



Issue 30 / Q1 / 2026

A LETTER FROM RIVERFRONT LEADERSHIP

For more than two decades, our work has been defined by a bold vision and steady expansion. What began with the first half-mile of Riverwalk stretching from the Renaissance Center to what is now Cullen Plaza has grown into something few could have imagined: more than eight miles of trails and almost 100 acres of public space.

Today, the Detroit Riverfront connects continuously from the MacArthur Bridge to Belle Isle all the way to Michigan Central. This extraordinary transformation reflects years of partnership, persistence and community belief. These connections – linking neighborhoods, parks and people – strengthen not only physical access to our riverfront, but also our shared sense of belonging.

After years of transformative growth and milestone moments, 2026 marks a turning point for the Conservancy. While we remain committed to realizing our full bridge-to-bridge vision, the opening of Ralph Wilson Park, along with the completion of nearly five miles of connected Riverwalk, signal a new phase in our work. Entering this era, our focus turns increasingly to stewardship and the ongoing responsibility of sustaining the world-class public spaces that Detroiters and visitors alike have embraced.

This year, we look forward not only to caring for the public asset we have built, but also to activating it in dynamic new ways. In May, we will host Spring into Wilson, a celebration to reintroduce Ralph Wilson Park and showcase the diverse programming planned there throughout the season. Across the Riverwalk and greenways, our calendar is filled with opportunities for connection—from family events and fitness classes to cultural celebrations and community gatherings.

We are also energized by the continued momentum along the riverfront corridor. New development is taking shape on adjacent properties, including a new WNBA practice facility and sports complex planned for the East Riverfront, a new luxury JW Marriott hotel connected to Huntington Place, as well as transformative updates envisioned by Bedrock and GM for the Renaissance Center. These investments signal a strong and exciting future for the region and further reinforce the Detroit Riverfront as a central thread in our city's ongoing story.

This is what a new era looks like: not simply growth in miles and acres, but growth in impact. Thank you for being part of this journey, and for helping us steward this remarkable public treasure into its next chapter.

With gratitude,



Sandy Pierce
Board Chair, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy



Ryan Sullivan
CEO, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy





Spring into Wilson

Saturday, May 16
10am-3pm

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.
Centennial Park

SPRING INTO WILSON

As the excitement of the Grand Opening of Ralph Wilson Park remains, we are looking forward to celebrating a season of reimagined program offerings at the Detroit Riverfront's newest public space. Join us on May 16 for Spring into Wilson, featuring If the River Could Sing, to experience the park blossoming and the program calendar unfolding. In partnership with InsideOut Literary Arts, the event will also include a celebration of the natural wonder of the Detroit River through poetry and artistic activations.

The day will provide a sampling of the programs being offered at Ralph Wilson Park this summer, including educational opportunities with Huron-Clinton Metroparks, fitness classes, and youth led activities. Visitors can dip their toes into these programs, then jump right into the Gilbert Family Foundation Water Wonderland, opening for the very first time during the event. You will not want to miss the official kick off to our most active programming season as we highlight the people, programs, and features that make Ralph Wilson Park, and the Detroit Riverfront, such a special place.



Learn more by visiting
[DetroitRiverfront.org/events](https://detroitriverfront.org/events)



We have a full lineup of spring and summer riverfront programming. Don't miss these major events, and check out our full calendar online.

Riverfront Fish Fest
May 2 | Milliken State Park

Detroit Riverfront Run
June 6 | Cullen Plaza

Juneteenth at Wilson
Jun 19 | Ralph Wilson Park



View our full event lineup at
[DetroitRiverfront.org/events](https://detroitriverfront.org/events)





92% of U.S. adults experience a positive mental health boost after spending time at their local parks.

National Recreation & Park Association



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH ON THE DETROIT RIVERFRONT

Year after year, research shows a direct correlation between access to parks and public spaces and the improved physical and mental health of the people who use them. At the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, we aim to provide access to beautiful and welcoming environments that promote wellbeing in both active and passive ways. Whether enjoying a walk or bike ride, meditating by the river or joining us for an intentionally-planned free program, we are committed to supporting the physical and mental health of the community we serve.

Each May, we recognize Mental Health Awareness Month with a series of programs aimed at supporting visitors' mental wellbeing with activities to help reduce stress and anxiety while connecting with nature. We have a full lineup planned this spring across a variety of our parks, including some favorites from past years that will now take place at the recently opened Ralph Wilson Park.



