

**HEADWATERS PARK 2.0 AND
DOWNTOWN RIVERFRONT DEVELOPMENT**

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The week before that fateful evening of Friday, March 12, 1982, began, really, no differently than any other week. It was filled with the routine bustle of life in Fort Wayne.

Winter jealously held its heavy grip. The Monday, March 8, weather report predicted three inches of snow in the wake of a fast-moving storm system sweeping Indiana. The morning's low temperature that Monday was eight degrees. The high was twenty-eight. Five inches of leftover winter snow still lay on the ground. How omniscient that Monday's weather forecast was, by stating that residents should expect a welcome moderation in temperatures by mid-week.

The three-inch snow blanket received that Monday was just like every other Indiana snow. It simply reminded us that here, Jack Frost plays out heavy snow not by the changing seasons, but rather, by the start of our single-class high school boys' basketball sectionals underway in gymnasiums around the Hoosier state.

Summit City residents not dialoging in our coffee shops with their armchair predictions of those basketball sectionals cultured in other familiar ways. 'The Raiders of the Lost Ark', 'On Golden Pond', and 'Chariots of Fire' featured on the big screen at the Georgetown, the Holiday, and the Glenbrook cinemas.

Other residents were, perhaps, shopping for advertised specials from Rogers Friendly Markets.

Residents suffering from a bout of winter cabin fever were invited to bring the whole family to the annual boat show for a healthy regimen of watercraft spread through the halls of Glenbrook Square Mall.

Pages of our local Journal-Gazette and News-Sentinel early that week in March, 1982, chronicled other local events. One story, in particular, reminisced that Fort Wayne forgot to celebrate its one hundredth birthday in 1894. When the oversight was finally discovered in 1895, Fort Wayne threw itself one heck of a birthday party! The party was funded with two thousand dollars from the City, three thousand dollars from the County, a one hundred gun salute, and a grand arch constructed over Calhoun Street.

Gasoline prices were low that week and headed lower. One local gas station owner predicted that motorists would pay less than one dollar by spring!

But as the Fates would have it, it wasn't really shaping up to be just another March week.

The weather maps gave ol' Jack Frost a quick head fake and dished out a double-team of warm temperatures and a full-court press of heavy thunderstorms. With the Hoosier soil still frozen, the deluge of snow melt and rain water chose the one game play that always works during sectional time. That is, it headed straight for our streams and rivers and gave Fort Wayne one whale of a flood!

Fortunately, the city was well coached. After all, Fort Wayne witnessed this orchestrated game play many times before. By 8 a.m. Saturday morning, March 13, 1982, Mayor Win Moses issued the flood alert. Mayor Moses then appeared on local, state, and national television sounding the urgent need for volunteers.

Within a few more days, as floodwaters continued to pound, Fort Wayne's fight became center court stage for the news media, including the top story on the national nightly news programs for the next seven days. Mayor Moses' plea was heard by President Ronald Reagan himself, who flew here that following Tuesday to toss a few sandbags, thus officially certifying that Fort Wayne floods.

With their new-found waterfront properties, neighborhoods were joined by thousands of volunteers from around the state and the nation who ran first-string in round-the-clock sandbagging defense, especially in hard-hit areas, including the Nebraska neighborhood along West Main Street, the Pemberton Drive neighborhood just east of Anthony Boulevard, and, in a well-traveled area, along Clinton Street, in downtown Fort Wayne, commonly known as "The Thumb".

The Thumb is simply a horseshoe-shaped curve in the St. Mary's River along its easterly flow through downtown, just where the St. Mary's joins the St. Joe River at the rivers' confluence. There, the two rivers form the headwaters of the Maumee River, which then flows northeast, across Allen County and Ohio, finally spilling into Lake Erie. The Thumb is defined by the Harrison Street and

Lafayette Street bridges to the west and the east, the Clinton Street bridge to the north, and Superior Street to the south.

Well, The Thumb found itself steadfastly drowned three feet under this Flood of 1982. The businesses located in The Thumb, including Poinsette Motors, Savon Furniture store, and Seat Cover Charlie's, were awash in catastrophic flood damage.

Of course, this was not The Thumb's first time. Virtually every flood in Fort Wayne's recorded history overran The Thumb, including the Great Flood of 1913 and the devastating Flood of 1978. Native Americans from the Miami nation, not needing any official certification, knew that The Thumb floods. Instead, they settled along higher ground. Even the American general and Fort Wayne namesake Anthony Wayne commissioned his 1794 fort on higher ground at the present-day corner of Clay and Berry Street, on the current site of the Cinema Center. And Colonel Hunt commissioned a replacement fort in 1800 near the current site of Fort Wayne Fire Station No. 1.

But driven by the high visibility along Clinton Street and its premier location near the court house, The Thumb developed as one of the focals of Fort Wayne. Now that The Thumb was awash in three feet of floodwaters, it was finally time for change. And it was finally time for structural change to address the three realities of life in Fort Wayne.

