



DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY

Issue 14 • Quarter 4 • 2021

A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

There is a growing sense of hope in our community that we are starting to win the fight against the pandemic. Throughout these difficult years, the people of Detroit and Southeast Michigan have embraced the Detroit Riverfront as a place where they can stay resilient and continue to make memories with their friends and families.

Along the riverfront this fall, we were thrilled to welcome guests back to public events as we hosted Shimmer on the River, West Riverfront Block Party and Detroit Harvestfest & Food Truck Rally. All these events were extremely successful. We raised more than \$270,000 from Shimmer, and the Block Party drew 6,000 participants. The two-day Harvestfest drew 50,000 people to the Dequindre Cut.

Throughout the year, our programs remained well attended and were an important component to an improved quality of life for community members by providing opportunities for a healthy balance of mind, body

and soul. Our programming team is busy developing a robust schedule of wintertime programs and events that will build off the successes we enjoyed last winter.

Construction toward achieving our vision of 5.5 miles of revitalized riverfront continued at a steady pace this year. Our progress includes significant progress on the Riverwalk extension along the Uniroyal property and site clearing of the Southwest Greenway. In the coming months, we will break ground on the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park.

While we celebrate an incredible year, we also look back with a sense of profound sadness as well at the loss of one of our most beloved and tireless champions, Senator Carl Levin. Senator Levin's passing earlier this year was an incredible blow to those of us at the Conservancy who loved him so dearly. He was a friend and a key leader in the development of this riverfront that is helping

transform the great City of Detroit. We are pleased to be able to honor Senator Levin in a special section of this newsletter.

Allow me to extend my sincere thanks to all of our wonderful supporters who make generous gifts that allow the Conservancy to operate these essential places along our riverfront. We couldn't do it without you. I'd also like to acknowledge the work of our staff, volunteers and Board of Directors for all of their hard work this year.

For those of you who visited the Detroit Riverfront this year, thank you for coming to see us and we look forward to seeing you again in 2022. For those we missed this year, we hope to see you in 2022.

Matthew P. Cullen
Chair





SHIMMER ON THE RIVER:

A RIVERFRONT REUNION

Shimmer on the River, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's largest annual fundraising event, returned in September and welcomed back donors for an evening of family fun.

For the first time in over two years, the Conservancy gathered supporters in-person to raise funds and celebrate the Detroit Riverwalk being named Best Riverwalk in the United States by USA TODAY 10Best. In record-breaking style, more than \$275,000 was raised in support of the Conservancy's revitalization efforts.

Sponsors and guests reunited on the riverfront for a perfect night of live music by The Spinners, delicious eats from popular Detroit-based food trucks, and fun activities for adults and kids alike. This year's Shimmer featured an Adventure Park sponsored by Delta Dental of Michigan,

which provided participants with a variety of games and inflatables to keep everyone entertained.

Also at this year's Shimmer, the Conservancy announced the two most recent recipients of the Shimmer Award: Larry McLaughlin and the late Evelyn Johnston. Larry served as general counsel to the Conservancy from 2002 to 2018. To this day, he still provides valuable insights as an Emeritus Board Member to the Conservancy. Evelyn was a founding member of the Conservancy, known for her dedication to fostering engagement in the community. She served on the Board of Directors for 11 years, and remained a passionate supporter as an Emeritus Board Member after her retirement.



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THE WILLIAM DAVIDSON SPORT HOUSE

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is excited to share that the new Sport House that will be a feature in the future Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park will be named after the Detroit businessman and former professional sports team owner, William “Bill” Davidson (1922-2009).

William Davidson served as Chairman, President and CEO of Guardian Industries Corporation, which he transformed from a small, struggling family company into one of the world’s largest manufacturers of architectural and automotive glass. Mr.

Davidson was also the owner of several American professional sports teams: the Detroit Pistons, Detroit Shock, and Tampa Bay Lightning.

Regarded as an innovator in professional sports, Mr. Davidson won a total of seven national championships, and became the first owner in major North American team sports to win concurrent NBA and NHL national titles in 2004. Mr. Davidson was one of Michigan’s most notable philanthropists and founded the William Davidson Foundation in 2005.

Honoring its founder and continuing his lifelong commitment to philanthropy, the William Davidson Foundation has been one of the greatest supporters of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy over the years. To date, the Foundation has donated more than \$11 million to the revitalization of the Detroit Riverfront, supporting the Conservancy’s mission of transforming the riverfront into a world-class destination for all to enjoy. For that reason, the Conservancy is happy to be naming the Sport House that will be part of the future Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.