Learn more by visiting DetroitRiverfront.org/MentalHealth



Labyrinth Walk
May 2 | Gabriel Richard Park



Love Myself Walk
May 9 | Ralph Wilson Park



Sound Bowl Meditation at Spring into Wilson
May 16 | Ralph Wilson Park



Hammock & Flow Meditation
May 20 | Gabriel Richard Park



Join us for
SHIMMER ON THE RIVER

Presented by Friends of Robert C. Valade Park
 Thursday, June 18 | Robert C. Valade Park

Sail into Summer at Shimmer on the River, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's largest annual fundraiser! Returning to Robert C. Valade Park on June 18, this iconic, family-friendly night will feature live musical performances, a delicious curation of local food and beverages, lively activities for all ages, and other exciting moments to ring in a new season on the riverfront. At our Shimmer VIP Reception, we are thrilled to honor Dr. John Hartig and Sarah & Chip McClure in recognition of their long-time stewardship of the work of the Conservancy.

Your contribution directly supports the ongoing maintenance, programming, and security of these valued public spaces to ensure that the Detroit Riverwalk, parks and greenways remain beautiful, safe, and accessible for everyone.

Drop your anchor and join us for an evening of celebration in support of the best riverwalk in the USA!



Learn more by visiting
DetroitRiverfront.org/Shimmer



EXCITING NEW DEVELOPMENT COMING TO THE RIVERFRONT

Last year brought exciting developments along the Detroit Riverfront, including the grand opening of the highly anticipated Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park on the West Riverfront.

More big news followed in 2025 with the announcement that Detroit will once again be home to a WNBA team. The franchise will anchor a major development on the 42-acre former Uniroyal site along the East Riverfront, featuring a new practice facility along with the anticipated future development of a youth sports academy and outdoor athletic fields.

Initial site work for the project is expected to begin this year. Construction on the WNBA practice facility, which will also serve as the team's headquarters,

will begin sometime in 2027 with expected completion ahead of the 2029 WNBA season. Home games will be played at Little Caesars Arena.

Plans also call for a roughly 100,000-square-foot youth development academy with indoor facilities for basketball, volleyball and other sports. The Youth Sports Academy is expected to be constructed adjacent to the WNBA headquarters and practice facility. Planning also includes outdoor athletic fields for soccer, flag football and other sports located on the eastern portion of the site near Gabriel Richard Park.

"All of us are incredibly excited about this project," said Ryan Sullivan, CEO of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy. "Located along one of the most scenic stretches of the Riverwalk, it will introduce more people to the riverfront while generating significant economic benefit in the neighborhood. It will also help elevate women's and youth sports in our community and create a place where young Detroiters can learn, grow and lead."

FACES OF THE RIVERFRONT

It takes a true team effort from more than 500 dedicated individuals to deliver over 200 days of high-quality programming and provide access to safe, beautiful, world-class public spaces along the Detroit Riverfront. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy would like to acknowledge our amazing Conservancy staff members, third-party security and maintenance teams, and volunteers who work every day to ensure every visitor has a positive experience in our riverfront spaces.

Throughout the year, we'll be highlighting the people who contribute to creating a beautiful and active riverfront for everyone to enjoy. When you see these familiar faces out on the Riverwalk, be sure to say hello!



Michelle

Founder, Urban Solace
Holds the record for longest running riverfront programming partner

"This summer, Urban Solace is proud to celebrate 19 years of fun & fitness on the riverfront. I recently learned that we're the first to provide programming and we share an anniversary with the carousel - super cool! I'm immensely grateful for our partnership with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy - everyone from the staff to the volunteers are like family. It has been wonderful to witness the riverfront's transformation, and we are honored to foster community through meaningful wellness experiences in this spectacular setting."

Officer Waters

Security Officer, Liberty Security Group
Keeping the riverfront safe, 24/7

"I've been serving the Detroit Riverfront for a year and I love it. My favorite riverfront space would have to be Robert C. Valade Park because it's a great place for families to spend time and they offer so many amenities from fun in the sun to restaurants and more!"



Mike

East Riverfront Operations Manager, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy
If something needs to be fixed, he's your guy!

"When I am at work, Cullen Plaza is my home. One of my most unique experiences on the riverfront was watching a beaver that temporarily lived in the state park waddle by my office to access the river."

Dr. John Hartig

Board Member, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy
A celebrated author and our go-to ecological expert

"I enjoy welcoming visitors to Detroit who still think that the Detroit River is just a polluted river in the Rust Belt. They are always surprised to learn that the Detroit River is now one of the most remarkable ecological recovery stories in North America, with the return of bald eagles, peregrine falcons, osprey, lake sturgeon, lake whitefish, walleye, beaver, and river otter."



Cora

Volunteer, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy
You can find her working at her favorite program - Riverwalkers!

