

BLUE WATER RIVER WALK

GRAND OPENING

The many donors, friends and partners who have banded together to create the Blue Water River Walk will celebrate its Grand Opening on June 7th, 2014. The vision and efforts to create a River Walk really began with a bus trip for 50+ people down to the beautiful Detroit River Walk in the fall of 2010. Now, just four short years later, the entire Blue Water Region will come together to celebrate the complete restoration of almost one-mile of St. Clair River shoreline. Under the ownership of the Blue Water Land Fund, which is a subsidiary company of the Community Foundation of St. Clair County, millions of dollars in public and private funds have restored and re-opened the shoreline for public use and enjoyment. The public is invited to celebrate with us on June 7th, 2014, for the Grand Opening of the Blue Water River Walk.



Outdoor Classroom

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT



Hale Walker, Senior Vice President of Michigan Mutual, Inc., a wholesale mortgage lender with offices in Southfield and Port Huron, is not new to philanthropic giving. Michigan Mutual's generous donation to the Blue Water River Walk project may be viewed as philanthropic in nature, yet Hale considers it more of an investment:

Q. In what way do you see your donation as an investment?

A. People gravitate to communities offering amenities that enhance the experience of being in that community. As the Blue Water Area improves, people want to live here, work here and invest here — all of which enhance the business of mortgage lending. It only made sense to be a part of this and provide some inertia to get others involved.

Q. How do you think the River Walk will impact the community?

A. The River Walk is again a perfect example of the need to build a vibrant place to live and work. The question of which comes first, jobs or amenities, can be argued, but the fact of the matter is the River Walk is a very exciting addition to the quality of life in the Blue Water Area.

Q. Who do you see utilizing the River Walk?

A. The use of River Walk goes far beyond what we see in the Port Huron area. This initiative represents an entire county's commitment to the completion of the Bridge to Bay Trail. I see the River Walk as the gem of the Bridge to Bay Trail — attracting bikers, runners and walkers to take advantage of the trail.

Q. Any final thoughts?

A. In my opinion, what needs to happen next is the further promotion of the assets of the Blue Water Area. We need to attract both local and outside interest to invest here. The community is on the right track when you consider the investment in the Convention Center, the Hilton Doubletree and Freighter's restaurant, the Baker College Culinary School, the YMCA and the St. Clair Little League Park. All of these investments enhance the living experience in St. Clair County and increase the viability of attracting outside interest.

THE SHORE BEFORE

Soon, visitors to the Blue Water Area will have an opportunity to enjoy the shores of the St. Clair River and its outlying wilderness areas as they existed before the influence of European settlers. In 2014, the southern-most end of the Blue Water River Walk Project will become the site of a 2.75-acre county wetlands park.

The wetland restoration, part of the master plan for the River Walk, will be a seamless addition to the project thanks to a partnership between the Community Foundation's Blue Water Land Fund and the St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission (SCCPRC). While the Land Fund company has overseen the entire project, the SCCPRC has led the way regarding the development of the wetlands, says Randy Maiers of the Community Foundation.

A Community Foundation grant from NOAA covered the cost of removing the shoreline debris to prepare for the wetland restoration, but it is a \$1,039,500 grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation that is making the reconstructed habitat for small fish, native plant life and migratory birds a reality.

Upon its completion, access to the area will be composed of secondary trails which will feature educational interpretive panels similar to those along the River Walk. Mark Brochu, director of SCCPRC, says wetlands access will blend with the River Walk in such a way as to ensure visitors have a consistent experience from the River Walk's start to its finish at the park.

The project is slated to begin this summer and barring any unforeseen complications, will be mostly complete by the end of 2014.



Future wetlands park, before restoration.



Warren, David & Ed Brooks

THE BROOKS BROTHERS

The three Brooks boys; Ed, Warren and David, grew up along the St. Clair River just 9 houses south of the Seaway Terminal. As young boys they fished and swam in the river, played street hockey in the Medical Village parking lot across the street, and played sandlot baseball on the vacant lot that was left when the old Murphy mansion was razed. Fishing was a regular pastime, and they recall buying minnows from a bait shop that used to be located on what is now Desmond Landing and the Blue Water River Walk. Their parents, Walter & Mary Brooks, gave the boys an early education about the importance of “community” and a strong sense of giving back. The early years of the Port Huron Museum benefited greatly from



Brooks Brothers with Grandpa Keith Brooks

the support, involvement and dedication of the Brooks'. Today, the Museum, YMCA, Fort Gratiot Lighthouse, and the beautiful new Blue Water River Walk are some of the beneficiaries of the continued philanthropy by the Brooks' boys and their families.