Centennial Park in his honor.

The William Davidson Sport House will feature a raised canopy and skylight covering two public, open-air basketball courts, as well

“William Davidson was a visionary who brought sports closer to the community, and especially to youth. We are thrilled to create this living memorial in honor of Mr. Davidson on the Detroit Riverfront. We look forward to this Sport House being a gathering place for children in the Detroit area for generations to come.”

– Mark Wallace, President & CEO of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy

as an additional space that will be used for other athletic activities and programming. Designed by award-winning architect Sir David Adjaye, the Sport House will be a place that will welcome visitors from all backgrounds, providing a safe and fun space to come together and play.



SUSTAINING OUR COMMUNITY

In 2021, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy continued to look for ways of bringing the community together in the midst of the pandemic. Be it introducing beloved events back to the riverfront in a safe way, or hosting new programming, 2021 saw another full season of activity along the Detroit River.

In September of this year, the Conservancy commemorated the end of summer and kicked off the fall season with the West Riverfront Block Party, a one-day celebration that included national live music, delicious eats from Detroit food trucks and many fun, free activities for the kids.

The Detroit Harvestfest also returned this year, with an even more exciting lineup than before. Featuring the traditional trick-or-treating, pumpkin patch and other great family activities, this year's Harvestfest also included five stages of musical performances from local artists, a beer and wine garden and a Food Truck Rally of more than 50 food trucks from Metro Detroit and beyond.

This fall, the Conservancy partnered to create The Healing Memorial project, an initiative led by artist Sonya Clark that is now on display in the TCF Center. As part of this project, more than 30 making stations were set up across the





DURING 2021

Detroit area. Participants were invited to create colorful, hand-made memorial pouches with personal dedications as a way to recognize the depth of loss felt during the pandemic, and take steps towards healing. In total, more than 2,500 pouches were made, which now comprise the beautiful and dramatic display at the TCF Center.

As demonstrated through The Healing Memorial project, it is more important now than ever before to find ways to support each other in these trying times. The events put on by the Conservancy are crucial for supporting the morale of the Detroit Community, as

well as supporting the livelihoods of local Detroit artists and businesses.

In order to continue bringing the Detroit community together throughout the winter months, the Conservancy is looking forward to bringing back Winter at Valade. From carolers to carriage rides, oversized fires, marshmallow roasting, winter games and other special programming, Robert C. Valade Park will be the go-to destination this winter.

For more information about winter programming, please visit www.detroitriverfront.org/things-to-do



THE HEALING MEMORIAL

Make a Memorial Pouch in recognition of loss during the Covid-19 Pandemic and contribute to regional memorial project to be displayed at the TCF Center.





REMEMBERING **CARL LEVIN**

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is fortunate that over the past two decades, many individuals have played significant roles in the transformation of the Detroit Riverfront. There is one individual in particular however, who has helped shape the riverfront perhaps more than anyone else. That person is Senator Carl Levin.

The entire Conservancy team was saddened to learn of the passing of Senator Carl Levin this spring. “The Senator” as he was lovingly referred to, was a friend to the Conservancy and a fierce champion for the revitalization of the Detroit Riverfront. He was a key leader in the development of a Riverwalk that has transformed the City of Detroit and that welcomes millions of visitors a year.

Any story about Senator Levin would not be complete without mentioning his longtime state staff director, Cassandra Woods. Woods was a Detroit native and worked with the Senator from 1979 until her passing in 2013. She was known as being a dedicated advocate for the people of Michigan and a tireless advocate for cancer patients in her later years. The Senator and Cassandra were

a dynamic and formidable team, indeed. Among the Senator’s many contributions to the riverfront transformation were his efforts to secure more than \$40 million dollars in federal funds that provided a significant jumpstart to the project. An interesting note is that in his legendary decades-long Senate career, the first earmark he ever championed was for those funds for the riverfront revitalization.

The funds were instrumental in the development of numerous high-profile projects along the East Riverfront, such as Mt. Elliott Park, the Detroit-Wayne County Port Authority building, parcels east and west of what is now known as Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre, the bridge at Robert C. Valade Park and the Uniroyal Riverwalk extension. Some of the most popular destination along the riverfront—the Best Riverwalk in the US—were shaped by Senator Levin.

While he loved the entire riverfront, it was the West Riverfront, which stretches from the site of the former Joe Louis Arena to the Ambassador Bridge, of which the Senator was especially fond. He had a vision for that stretch of riverfront that it would be every bit as

vibrant, beautiful and popular as the East Riverfront had become.

