



DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY

Issue 12 • Quarter 4 • 2020



A MESSAGE FROM THE TEAM

Over the past year, we've heard from many people who embrace the riverfront as a place of healing and wellness. They leave their homes for a walk or a bike ride along the river and return refreshed, ready to face the challenges ahead.

When COVID-19 upended our lives in the spring, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy doubled down on our promise to provide a safe and welcoming gathering space for all.

Our team worked quickly to make sure that visitors could continue to come to the Riverwalk and the Dequindre Cut to spend time in nature and to get some fresh air.

We rallied around the idea of #BeingApartTogether. And through increased cleaning, signage, and security, we have been able to stay open all year. We launched a virtual series of programs that reached more than 15,000 people. We partnered with local artists to create murals and experiences for those out for a walk. And once we could gather in small groups again, we began to host unique, physically-distant activities.

The response from our community has been inspiring. Visitation to the riverfront increased by more than 20 percent this year. And, use of the Dequindre Cut increased more than 40 percent.

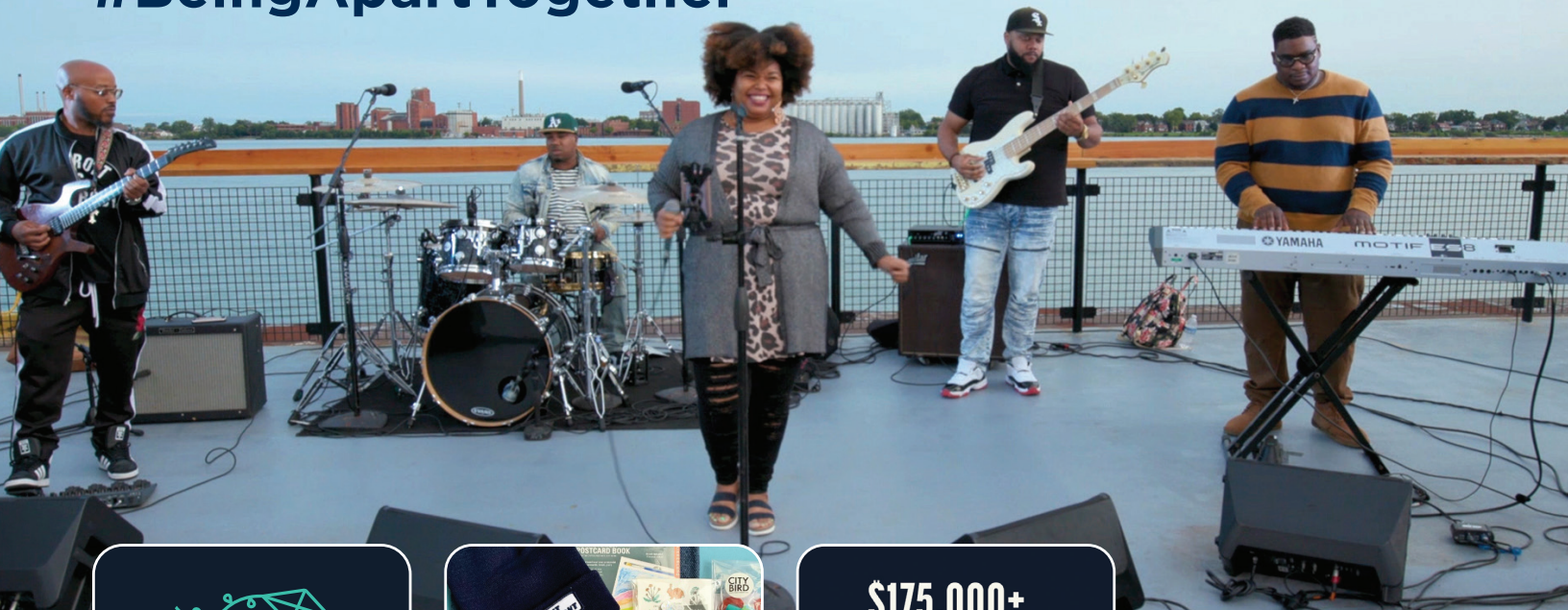
This year has illustrated that the riverfront is essential to Detroit.

