



Issue 29 / Q4 / 2025

A MESSAGE FROM THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT CONSERVANCY TEAM

When our journey began more than two decades ago, we made a commitment to the Detroit community – a promise to develop and care for Detroit's International Riverfront so that it would be an accessible, welcoming place for everyone to enjoy.

Twenty-three years later, with eight miles of connected trails, 100 acres of public space, 200 days of free programming each year, 400 dedicated volunteers and millions of visitors, the results of that commitment can be seen and felt every day by the community that has come to call the Detroit Riverfront its own.

This year has been one of extraordinary progress. Across the Conservancy, both within our organization and throughout our public spaces, we have seen growth, renewal and a deepened sense of connection as we continue creating places that bring people together along the water's edge.

The grand opening of Ralph Wilson Park in October marked a milestone more than seven years in the making. What began as conversations and sketches became a reality filled with life and joy. More than 55,000 people joined us for opening weekend, celebrating a park that truly belongs to everyone. We are especially thankful for the hundreds of people, many pictured on this page, who brought this vision to life through years of

planning, collaboration, and care. Whether part of the construction team, landscaping crew, Community Advisory Team, partner organization, or member of our staff, each individual's commitment to this project was instrumental in creating this world-class public park.

This year also brought new connections, linking the east and west riverfront from Belle Isle all the way to Michigan Central.

As an organization, we have continued to evolve to meet the needs of a growing riverfront. We have strengthened our governance, welcomed new team members, and are proud to introduce new leadership on our Board of Directors. Our founding Board Chair, Matt Cullen, will conclude his remarkable tenure at the end of this year after more than 23 years of dedicated service. As he transitions into an advisory role and remains on our board, we welcome incoming Chair Sandy Pierce, who will guide us into a new chapter of stewardship. Together, we will honor the promises that built this riverfront while preparing it for generations to come.

Thank you for believing in our mission and for joining us as we move into a new chapter on the Detroit Riverfront.

With gratitude,

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Team



2025 Year In Review

The Detroit Riverfront saw another remarkable year of growth and connection. From visitors and program participants to volunteers and community partners, each number reflects the people who make the riverfront a vibrant gathering place... FOR EVERYONE!



1,900,000

Total Number of Riverfront Visits



217

Days Programmed



352

Field Trip Participants



5,128

Volunteer Hours Served



104,273

Public Program Participants



48207

Zip Code with Highest Number of Visits



527

Detroit Riverfront Volunteers Engaged



1,946

Pounds of Litter Removed at Clean-Ups



Reflections on the 1K CHALLENGE

In early 2025, I had a wild idea: complete 1,000 miles of activity (running, walking, biking, rollerblading) on the riverfront and our connected greenways by the end of the year. And just like that, the 1K Challenge was born.

The inspiration was simple – connection. Connection with other riverfront users, with our greenways and park spaces, with nature, and with myself. By committing to this goal, I committed to spending the time needed to deeply understand the Conservancy and its value to our community during my first full year as CEO.

As I write this in mid-December, I have fewer than 100 miles to go to reach my goal and I'm on track for more than 170 hours of activity this year!

Along the way, I've met so many incredible people on the riverfront. They shared stories of what the riverfront means to them. I crossed paths with visitors from around the country experiencing the riverfront for the first time, in awe of its beauty and presence. I watched families make memories and individuals find quiet moments of peace.

I heard multiple foreign languages. Once, I heard three different languages in the same day! I saw countless species of birds and wildlife, from bald eagles and osprey to hawks, pheasants, cormorants, and majestic great blue herons.

I witnessed the changing seasons. I saw ice thawing and cracking, summer sunlight shimmering on the water, and winter freezing it once again. I felt wind that nearly knocked me over and learned it is a constant companion along the water's edge.

I saw million-dollar sunrises and postcard sunsets. I felt the power of the water and how it draws us in and uniquely unites us. Most of all, I gained an immense appreciation for the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and what it means to our entire region.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me on this journey! I'm looking forward to more miles and more connections along the riverfront in 2026.

Ryan Sullivan



Leadership in Motion

WELCOME SANDY PIERCE

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy is excited to introduce Sandy Pierce as our new Board Chair, beginning January 2026. A longtime civic leader and banking executive, Sandy brings a wealth of experience and a deep passion for the Detroit Riverfront. A native Detroiter, Sandy has held multiple leadership positions within the nonprofit community and currently serves on the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. Moving forward, Sandy will guide the Conservancy as we continue to grow and connect our community to this treasured space.

"I'm honored to step into this role and help lead the Conservancy into its next chapter. Over two decades of incredible work have transformed our riverfront, and I'm excited to build on that momentum for the future."

Sandy Pierce, Incoming DRFC Board Chair



Moments that Moved Us

A YEAR OF CONNECTION ON THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT

Hundreds of programs, thousands of people, and countless moments of joy filled the Detroit Riverfront this year. We hosted more than 200 days of free programming, each designed with intention and care to bring people together and strengthen our riverfront community.

Kids came out to Gabriel Richard Park this summer to fall in love with reading during the 15th season of Reading & Rhythm on the Riverfront. Groups of active adults gathered every Tuesday and Thursday at Cullen Plaza for Riverwalkers, getting their steps in while catching up with old friends and making new ones. Children learned to play chess at Valade Park every Wednesday, and young adults found their peace with morning yoga before work.

These experiences do more than fill our parks; they enrich lives, connect neighbors, and remind us what makes the Detroit Riverfront so special. Free and accessible programming is at the heart of our mission, and it's only possible through the generosity of supporters like you. Scan the code to learn how you can help us continue creating meaningful moments of connection on the #1 Riverwalk in the U.S.A.