The Detroit Riverfront remained a special place to the Senator throughout his entire life, and he visited it often. In fact, just weeks before his passing, he was able to view the riverfront and take in the newly completed boardwalk in front of Riverfront Towers. It was a project that he had personally championed ever since the Towers were constructed many decades ago. He knew that someday in the future, the public would be able to enjoy this scenic stretch of riverfront.

As much as the Senator was loved throughout the state of Michigan and beyond, he loved his family, friends and constituents just as deeply. Senator Levin leaves behind his beloved wife Barbara, his children and grandchildren, as well as his brother Sander. While his passing is a profound loss to the community, the Conservancy team knows that his legacy lives on.

In the coming months, the Conservancy will be announcing details for a fitting tribute to honor Senator Levin. In the meantime, please consider a visit to the riverfront, pause and give a thank you thought to Senator Carl Levin.



CARL LEVIN AND THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT

By Eugene Driker

The passion that Carl Levin held for the Detroit River was not simply the result of his having dealt with it as a legislator, first as a Detroit councilman and then for thirty-six years as a United States Senator. It was instead a reflection of the love that he and his family had for the outdoors and natural wonders, coupled with his long-felt disappointment that Detroit was squandering its most precious resource: a magnificent international waterway that could and should provide so much pleasure to its citizens, if only they had easy access to it.

I remember well our family watching the Fourth of July fireworks from Carl's office in the City County Building and hearing him express disbelief that in the heart of our great city the riverfront was taken up with cement storage silos, long-abandoned industrial buildings, and parking lots. Fortunately, this misuse of a great public resource, which had remained undealt with for decades, finally yielded to Carl's vision and to his tenacity.

It is important for us to remember that when Carl's life as a legislator changed from local to national, he never forgot where he came from, nor how much his new influence in Washington could do for his beloved hometown. How many times did we witness him pulling out an index card from the pocket of his ubiquitous white dress shirt to scribble down a reminder of some local need that would command his attention when he returned to the Capitol? The Detroit Riverfront in all of its dimensions was often the subject of those notes.

Carl's devotion to the Detroit River was apparent in the earliest days of his extraordinary political life. Few Detroiters are now likely to recall Carl's gutsy lone negative vote on the City Council against granting exclusive river access to a luxury apartment being developed by a group of influential Detroiters. While clearly voting against his personal political interests, Carl's principles dictated his stand. He believed it contrary to the public interest to block river access that would benefit all citizens in order to provide private

access to a handful of them. How poetic that in the last year of his life, Carl's view finally prevailed as work was completed extending the Riverwalk around the decades-old barrier that he had opposed from the outset.

Carl loved people, and they in turn loved him even if they had never met him and held political views far different than his. Michiganders of all political stripes recognized that he cared about them and that he acted accordingly, whether that meant getting a multi-million dollar earmark from Congress that helped catalyze the Riverwalk two decades ago, or becoming its most prominent spokesman, bringing along so many other donors and supporters to the cause.

When the history of our city in the early 21st century is written, it will surely lay out in detail just how critical Carl Levin was to its rebirth in general and to the riverfront in particular. His devotion to this remarkable transformation has forever changed the trajectory of Detroit.



MY FRIEND, **CARL**

By Robert W. Marans

News of Carl Levin's death in late July was a sad moment for Detroiters and for many others throughout Michigan, the country and the world. He had been our U.S. Senator for 36 years and before that, a Detroit City Councilman for eight years. It was especially sad for me as someone who has been his friend for more than 70 years. We first met in grade school and grew close during junior high through a shared interest in sports, particularly baseball, and philately. Our friendship grew following graduation from college when we both worked in downtown Detroit and met regularly for lunch to discussing politics and sports. The friendship deepened as we both married, had children, traveled together, and shared numerous life events.

One of my last visits with Carl was in early June when we visited a new section of the Detroit Riverwalk behind Riverfront Towers. His words to me as I departed to head home were, "See you at the christening." In the coming weeks, the christening of the U.S. Navy's newest and most sophisticated

missile destroyer, the USS Carl M. Levin, was to take place.

The day of the christening, which had been rescheduled to October 21, 2021, was a very special, but emotional day for me. I was honored to be a guest at the christening. The event took place at the Bath Iron Works (BIW) shipyard in Maine. I was there because of my longtime friendship with Carl; but also to accompany my daughter who was part of the official program. Gayl Marans Monto served as Matron of Honor for one of the ship sponsors, Kate Levin Markel, the eldest of the Levin daughters. Gayl was asked to serve in that capacity because of her lifetime friendship with Kate.

