

Riverfront Making Great Progress

By Trey Runnion

Edward Eveld recently wrote about Kansas City's riverfront in Star Magazine (7/7). He recognized, as many of us do, that this city has dedicated less effort to its riverfront than that of other cities of similar size. The Port Authority of Kansas City is working hard to change that direction.

We were pleased to continue the fireworks tradition on Kansas City's Riverfront for a crowd of more than 500,000 for the Fourth of July weekend. Recognized by Special Event Magazine as a 2008 international finalist for Best Fair/Festival, KCRiverFest celebrated its fifth year of celebrating America's Independence - Kansas City style. There's nothing quite as breathtaking as watching as fireworks reflect on the waters of the Missouri River accompanied by inspiring music. KCRiverFest is the main awareness and fundraising event for Friends of the River-Kansas City, a nonprofit organization that promotes awareness and public use of the Riverfront throughout the metropolitan area. The Port Authority of Kansas City is a proud sponsor and host of KCRiverFest. We kicked off the weekend with Missouri's Senator Kit Bond at a ribbon cutting event with over 100 of our riverfront supporters for the new Wetland Ecosystem Restoration Area located on the Riverfront Heritage Trail near First and Main streets.

Kansas City's riverfront has great momentum. The Port Authority, Ameristar Casino and the City of Kansas City recently broke ground on the ASB Underpass. This significant improvement on the Riverfront Heritage Trail will allow safe passage under the ASB Bridge and connect more than 10 miles of the region's Riverfront Trail System. Earlier this spring the Port Authority was the host of the third annual River Otter Day Riverfront cleanup with more than 300 volunteers.

The Riverfront Heritage Trail looks wonderful, and Berkley Park, adjacent to the 55-acre downtown Riverfront Economic Development Initiative (REDI) site, is constantly adding new amenities.

The future looks bright for the REDI site, with plans for a world-class, environmentally sensitive neighborhood district, featuring multiple living units, retail, offices, and attractions.

Take a walk along the Riverfront Heritage Trail this summer. Start at the Town of Kansas Pedestrian Bridge and see the Wetland Ecosystem Restoration Area and the construction progress on the ASB Bridge Trail Underpass. Come back in a few months and notice the changes. Native grasses will grow, and mature, native Missouri flowering plants will bloom. The ASB Underpass will be complete by the end of this year, and the "green" Front Street Extension connecting the River District to the interstate will be underway.

So, plan to celebrate Fourth of July on Kansas City's Riverfront in 2010. Remember that there is much more to come. The Port Authority is committed to fulfilling its vision of creating a vibrant sustainable River District and a world class riverfront where people can live, work, and play.

Trey Runnion is chairman of the Port Authority of Kansas City. He lives in Kansas City, Missouri.