GOVERNANCE UPDATES AT THE CONSERVANCY

This November, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Board announced series of changes to its Board and staff protocols designed to enhance the Conservancy's financial operations and strengthen board governance.

Moving forward, the Board has reduced its maximum size from 55 to 30 members and introduced term limits of three consecutive three-year terms for at-large members. Board orientations, retreats, conflict

checks, and updated committee charters are all enhanced aspects of the governance framework.

Working with an independent governance adviser and a national accounting firm, the Conservancy has expanded its financial authorization controls, increased the segregation of financial duties, and established a regular cycle of independent internal control reviews. The organization has also instituted annual evaluations of its banking relationships and updated its financial systems to incorporate role-based access and comprehensive audit trails.

Under this thoughtful new structure, incoming Board Chair Sandy Pierce will work closely with a talented team of vice chairs, Board members and leadership on the Conservancy's team, to set the stage for future growth and stability.



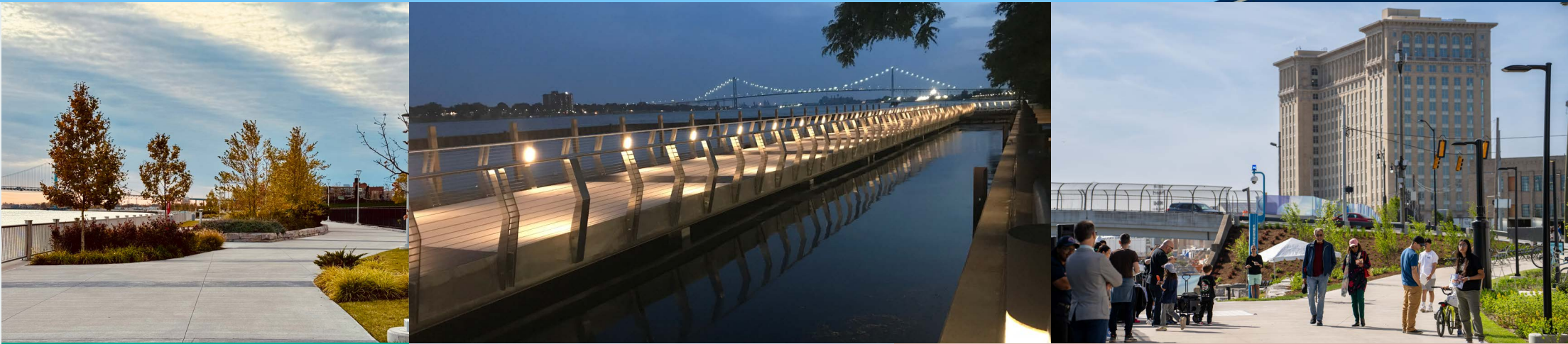


Connecting Communities NEW LINKS CONNECT PARKS, NEIGHBORHOODS, AND GREENWAYS

With the grand opening of Ralph Wilson Park this October came exciting new connections along the Detroit Riverfront. Previously fenced off at the western edge of the Riverwalk, the new boardwalk in front of Riverfront Towers now links the Riverwalk near Huntington Place all the way to Ralph Wilson Park.

This newly opened stretch, together with the launch of Ralph Wilson Park, strengthens access from neighborhoods in Southwest Detroit and Corktown to the waterfront via the Southwest Greenway. Once on the Riverwalk, visitors can reach Belle Isle by accessing the MacArthur Bridge from Gabriel Richard Park, explore Eastern Market through the Dequindre Cut, and connect to dozens of neighborhoods across the city.

Today, the Detroit Riverfront encompasses more than eight miles of interconnected trails, including the Riverwalk, Dennis Archer Greenway, Dequindre Cut and Southwest Greenway. These connections are bringing Detroiters closer to the riverfront than ever before and are creating a more accessible experience for everyone.



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RALPH C. WILSON, JR. CENTENNIAL PARK

Grand Opening!

Featuring **DETROIT HARVEST FEST**

Over 55,000 people joined us to celebrate the Grand Opening of Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park featuring Detroit Harvest Fest on October 25 and 26. There was a buzz of excitement and awe as visitors explored the newest park on the beautiful riverfront. Detroit-area children created core memories as they experienced the joy of the Delta Dental Play Garden for the first time, climbing, sliding, and scaling the one-of-a-kind playscapes. The William Davidson Sport House was alive with activity, including hours of hoops and a variety of fun fitness classes. Music by local talent filled every corner of the park with lively sound, and the headlining performance by The Jacksons brought the crowd to their feet at the DTE Foundation Summit. Those searching for a moment of quiet sought the tranquility of the Huron-Clinton Metroparks Water Garden, participating in mindfulness workshops and laying picnic blankets to soak in the late October sun.

The Detroit community showed up and showed out in celebration of Ralph Wilson Park, and now it is officially open- For Everyone!





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The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy extends its deepest gratitude to **Founding Board Chair Matt Cullen** for more than two decades of visionary leadership. His dedication, guidance, and belief in the potential of the Detroit Riverfront have transformed an ambitious dream into a national model for revitalization and community connection.

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Pictured here at the Ralph Wilson Park Grand Opening, from left to right: Willaim Davidson Foundation President & CEO Darin McKeever, MVVA Creative Director Michael Van Valkenburgh, Mayor Mike Duggan, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Board Chair & Life Trustee Mary Wilson, Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist II, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy Board Chair Matt Cullen, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy CEO Ryan Sullivan, Community Advisory Team Member Denise Kennedy, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation President & CEO Dave Egner, Huron-Clinton Metroparks CEO Amy McMillan