



Issue 22 / Q4 / 2023



## A MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Wow .... to say that it's been an eventful year would be an understatement!

In addition to the multiple celebrations for our 20th anniversary, the premiere of a documentary film about the transformation of the Detroit Riverfront, and the hundreds of hours of community programming that took place across all of our parks, we opened two new and long-awaited connections: the Southwest Greenway in May and the Uniroyal Promenade in October. These new connections signify more than just the physical connection they provide between parks and neighborhoods. They are part of a vision coming to life, an example of hard work paying off and proof that with collaboration and a common goal, even the seemingly impossible can be achieved.

Twenty years ago, community leaders and stakeholders came together to discuss a vision for the transformation of the Detroit Riverfront. I'll never forget the meeting where we all discussed forming a board of directors for a brand new Conservancy to help make that vision a reality. Every single person raised their hand to volunteer. It is that level of commitment, from all of our stakeholders, that has propelled us forward.

Our path has been filled with many successes but also roadblocks; humbling reminders that transformational change does not happen overnight. But we didn't give up, we kept pushing forward, and year after year we've seen the results of that dedication.

So here we are in 2023, two decades later, completing the 3.5-mile vision for the East Riverfront with the Uniroyal Promenade and well underway on the construction of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park on the West Riverfront. The beautiful and welcoming public spaces along the Detroit Riverfront are no longer just a vision or a blueprint sitting on a dusty shelf, but rather a daily reality for the people of Detroit and the surrounding communities. Our network of parks and greenways has changed the perception of the City of Detroit and become an essential part of people's lives. Many young people have never known a Detroit without a vibrant and expanding riverfront.

This year has given me a lot to think about and reflect upon, but I'm still looking forward. Looking forward to the daily progress I'm seeing at Ralph Wilson Park. Looking forward to the always expanding programming we're providing to the community. Looking forward to keeping our spaces beautiful and safe and welcoming to everyone. And I'm looking forward to your continued support of our mission as we move into our next 20 years and beyond. I've never been more optimistic about what we'll create together – I know we're in for an exciting ride.

Happy Holidays and thank you for joining me in looking forward.



Matthew P. Cullen  
Chairman



# A WEEKEND FULL OF FALL FUN!

## Soirée on the Greenway

Once again as a Friday night kick off to the Detroit Harvest Fest & Food Truck Rally, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy hosted Soirée on the Greenway, a masquerade fundraiser at the Dequindre Cut Freight Yard, presented by Citizens.

More than 700 guests donned their fall finest and came dressed to impress for an evening of excitement. Partygoers were treated to performances by the Motley Misfits and the Aston Neighborhood Pleasure Club's Bizarre Orchestra while enjoying a variety of fare from Detroit's most popular food trucks. Guests could also participate in a tarot card reading, try their luck at the carnival arcade and create their own letterpress artwork with Signal Return.

Soirée was also the first opportunity to view the brand new mural by artist Joel Grothaus commemorating the Conservancy's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The mural can be seen just north of the Wilkins entrance to the Dequindre Cut.

The Conservancy thanks our many sponsors and guests who came out for this successful evening which raised over \$160,000 to support the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's work along the Riverwalk and associated parks and greenways.

## Harvest Fest

Detroit Harvest Fest & Food Truck Rally was back on the Dequindre Cut this fall and more than 40,000 people came out to join us for this fun-filled family weekend.

Visitors had their choice of over 50 of Detroit's best food trucks: from traditional fair food to delicious barbeque, Mediterranean, Mexican and more, no one went home hungry.

Six music stages provided entertainment for all musical tastes featuring artists from across the metro area and around the state. There were endless opportunities to keep the kids busy, with a pumpkin patch and decorating station, 12 stops for trick-or-treating with some of our favorite partners and an inflatable fun park and kids' zone that stretched along the Cut.

This was the third year the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy hosted the Detroit Harvest Fest & Food Truck Rally along the Dequindre Cut, providing over a mile of food, music and fun for the community.

Visit [detroitriverfront.org/things-to-do](http://detroitriverfront.org/things-to-do) for a full list of programs and events.



## THANK YOU TO OUR SOIRÉE SPONSORS

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# CONSTRUCTION UPDATES

## RALPH C. WILSON, JR. CENTENNIAL PARK

After a busy fall construction season, the landscape at Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park has changed significantly during the last several months.

Driving down Jefferson Avenue, the first hint that something truly special is happening at the 22-acre site is catching a glimpse of the dramatic William Davidson Sport House. Crews have finished pouring the concrete parapet walls and are currently pouring a section of the roof deck. Sandblasting of several walls around the structure has started and will continue through December. The skylight is also arriving soon for a winter installation. As soon as that work is complete, crews will remove all the scaffolding and begin preparing for a spring pour of the concrete floor slab.