Our team is thankful for all of our wonderful supporters who make gift after gift to help us maintain and operate the essential spaces along our riverfront, for our amazing volunteers and for our Board of Directors. To any of you who came out to the riverfront or joined us virtually this year—we offer collectively a loud and sincere THANK YOU!!

The riverfront remains a place for all Detroiters because of YOU and we are truly grateful to have the support of our community behind us.

With Gratitude,
The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Team

#BeingApartTogether



\$175,000+
Dollars Raised

50+ Sponsors **400** Packages Shipped

4,400+
Virtual Concert Attendees

The team at the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy got creative during this time of social distancing to host a fun virtual fundraiser this fall. Presented by Citizen’s, #BeingApartTogether was a physically distant, socially-connected fundraiser that allowed supporters to celebrate the essential role that riverfront parks hold in the community.

As part of this creative program, on Friday, October 16, the Conservancy hosted a free virtual concert by local musical artists including In Transit, Al Bettis, Juuni and New World Soul. Prior to the online program, the Detroit Experience Factory held a free virtual tour explaining the past, present and future of the Detroit Riverfront.

This unique event also offered participants the opportunity to make monetary donations to support the essential work that the Conservancy does to maintain a safe, clean and

beautiful riverfront. With a donation of \$250, supporters received a special box of limited-edition riverfront items and locally-sourced gifts that were created in partnership with Detroit retailer City Bird.

“Once again, the Conservancy was completely blown away by the support and generosity of the Detroit community,” said Cassie Brenske, chief development

officer for the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. “The funds raised from #BeingApartTogether are vital to helping us keep the riverfront a reliable, beautiful space for our community to turn to during all times and seasons.”

“What fun to open and share my riverfront bling with my wife, our daughter, her husband, and their three-year-old daughter! There was something in that box for each of us!”

– Bob Hoey, CAT Team Member

The #BeingApartTogether virtual concert attracted more than 4,400 viewers from Detroit to Texas who enjoyed the scenic riverfront sights set to a soundtrack of Detroit talent. These performances are still available for everyone to enjoy on Youtube and on the Conservancy’s Facebook page.



MEET THE EATS AT **ROBERT C. VALADE PARK**

The Shed at Robert C. Valade Park features amazing restaurants for riverfront visitors to enjoy five-days-a-week all year long. Stop by on your lunch break or after work to check out two great restaurants. The Shed is open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. from Tuesday through Sunday.

Geisha Girls Sushi

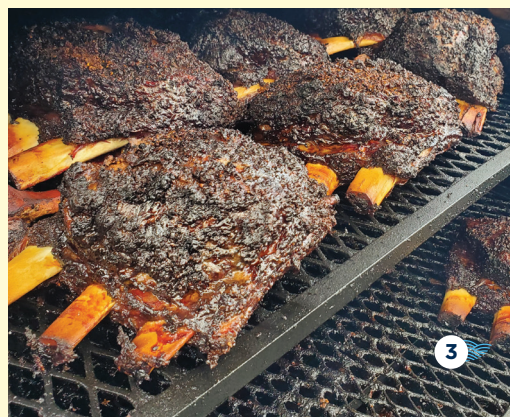
Inspired by American soul food and the Japanese roots of founder Mary Stallworth, Geisha Girls was once a popular pop-up restaurant in Detroit. Featuring scrumptious classic sushi rolls, intriguing Asian fusion dishes and exciting vegan and vegetarian options, Geisha Girls Sushi is sure to be a riverfront favorite!

Now that the restaurant has a permanent location at Valade Park, Mary feels that she has met an important milestone with her business. “When this opportunity came about, it was everything that my business was trying to do,” said Mary. “To be put into one of the hottest spots in Detroit, and to be able to offer my following a space like this, is unbelievable.”

Smokey G’s Smokehouse

As a child, Smokey G’s Founder Greg Sims used to visit the Riverwalk with his family. Now that he is serving up his own recipes in The Shed, Greg describes being a part of the Detroit Riverfront as a dream come true. “As I’m cooking in the morning and the sun is rising, it’s incredible to think that this is now my office,” said Greg. “It’s great to be a part of something that will bring new people down to the riverfront!”