The core of the ceremony consisted of brief speeches given by the governor and senators from Maine, as well as Senator Jack Reed from Rhode Island. Reed was Levin's successor as Democratic Chair of the Arms Services Committee. There were also speeches by officials from BIW, the U. S. Navy and Levin family members, including Congressman Andy Levin, former Congressman Sandy Levin (Carl's brother) and daughters Kate, Laura,



and Erica. The remarks of the officials were laudatory in their praise of Carl as a public servant and person of modesty and great integrity. But the words from family members were the most meaningful and moving.

Carl was proud of the 510-foot ship and the honor bestowed upon him and, he would have loved the ceremony. He looked forward to attending the event, but sadly did not live to see it. However, Carl and Barbara did visit BIW in 2019 and saw the ship while it was being built. In true Carl fashion, he provided feedback to the ship builders and to Navy officials during his visit and even made some new friends along the way.

Many of those new acquaintances were present at the christening, which to me was further testament to the importance of the ship and to the humanity of its namesake, Senator Carl Levin, who made a lasting impression upon everyone he met.



THOUGHTS ON **THE SENATOR**



“It was Carl Levin who brought our family to Detroit, which was my husband Kermit’s born and raised hometown. Carl was a City Council member at the time and reached out to Kermit in person at our California home in 1975. He recruited him for Mayor Coleman Young’s appointment as Corporation Counsel, and that’s how we got here. We moved into Lafayette Park, where I still live and will never leave, and I’m forever grateful to Carl for the opportunity to come here.”

– Penny Bailer, community advocate and long-time Conservancy Board Member



“Senator Levin loved the Detroit Riverfront, and he never stopped working to make it more accessible for the public. During his legendary career, Senator Levin improved the quality of life for millions of people. One of my fondest memories is the time we spent talking with residents of Riverfront Towers about the boardwalk that connects the Riverwalk to Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park. That project would not have moved forward without his advocacy, and he was so proud to see it in person after we completed construction.”

– Mark Wallace, President & CEO of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy



“Senator Levin was an important advocate for the State of Michigan, and most certainly for the Detroit Riverfront. His tireless efforts in support of the development and sustainability of the waterfront will be remembered. His leadership in securing \$40 million for the East and West Riverfronts provided an important financial stake in the ground on the importance of this public space, serving as a funding catalyst for future dollars raised. Over the 10 years that I had the privilege of working with the Senator, I will always be grateful for his friendship, and for our shared passion for the Detroit Riverfront.”

– Faye Alexander Nelson, former President & CEO of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy



“Senator Levin was a powerful advocate and consistent cheerleader for the riverfront project. From the very first time I talked to him about the project, I found him to be very engaged and approachable. Over time, I came to realize that he was that way with everyone. It didn’t matter who you were, he had time for you. And his ability to focus on issues large and small was incredible. One time I was in his DC office as he was about to chair a meeting of the powerful Armed Services Committee and he wanted to first make certain that a riverfront challenge was under control and that we were making progress on a labor dispute for a nonprofit that he was mediating back in Detroit. That was Carl.”

– Matt Cullen, Chairman of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy





VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: REGINA T. LAWSON

Born on the East Side of Detroit, Regina Lawson has lived near the riverfront her whole life and has been involved with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy since its conception. When Regina volunteers on the riverfront, she helps wherever there is a need, including checking in guests at events and staffing the ambassador cart. However, she is best known for her involvement in special riverfront events, namely the Herbal Walk & Talk.

Regina has been leading the Herbal Walk & Talk on the riverfront for the past nine years. As part of this event, she teaches participants about the riverfront and the uses of different plants that can be found along the Riverwalk. In particular, she has always felt a special connection to the dandelion, which she and her grandmother used to collect to eat.