"One of the most special things for me has been seeing the riverfront continue to grow and evolve over the years while bringing more people together. Watching families enjoy the spaces, meeting people from all over, and now sharing the riverfront with my grandson makes the experience even more meaningful."



CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE RIVERFRONT

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy continues to welcome volunteer groups throughout the year to support impactful projects across our parks and greenways. Building on the momentum of our Corporate Champion and Corporate Steward volunteer packages, we continue to expand opportunities for companies to engage their teams in meaningful, hands-on service in 2026.

Last year, corporate partners from across Metro Detroit joined us for cleanup and beautification efforts that strengthened our public spaces while fostering connection and collaboration among employees. These experiences not only supported the riverfront's ongoing stewardship but also created memorable team-building moments rooted in community impact.

Corporate Champions and Corporate Stewards can participate in a variety of projects, including Rivertown neighborhood cleanups, picnic table construction, Dequindre Cut Freight Yard enhancements, event composting and recycling support, invasive species removal, and visitor survey distribution. Each opportunity is designed to help keep the riverfront vibrant, welcoming, and accessible for everyone.



Learn more by visiting [DetroitRiverfront.org/GroupVolunteering](https://detroitriverfront.org/GroupVolunteering)



PROGRAM SPONSOR



Rivertown Neighborhood Cleanup
20 Volunteers
389 Pounds of litter collected

Dequindre Cut Freight Yard Winterization
13 Volunteers
Removed fencing, organized storage, removed litter

CORPORATE CHAMPION



Mt. Elliott Park Cleanup
8 Volunteers
275 Pounds of litter collected

Picnic Table Build
17 Volunteers
Built eight new picnic tables for the Freight Yard

Flower Bed Demolition at Cullen Plaza
18 Volunteers
Demolished and replaced wooden flower boxes and cleaned carousel

Dequindre Cut Freight Yard Beautification
28 Volunteers
Stained picnic tables, cleaned all structures, removed litter, raked sand

Rivertown Neighborhood Cleanup
21 Volunteers
232 Pounds of litter collected

CORPORATE STEWARD



Carport Build and Fencing Installation
21 Volunteers
Assembled new carport for Ralph Wilson Park, installed fencing at Play Garden



Invasive Species Removal and Cleanup
14 Volunteers
Assisted Brightview Landscaping in removing invasive phragmites along the Southwest Greenway



1,104
Total Responses

100%
of Detroit Zip Codes Represented

99%
of Visitors Would Visit Again

98%
of Visitors Would Recommend the Riverfront as a Destination

Shaped by Community: INSIGHTS FROM OUR 2025 VISITOR SURVEY

For us to serve the community to the highest standard, each year we gather feedback from Detroit Riverfront users through our visitor survey. QR Codes are placed throughout our parks and on the Riverwalk and greenways for approximately six months, giving people the opportunity to share their thoughts on what they like about the riverfront, and what could be improved. It also helps us gain valuable insights into where the majority of visitors are from and helps us identify gaps in our outreach.

Some highlights from this year's survey include an almost 99% approval rating with nearly all respondents saying they would choose to visit the Detroit Riverfront again, and 61% of visitors come to the

riverfront more than twice a month. Close to 90% of our visitors are from the state of Michigan, and we welcomed visitors from across the United States, Asia, Australia and Europe.

When you're out on the Detroit Riverfront later this spring, be sure to scan the QR codes you see placed throughout our spaces and share your feedback with us. We are always using new insights to improve our daily operations and programming opportunities to best serve our local communities.

"I was absolutely blown away by the beauty and nature of what the Detroit Riverwalk has to offer to residents and visitors alike. I love it & want all visitors to Detroit to take in the breathtaking views. Thanks to everyone who donates, volunteers and works to make this a community to be proud of."



DETROIT
RIVERFRONT
CONSERVANCY

600 Renaissance Center, Suite 1720, Detroit, MI 48243
313.566.8200 | DETROITRIVERFRONT.ORG

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 A Letter from Riverfront Leadership
- 2-3 Spring into Wilson
- 4-5 Mental Health Awareness Month
- 6 Shimmer on the River
- 7 New Development on the Riverfront
- 8-9 Faces of the Riverfront
- 10 Corporate Volunteers Making an Impact
- 11 Insights from Our 2025 Visitor Survey

Non Profit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 730
Southfield, MI

FOLLOW US

-  [instagram.com/detroitriverfront](https://www.instagram.com/detroitriverfront)
-  [facebook.com/detroitriverfrontconservancy](https://www.facebook.com/detroitriverfrontconservancy)
-  x.com/DetroitRvrfrnt
-  [tiktok.com/@detroitriverfront](https://www.tiktok.com/@detroitriverfront)