At the Huron-Clinton Metroparks Water Garden, crews are finalizing the AquaBlok pond liner installation along the water's edge. Topsoil has been added to the large island in the middle of the Water Garden and the runnel bridge foundation is complete, awaiting the wooden walkway expected this spring. Additionally, the pump system and

pipework for the Water Garden has been installed and all light pole bases have been placed.

Along the far western portion of Ralph Wilson Park, crews are finishing grading the site of the expansive DTE Foundation Hill.

At the Delta Dental Play Garden, a partial shipment of play equipment has arrived on site for the water play area and the large custom play animals are expected to arrive next spring. Weather permitting, foundations for the play equipment on the north end of the Play Garden will be installed this season.

Elsewhere throughout the park, the foundations and walls for the two comfort stations have been poured. In the coming weeks, crews will focus on enclosing these buildings and working on interior installations throughout the winter. All remaining underground utility installations will finish next spring.

The Conservancy is targeting a second quarter 2025 grand opening for Ralph Wilson Park.







Black Bottom Archives on the Dequindre Cut



Leona Medley from the Joe Louis Greenway Partnership at Reading & Rhythm on the Riverfront

## CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Take a look at the images on these pages, and the stories throughout this newsletter. Each and every one of these moments would not be possible without the generous support we've received year after year.

Some of you have been supporters since the very beginning, 20 years ago before the first stretch of Riverwalk was poured. Many of you have come to know us more recently but have watched as we continue to expand our footprint while also expanding our programming and community outreach, ensuring that our Detroit Riverfront remains a place to BRING EVERYBODY.

As you consider your annual giving, we encourage you to renew your support and consider an increase in celebration of our 20 years of transformation. This year alone we were able to open two new connections along the riverfront, host programs for hundreds of

thousands of visitors and improve and maintain all of our parks and greenways keeping them safe and beautiful day after day.

Our vision - to transform Detroit's international riverfront into a beautiful, exciting, safe, accessible world-class gathering place for all - is a collective vision that has come to reality over the last 20 years. It is because of the consistent and generous support from our wonderful Detroit community that we have the privilege of continuing our work into the next decade and beyond.

We thank each and every one of our supporters, at every level, for continuing to be our partner in this very important work. Thank you.



We truly 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/2023\\_NL4](http://www.detroitriverfront.org/give/2023_NL4)





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to purchase a wide variety of Detroit  
Riverfront gear, from Dequindre Cut  
hoodies, to Best Riverwalk T shirts and  
baby onesies.



## ADDITIONAL WAYS TO GIVE

In addition to visiting our online store,  
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
- Underwrite a commemorative bench or make an honorary gift for a loved one
- Support the Conservancy at its fundraising events

Visit [detroitriverfront.org/waystohelp](http://detroitriverfront.org/waystohelp)



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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

### Peaches Underwood

**A** Detroit, born and raised, Peaches Underwood retired from working in the state government nine years ago. Since that time, she has been focusing on doing what she enjoys most: spending time with loved ones, reading, and volunteering across the City of Detroit, including with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy.

A huge advocate for reading, Peaches' favorite event is Reading and Rhythm on the Riverfront (R3), the Conservancy's popular childhood literacy program where kids of all ages are invited to enjoy music, a free snack, and a story read by a local celebrity or community leader. In the end, all of the kids take home a free book, courtesy of the Detroit Public Library. At R3, Peaches will typically volunteer at the snack table because she likes to be anywhere she can interact, mingle, and laugh with guests and visitors.

To Peaches, one of the best parts of volunteering is the people you meet – and that includes the other volunteers. “I’ve met some great friends who have become close friends,” she said. “Everybody is like one big family.”

Peaches loves to share the riverfront with everyone she meets and has even gotten her sister and granddaughter involved with some volunteer events. Through her network of Conservancy volunteers, she’s always hearing about other volunteer opportunities and things that are happening in the community.

Since volunteering with the Conservancy, Peaches has watched the transformation of the riverfront and is excited to be a part of everything that is still to come. In the future, she hopes to see even more spaces for children to play, for seniors to gather, and for people to grab a snack or cold drink. But mostly, she looks forward to sharing the riverfront with more and more people, seeing them smiling and having fun.

To all the guests and visitors who stop by the Conservancy's events and enjoy the many parks and green spaces along the Detroit River, Peaches offers a simple message of gratitude: “Thank you for coming out. We wouldn't be here without you.”