Barbecue connoisseurs who visit the riverfront are sure to fall head over heels for Smokey G’s. Inspired by southern barbecue and old family recipes, Smokey G’s is serving up delicious slow-smoked everything – from beef brisket to salmon and pulled pork to turkey legs. Using all natural ingredients, the meats are slow-smoked over fruitwood, ensuring the perfect balance of flavors to create a meal so savory and fulfilling, you will be sure to come back for more!





BRINGING THE DR

Throughout 2020, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy made significant progress toward its vision of 5.5 miles of Riverwalk for the public to enjoy.

The Platform Parcel
This new section of Riverwalk along the Platform property opened earlier this summer, providing visitors with another scenic stretch of riverfront to enjoy. It features lush landscaping, security cameras, benches, light posts and a marine railing. The property is owned by developer Peter Cummings and runs from just west of the former site of Joe Louis Arena to the eastern edge of Riverfront Towers. The property represents a significant milestone as the first completed section of the two-mile long West Riverfront project.

Riverfront Towers
Completed in June, this section of Riverwalk will open to visitors when connections to the Riverwalk east and west of the property can be made. Security cameras are up and running on the picturesque boardwalk along the Riverfront Towers property.

DDA Parcel
Construction of the Riverwalk along the Downtown Development Authority-owned property just west of Riverfront Towers will begin in summer 2021. This section of Riverwalk will connect the Riverfront Towers boardwalk with the new Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park. Currently, the

Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) is coordinating the start of seawall repair, which will begin in the spring. Ann Arbor-based SmithGroup is completing the landside design of the development to include a connected pathway to Wilson Park, lighting, seating, and a plaza.

Uniroyal Promenade
Construction on the Uniroyal Promenade project began this past August with the installation of a sediment cap in the river. Now that the sediment cap is in place, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) will begin bringing in riprap, which are large stones that will be



EAM TO LIFE

placed along the shoreline. In the spring, work begins on the construction of the Riverwalk along the shoreline. This section of riverfront is significant because it will connect Gabriel Richard Park with Mt. Elliott Park, resulting in a continuous 3.5 miles of Riverwalk along the East Riverfront.

May Creek

The Conservancy will soon wrap up the design stage for the May Creek Greenway, a project that will provide safe and convenient access to the West Riverfront for residents of Corktown and Southwest Detroit. The project is scheduled to begin construction in late spring.

Joseph Campau Greenway

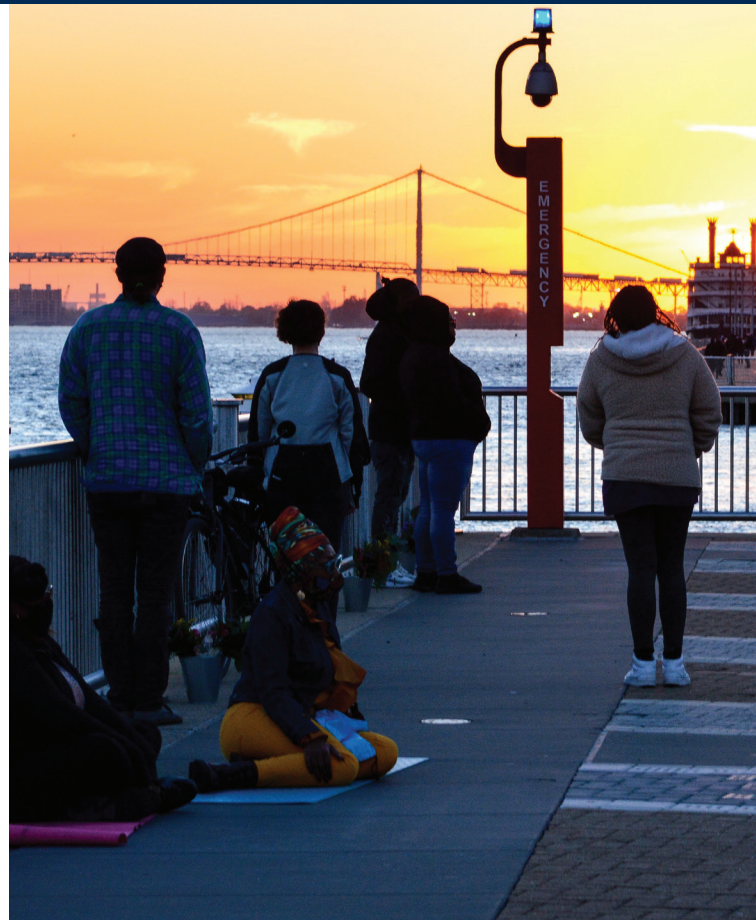
The City of Detroit has completed Phase One of the Joseph Campau Greenway project, which runs from Jefferson to Robert Bradby Drive. Phase Two will extend the path to Vernor. When complete, this crucial greenway will provide eastside Detroit residents with safe and easy access to the many parks and amenities along the riverfront. The greenway features new benches, lighting, security boxes, and a 10-foot wide pedestrian and bicycle path. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy will provide security for the greenway when it opens.

Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park

With the design phase nearing completion, the Conservancy is looking forward to a spring 2021 groundbreaking for the much-anticipated Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park. This 22-acre park will feature an expansive lawn for special events, the Delta Dental Children's Play Garden, a Sport House with basketball courts and a large water feature.

Completion of the park is scheduled for 2023.

2020 Programming in Review and **LOOKING FORWARD**



The Detroit Riverfront is a place of celebration, healing and peace. During the pandemic, having a place to go while still maintaining a sense of togetherness has been more important than ever.

With the health and safety of visitors in mind, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy programming team came up with creative ways to host some annual favorites as well as some new ones.

Favorites such as Reading & Rhythm on the Riverfront (R3), Yoga, Tai Chi, Moonlight Yoga and Herbal Walk & Talks were back. New events included Kids Yoga and Story Time and Senior Hustle Fitness. The team even introduced a virtual component to several

programs so people could participate from the safety of their own homes.

In place of the much-loved Harvest-Fest, the Conservancy hosted (Not-So) Spooky Saturdays over three consecutive Saturdays in October. More than 400 families with children enjoyed safe and festive activities at Robert C. Valade Park, all dressed in costumes and donning masks – spooky or otherwise. Participants enjoyed a pumpkin patch, children’s music, Halloween photo opportunities, trick-or-treating, storytelling and kid’s yoga.

Another new event introduced by

the Conservancy this year was Rise Together, an inspirational series that provided emotional, social and grief support to Detroit residents who may be feeling alone during the pandemic. Inspired by the Detroit Sunrise Club, each socially distanced Rise Together session was held at either sunrise or sunset and included relaxing music and a 10-minute guided meditation.

More than 6,000 people participated in programs this summer and fall. The team is busy working on another robust schedule of programming and events for 2021. Visit our facebook page for all the latest information.

WINTER AT ROBERT C. VALADE PARK



Robert C. Valade Park will be the go-to riverfront destination for family-friendly fun this winter.



PROGRAMMING RUNS THROUGH FEBRUARY 28, 2021

The park will feature oversized outdoor fire chimneys, warm drinks, marshmallow roasters, music, box hockey, the Sled Shed (featuring free sleds when it snows), synthetic ice curling and much more.



HOURS

Friday 5 to 9 p.m.
Saturday Noon to 9 p.m.
Sunday Noon to 7 p.m.

WEEKEND AMENITIES

Outdoor Games
Sled Shed
Oversized Fireplaces
Free Gloves and Handwarmers*
Marshmallow Roasters
Live Music and DJs

*Visit a volunteer for gloves or handwarmers during select hours.

DRINK

Enjoy hot or seasonal alcoholic and non-alcoholic classics like hot chocolate and cider and Granny's Hot Toddys at Bob's Barge. Marshmallows for roasting at the park are also available for purchase.

Friday 5 to 9 p.m.
Saturday Noon to 9 p.m.
Sunday Noon to 7 p.m.

FOOD

Enjoy some tantalizing fare in The Shed from Smokey G's BBQ and Geisha Girls Sushi.

Smokey G's and Geisha Girls are open Wednesday through Sunday from Noon to 8 p.m.

