraub and di Domenico and is the newest and largest park on Roosevelt Island. The design process involved the whole community: 12 island organizations each appointed a member to a single task force that worked with architects and RIOC (the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, the island's governing body). The result, in the words of architect Lee Weintraub, is a 15 acre park with 35 acres of program.

*To continue with the tour, follow the white and green "Roosevelt Island Historical Walk" signs.*

Here on Roosevelt Island, we take pride in our garbage. Taking out the trash, for us, is not so mundane a task: We know that when it is released from our hands, it travels the high-tech route known as the **AUTOMATIC VACUUM COLLECTION (AVAC) System**. A computer brings the trash receptacles in each building to life every hour, opening up a valve that releases trash into one of two underground pipes. (There are two main pipes, one each along this island's east and west sides, that alternate operation every 30 minutes.) The trash is whisked away through these pipes at 55 mph to the AVAC complex across the street, built in 1975, designed by Kallmann & McKinnell (Motorgate's architects).

When the trash reaches here, a cyclone effect separates dust from the air, which is then filtered and released. Then one of the system's five compactors crushes the trash to 1/5 its original size and seals it in 50 cubic-yard containers. The New York City Department of Sanitation trucks these containers to either an incinerator or a barge in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. This method of disposal minimizes air pollution and smell and economizes on manpower. (Only two to three workers run the entire plant.)

AVAC was first installed in Sweden in 1961. Only six such systems have been used in the U.S., including that of Disney World. Roosevelt Island, however, boasts the only AVAC system used in a residential setting. It is also the largest such system in the U.S., able to collect trash from 20,000 people. Though many other systems have been abandoned due to recycling and sorting requirements, Roosevelt Island's system still runs strong. Behind the AVAC complex is a post for the New York City Fire



*Clockwise from upper-left: the soccer field, community gardens, baseball field, and tennis courts of Octagon Park.*