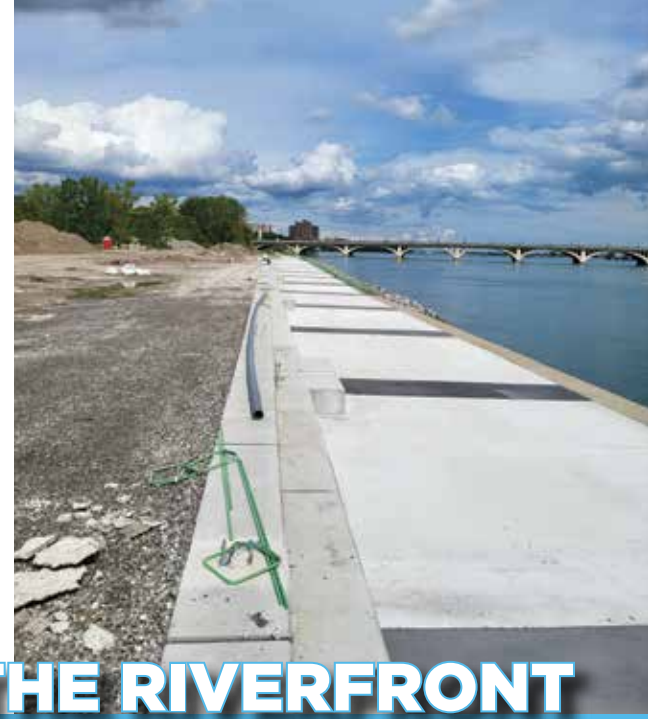
Growing up, Regina's grandfather, who was Cherokee, would take her out to Belle Isle to go fishing. On these outings, he would teach her about the history of the riverfront and the importance of having a connection to nature. For that reason, Regina has always enjoyed visiting the parks along the Riverwalk to study the plants that grow there. People who see her often affectionately call her the "Weed Lady" because she is always taking pictures and examining plants to determine their nutritional and medicinal properties.

For Regina, volunteering is not just about connecting individuals with their community – it is about helping others foster a unique connection with nature. When she visits the riverfront, she remembers her grandparents. "My grandfather would tell me that if we have anything negative in our lives, just let it go," said Regina. "Throw it in that river and let it flow."

Most recently, Regina has been involved with The Healing Memorial project for the Conservancy, which is a large art installation comprised of colorful, hand-made pouches from individuals in the Detroit community. Each pouch includes a personal dedication as an expression of grief and healing. Having lost her mother earlier this year, Regina feels especially connected to this project. "It's about remembering people who have gone before us in these trying times," said Regina. "It's emotional and heartwarming at the same time."

Regina can be found volunteering all year long for the Conservancy, so next time you see her on the #1 Riverwalk in the country, please say "Hi."

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



A BUSY YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION ALONG THE RIVERFRONT

Looking back over a busy construction season in 2021, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy made significant progress toward its vision of revitalizing 5.5 miles of riverfront and making connections that provide community members with safer and easier access to the waterfront.

Uniroyal Promenade

Work continues on the Uniroyal Promenade, a crucial section of Riverwalk that will connect Gabriel Richard Park with Mt. Elliott Park, as well as provide pathways to the bridge to Belle Isle. Crews will continue significant concrete work over the coming months as this scenic stretch of riverfront continues to take shape. When complete, this stretch of Riverwalk will feature extra-wide pathways and separate lanes for pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as colorful landscaping, places to sit, lighting and security cameras. A stone barrier of rip rap along the water's edge will serve as a habitat for various fish species and aquatic life.

Mayor Dennis W. Archer Greenway

Earlier this summer, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy joined with the City of Detroit to celebrate the naming of the Mayor Dennis W. Archer Greenway, which was formerly known as the Joseph Campau Greenway. Phase one of the greenway runs from Jefferson Avenue to Robert Bradby Drive between McDougall and Chene Streets. Several hundred residents turned out for the August 19 celebration that featured special programming along the entire stretch of the greenway, as well as giveaways, free food, musical entertainment, hustle classes, tennis lessons, inflatable games and more.

The second phase opens in 2022 and will extend the greenway from Robert Bradby Drive to Vernor Highway. The Archer Greenway provides east siders with safe and convenient access to the beautiful Detroit Riverfront.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park

With the design phase now complete, the Conservancy is looking forward to a spring 2022 groundbreaking for the much-anticipated Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park. In the coming months, the Conservancy will work with the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct sediment remediation along the water's edge. This family-friendly 22-acre park will be the newest among numerous popular riverfront destinations for visitors when it opens in 2024. The park will feature an expansive lawn for special events, basketball courts at the William Davidson Sport House, a large water garden and the Delta Dental Children's Play Garden.

DDA Property

Crews begin working on the Downtown Detroit Authority (DDA) property immediately west of Riverfront Towers in October. This portion of the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC)-led project will see the installation of steel sheeting to strengthen the river's edge continuing through January. Final grading and concrete work will begin in the spring. Once that is complete, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy will partner with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) to begin installation of a spacious concrete plaza, tiered concrete seating, three rain gardens, decorative fencing, marine railing, lights and security cameras.





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