SPECIAL THEMED WEEKENDS

December 18-20
Ice Sculptures and Live Music

JANUARY 15-17
Fire & Ice Tower and Live Music

JANUARY 29-31
Ice Carving Festival

FEBRUARY 12-14
Carriage Rides and Valentine's Day Celebration

Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and Huron-Clinton Metroparks Form New Partnership



The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and Huron-Clinton Metroparks have entered into a partnership that will widen access to recreational and educational opportunities and leverage the world-class parks that each organization manages. Additionally, the partnership establishes a Metroparks presence within the City of Detroit at Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park.

The multi-year, pilot partnership was announced in mid-November following an official vote by the Metroparks Board of Commissioners. Under the partnership, Metroparks will contribute \$6 million over seven years to the Conservancy for expanded programs and operations at the park.

“We couldn’t be more thrilled to expand our collaboration with such a great organization like the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, build more relationships within the city and with all those who call it home, and have the opportunity to contribute in one small way to the dynamic energy and spirit that are the essence of Detroit,” said Amy McMillan, Director of Huron-Clinton Metroparks.

The new partnership begins immediately with two years of combined robust programming and joint outreach efforts leading up to the opening of the new park, which is slated for 2023. Once the park is open, the agreement includes another five full years of partnership that leverages the strengths of each organization.

This isn’t the first time the two organizations have partnered, however. The

organizations first began working together in 2015 with programs at special events along the riverfront that educated thousands of Detroiters on wildlife and the outdoors.

“The ecosystem of parks and public space becomes stronger when we work together in partnerships like this one,” said Mark Wallace, President and CEO, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. “We can do more and serve more people by embracing a truly regional perspective and leveraging our shared commitment to equity and diversity in recreation.”

The 22-acre Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park will feature a water component, Sport House with basketball courts, the Delta Dental Play Garden with an array of animal structures for kids to climb in and around and a large lawn that will be used for special events and programming.

Huron-Clinton Metroparks are located throughout southeast Michigan and attract 5.6 million visitors to 13 parks comprising 25,000 acres across five counties. To learn more about Huron-Clinton Metroparks visit metroparks.com.





Riverfront Ofrenda Brings Comfort to the Community

By Maria Elena Rodriguez, Board Member

This year has been the most challenging in our collective memory. In addition to the disruption to our routines, lifestyles and income, perhaps what has shaken us the most is the massive loss of life.

Earlier this spring during a Detroit Riverfront Conservancy meeting, we talked about what we could do to comfort people and to honor those who have died during the pandemic.

We understood that the riverfront is a special place for many people throughout our community. It is a peaceful reminder of the incredible gifts Mother Nature provides us and how lucky we are to be surrounded by so many beautiful waterways in Michigan.

That conversation ultimately resulted in the creation of our very first Dia de Muertos ofrenda (Day of the Dead offering) along the riverfront at Cullen Plaza.

In Mexico, Dia de Muertos is a holiday that dates back many centuries to pre-Hispanic culture and is celebrated in joyful, colorful and personal ways every year on November 1 and 2. It is a tradition that evolved in the

16th Century when Spanish clergy were converting the native population to Catholicism.

The riverfront ofrenda was erected so that visitors could take a moment to reflect on their loss, and if they chose, to leave a note for their dearly departed, which many of them did. Like the fall leaves blowing around during the season, this gesture was totally organic and it just felt right.

The traditional items that we used for the altar included: plenty of Mexican marigolds, better known as Cempasuchitl; water; a large number of lit candles; embellished skulls; Mexican pastries; hot chocolate mugs; gourds; crosses, and a small barrel for the notes.

Our first ofrenda on the Detroit Riverfront was a resounding success, and it was visited by many people throughout our community. People throughout Mexicantown and Southwest Detroit have celebrated this beloved holiday for well over 40 years. It was comforting and exciting to see a Dia de Muertos ofrenda along the riverfront for the first time, and we look forward to creating another one in 2021.





VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: ELENA NUNO

Elena Nuno has been involved with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy since when the nonprofit launched in 2003. During the very first Detroit River Days, Elena was walking downtown and happened across the festival simply by chance. Seeing the joy of riverfront visitors as they partook in carnival rides and summer activities, all set against the backdrop of the Detroit River, she immediately knew that this was something in which she wanted to be involved.