# PARTNER SPOTLIGHTS

## URBAN SOLACE

Urban Solace just wrapped their 16th season of programming on the riverfront. From weekly yoga and tai chi classes in Milliken State Park to fan favorite Moonlight Yoga, Michelle Renaud leads one of the longest-running free outdoor yoga programs in Detroit. In recent years she's joined the Conservancy's winter programming line up to give Detroiters ways to get moving outdoors in the winter time. Michelle is one of DRFC's most long-standing partners and is a core component of the Conservancy's Health and Wellness programming. For more information about Urban Solace, visit: [www.urbansolacestudio.com](http://www.urbansolacestudio.com)

## INSIDEOUT LITERARY ARTS

Through creative writing, InsideOut inspires and equips young people to think critically, create bravely, and share their voices with the world. InsideOut Literary Arts partners with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy to celebrate the written and spoken word through open mics, poetry performances, and the annual If the River Could Sing: A Celebration of Writing and River at Robert C. Valade Park. InsideOut has been partnering with the Conservancy since 2021 and primarily serves youth and teens in Detroit and the Metro Detroit area. For more information about InsideOut Literary Arts, visit: [insideoutdetroit.org](http://insideoutdetroit.org)



## DETROIT PUBLIC LIBRARY MOBILE LIBRARY

For more than 80 years, the Mobile Library has provided an integral service to the city of Detroit and Highland Park communities by visiting neighborhoods, schools, community organizations and events.

The Mobile Library is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including computer terminals, free Wi-Fi, access to electronic resources and databases, laptop stations, and a large outside TV screen. Customers are able to check out books and audio-visual materials and print/copy up to 10 black and white pages for free.

The DPL Mobile Library is a key partner for the Conservancy's Reading & Rhythm on the Riverfront program that takes place each summer at Gabriel Richard Park. This past summer, the Mobile Library gave away free books to thousands of kids through their partnership with the Conservancy.

For more information and to request the Mobile Library for events and activities in the Detroit and Highland Park communities, email [douglass@detroitpubliclibrary.org](mailto:douglass@detroitpubliclibrary.org) or call 313-481-1706.

## CURTIS IVERY HEALTH & WELLNESS EDUCATION CENTER AT WCCC

The Wayne County Community College District Curtis L. Ivery Health and Wellness Education Center (HWEC) is the premier health and wellness club for WCCCD students, faculty, staff, and the community. The HWEC has the latest equipment, workouts, and knowledge to help people achieve their fitness goals. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy partners with the HWEC for the Riverwalkers program, bringing fitness classes for older adults directly to the riverfront.

Located in the Curtis L. Ivery Center Educational Complex on Fort Street in Detroit, the HWEC is nearby and easy to fit into your daily schedule. Setup a tour, or check out a Zumba, Dance Fusion, Yoga, Strength Training or Spin class. Find out more at [mywcccdhwec.org](http://mywcccdhwec.org) or by calling 313-496-2600.



# WINTER AT VALADE

## A Full Season of Fun on the Riverfront

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is bringing back another programming packed winter with our fourth season of Winter at Valade!

Every weekend starting in January, Robert C. Valade Park will transform into a winter wonderland with fun for the whole family. Visitors can enjoy giant bonfires, marshmallow roasters, sledding on the hill, hot seasonal drinks, winter games and more! Don't have your own sled? Not to worry – the kids can borrow a sled from the Valade sled shed.

Throughout the winter, we'll be hosting four special themed weekends, like the popular Fire & Ice Festival and Lunar New Year celebration. Check out the dates and themes in the sidebar and set your calendar to join us.

New this season we'll be featuring Fireside Fridays, every Friday from January 5 to February 23. In addition to giant bonfires with s'mores and hot chocolate, we'll host trivia night, card tournaments, board games night, an open mic and more.

If you're looking for a way to decompress or to get moving at the end of a winter weekend, join us for Self-Care Sundays, January 7 to February 25. We'll provide opportunities for reflection, fitness and activity along the riverfront with power walks, Sunday strolls and winter hustles.

Keep up with all the updates and details for our winter programming on our website at [detroitriverfront.org/winteratvalade](http://detroitriverfront.org/winteratvalade) and on our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/detroitriverfrontconservancy](http://www.facebook.com/detroitriverfrontconservancy)





## LISTING OF WINTER PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

In addition to winter fun every weekend and Fireside Fridays and Self Care Sundays, we'll be hosting four exciting and activity packed weekends at Robert C. Valade Park.

### Fire & Ice Festival

**Date:** January 5-7

- Ice Carving Competition
- Ax Throwing & Archery
- Giant Fire & Ice Tower Lighting

### Motown Magic

**Date:** January 19-21

- Love Letters to Detroit Open Mic
- Special Detroit Performances
- Detroit Sports Celebration & Mascot Visits

### Mardi Gras

**Date:** February 9-11

- Lunar New Year Celebration
- International Food Truck Rally
- Multicultural Performances
- Crafts & Demonstrations

### Lunar New Year

**Date:** February 23-25

- Carnival games
- Face Painting
- Carnival Food Vendors



Help us keep the community active and warm this winter by sponsoring Winter at Valade!



Scan the QR code to learn more!

[detroitriverfront.org/winteratvaladesponsorships](http://detroitriverfront.org/winteratvaladesponsorships)



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