“It’s like a phoenix that has arisen from the ashes of what was once a stark area,” said David of the River Walk. “The reclaiming of the land for public use and restoration of the waterfront and habitat are truly something Port Huron residents can be proud of.” The Brooks’ are proud donors and partners in the continuing rebirth of the St. Clair River shoreline.

2013 IN REVIEW

The efforts to create the Blue Water River Walk through the complete restoration of habitat and the naturalization of almost one mile of St. Clair River shoreline made incredible progress in 2013. “Our collective progress last year exceeded everyone’s expectations,” said Doug S. Touma, chair of the Blue Water Land Fund which is the nonprofit owner of the River Walk. “Back in 2010 when this project began in earnest, we told the public to expect a 10 year schedule. Now, it appears as if we’ll be almost done with all of the major components after just four years.”

Even now, in the heart of a strong, cold winter, visitors by the dozen are drawn every day to the now beautiful shores of the St. Clair River. Since the first pilot phase of shoreline restoration in 2012, which was funded by the US Fish & Wildlife Service, approximately 8,000 tons of old industrial debris has been removed from the shallow waters and shoreline. The majority of the shoreline and habitat restoration work was funded from a \$2 million grant through NOAA and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

Private donors have also made significant investments in the Blue Water River Walk. \$150,000 was raised from private sources to completely restore and re-purpose the old railroad ferry dock on the north end of the property. When spring arrives visitors will find the ferry dock is in fact the most scenic patio to be found anywhere on the river. Private donors also provided significant matching funds for an MDOT grant which allowed a paved, multi-purpose pedestrian trail to be built. At a cost of almost \$300,000 the trail is a key part of the larger Bridge to Bay Trail system. The safety posts along the trail (bollards) are in fact re-purposed pilings from a large timber wall that served as a fender for the ferry dock.

In early spring visitors will find new interpretive signage and the beginnings of a new permanent collection of public art along the River Walk. The grand opening of the Blue Water River Walk is scheduled for June 7, 2014.

STURGEON FESTIVAL

The Sturgeon Festival is a one-day event offering close encounters with the “Giants of the Great Lakes”. Held on the shores of the St. Clair River, it provides an opportunity for families to see these endangered prehistoric creatures up close.

The festival will feature three Huron Lady Sturgeon Cruises in which guests will be able to see lake sturgeon in the St. Clair River via a live video feed from a diver underneath the Huron Lady. The video feed will be broadcast to televisions on deck which will allow guests a view of sturgeon from the bottom of the river. The event will also include indoor & outdoor interactive exhibits, including a live sturgeon on display, activities and workshops, and promote recent St. Clair River habitat restoration projects, including the Blue Water River Walk.

The Sturgeon Festival is a partnership between natural resource agencies, government, industry, scientists, and anglers in order to highlight the ecosystem approach to managing native fish and wildlife populations in the St. Clair River. For a complete list of festival activities and to purchase Sturgeon Cruise tickets, visit www.SturgeonFestival.com



Saturday, May 31, 2014 | 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Great Lakes Maritime Center, Port Huron

RIVER DAY

Come out and join us on June 7th for River Days! We aren’t called the Blue Water Region for nothing, and since 2004 the St. Clair County Health Department has been organizing recreational activities in early June that allow everyone to celebrate, enhance and protect our beautiful rivers, lakes and bays. River Days helps introduce the public to our precious water resources. Through annual River Day events we help families enjoy a day together in the great outdoors. This love of nature creates memories and stewards that will last a lifetime. So whether you like to stay dry, get wet, play, learn or relax, it won’t cost you a thing to get out and have fun on River Day! June 7th, multiple locations.

Saturday, June 7, 2014 | Free | www.RiverDayFun.com



2014 & Beyond: Future goals of the River Walk

- The development of Rotary Park just north of the Railroad Ferry Dock
- A fishing pier south of the Gray Fox ship
- A tribute area to the early Native American Peoples

For more information about the River Walk visit Stclairfoundation.org



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