Since that time, but especially over the past four years, Elena has gained experience volunteering with River Days, Camping on the Cut, Reading & Rhythm on the Riverfront, HarvestFest and more. She has been involved in nearly every event that the Conservancy has put on, and as a volunteer and Detroit native, she has had a front-row seat to the riverfront's transformation.

"It's a special place to me," said Elena, who can remember a time when she had to crawl over rocks and gravel to reach the waterfront. "For me it's just a place to go and get centered. I always loved water growing up, and I just like the fact that I can go down there and meditate."

In her many duties as a volunteer, Elena has met people from all walks of life – other volunteers and people from all over the country and around the world. She loves that the riverfront is a gathering place that brings people together. When COVID-19 began to spread in the Detroit area, she was

worried that she would not be able to volunteer anymore, but felt reassured when she realized the lengths the Conservancy would go to protect both visitors and volunteers.

"At the beginning they announced that if anyone needed anything – from grocery shopping to picking up prescriptions, even just someone to talk to – they could help,"

said Maria Elena. "I feel very safe with all the measures they took for our safety as volunteers."

Even during a pandemic, Conservancy volunteers came through for the Conservancy, donating more than 1,200 hours this year.

To learn more and apply, visit
www.detroitriverfront.org/volunteers
or call (313) 566-8207.

"To protect volunteers during these uncertain times, the Conservancy has limited the number of people working at any one time, provided masks and sanitizer and outfitted the Ambassador Cart with plexi-glass. The people who donate their time to the riverfront are more than just volunteers – they are friends and family and an integral part of our community. We will always do our utmost to make sure every volunteer and visitor feels safe on the riverfront."

– Renee Rodriguez, volunteer manager
at the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy



THINGS TO BE GRATEFUL FOR IN 2020

During a challenging 2020, the Detroit Riverfront has been an outlet for anyone seeking wellness, respite, and opportunities to engage safely with their neighbors, friends and family.

Our mission of creating and maintaining safe, beautiful gathering places resounded across the city as people flocked to public places in record numbers—proving that parks are essential to the well-being of our community.

We are fortunate to have some tremendous public spaces to enjoy in Detroit—we even partnered with them on a coloring book this year, Belle Isle, Eastern Market, Campus Martius Park, Beacon Park, Palmer Park and many other parks throughout the city.

As a non-profit, the Conservancy is responsible for raising funds to maintain the Riverwalk, Dequindre Cut, Robert C. Valade Park, Gabriel Richard Park, Mt. Elliott Park and Cullen Plaza. And this year our community showed us so much support throughout the year. We are very fortunate to be funded by a growing and diverse list of donors and we are truly humbled by it.

During this giving season, if you have not yet made a gift please consider supporting our work. We could not do what we do without your support. Thank you. We hope to see you along the riverfront in 2021.

WAYS TO GIVE

Considering a gift to the riverfront? Here are some ways you can help out:

- Make a one-time donation or become a Monthly Sustainer
- Learn about your employer's matching gift program
- Become a member and receive exclusive benefits
- Purchase an engraved brick or paver, underwrite a commemorative bench or make an honorary gift for a loved one
- Support the Conservancy at its fundraising events

Visit detroitriverfront.org/waystohelp

We know these are difficult times, and we appreciate your consideration of support for the work we do. If you planned to make a gift this year, please consider giving at www.detroitriverfront.org/give/NL3

About the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is a non-profit organization founded in 2003 with the mission to develop public access to Detroit's riverfront and to serve as an anchor for economic development. As the permanent stewards of the Riverwalk and the Dequindre Cut, the Conservancy is responsible for raising the funds needed for construction, operation, maintenance, security and programming of the public spaces located along the riverfront. The Conservancy's ultimate vision is to develop five-and-a-half miles of riverfront from the Ambassador Bridge on the west to Gabriel Richard Park, just east of the MacArthur Bridge to Belle Isle. Visit www.detroitriverfront.org for more information.





**DETROIT
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CONSERVANCY**

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