First, Fort Wayne floods. Fort Wayne experiences a one hundred year flood about every seven years.

Second, our generations always change. Civic leaders and our priorities will ebb and flow across the duration of mayoral, legislative, and business agendas. Flood control has always been too long and too expensive to undertake within one civic generation. Thus, it never became an urgent priority.

Third, Fort Wayne is uniquely situated. Chief Little Turtle himself called this area the glorious gateway at the confluence of the three rivers.

And so, The Thumb's 1982 flood experience merged with the city's 1978 flood experience during Mayor Ivan Lebamoff's administration, to create a confluence of opportunity for Fort Wayne architect Eric Kuhne and his ideas for downtown Fort Wayne. His ideas included comprehensive flood control for The Thumb.

With this, Eric Kuhne's vision for The Thumb was expansive, innovative, and majestic. His initial proposals drew inspiration from 1912 City Beautiful designs by George Kessler and later 1929 plans by Robert Hanna, which integrated a Three Rivers Park located at the confluence. True to the Kessler and Hanna plans, Eric Kuhne's proposal extended east and west along our riverfronts and north to embrace the OmniSource and the now-Science Central properties. At the confluence itself, Eric Kuhne proposed a two hundred foot high water fountain as a

celebration of our rivers. Early designs by Eric Kuhne even featured a partial re-routing of the St. Mary's River across a section of The Thumb as a nod to Fort Wayne's canal days.

Initially presented as Citilights State Park and soon-after renamed Headwaters State Park, the plan finally received the current of support it deserved. Strategically designated as Headwaters State Park, the plan created some turbulence among state legislators who found no humor in supporting a state park inside Fort Wayne's city boundaries. After the plan was again renamed, this time simply as a city park with the now-familiar name, Headwaters Park, state legislators agreed to provide financial support.

Flanked by legislative lobbying efforts, a subtle accommodation passed through the state legislature which allowed for the creation of an independent Headwaters Park Commission. Local architect and park enthusiast John Shoaff was elected president of the Headwaters Park Commission and served in that role for the commission's thirteen years of life. "The Headwaters Park Commission played a major role in working with Eric Kuhne and architects Tom Navin, Alan Grinsfelder, Ed Welling, and Kevin McCrory in seeing the plan grow and evolve into a development that would be beautiful and functional, as well as provide flood mitigation." This commission fed from the civic support to raise public and private dollars to fund Headwaters Park.

Through the vision and courage offered by our civic and business leaders, including Mr. Ian Rolland, Councilman John Shoaff, Friends of the Parks advocate Julie Donnell, Councilman Geoff Paddock, and City administrative support from Mayor Win Moses Jr. and then Mayor Paul Helmke, the Headwaters Park Commission became the model for generating public and private collaboration. The commission successfully raised over sixteen million dollars of funding, sixty percent of that from private sources. The commission provided one of the most innovative examples of civic collaboration in Indiana, and certainly around the country.

Combined with dollars from the state's Build Indiana fund and dollars from the City's Light Lease fund, our community quickly moved to negotiate with land owners in The Thumb to assemble the tracts that now consist the thirty acre Headwaters Park. The park was constructed in four phases. These four phases allowed tangible fundraising efforts to continue while actual construction progress plowed ahead.

Headwaters Park 1.0 has restored The Thumb as the primary focal and gathering place for our civic and recreational life. It now hosts our annual Three Rivers Festival, a number of non-profit events, and countless weddings annually. While owned by the City, its maintenance is supported by an endowment, the

result of the financial stewardship of the Headwaters Park Commission, and now led by the park alliance board and its executive director, Geoff Paddock.

True to its original purpose, Headwaters Park 1.0 eloquently incorporates flood control as a central theme, even though that element is virtually invisible to us today. For example, the Crescent Overlook is set at a survey line above the flood plain. If Fort Wayne ever receives a flood worthy of Noah's Ark, sandbagging across Clinton Street only would suffice to save our downtown.

But where does Fort Wayne go from here? We stand uniquely at the headwaters of a promising future. With the civic enthusiasm and active ideas percolating around this community, there may not a better time to be a proud citizen of Fort Wayne. Energized with seventy-five million dollars as part of our Master Legacy Plan, currents of possibilities flow like no other time in our history. Fort Wayne just commissioned a five hundred thousand dollar study to provide recommendations for Headwaters Park 2.0 and Downtown Riverfront Development.

A few central figures rise to the top in this study.

One is Zach Benedict. Zach Benedict is the chairman of the Downtown Improvement District and a partner in the architectural firm, MKM Architecture and Design. MKM Architecture and Design is a Fort Wayne-based company specializing in projects that celebrate our quality of life.

Another central figure is Alec Johnson, who is superintendent of park planning, landscape, and horticulture with our Parks and Recreation Department. These fortes make Zach and Alec the logical selections to collaborate while this eighteen month development study is underway.

Fort Wayne's river hydrology is unique: our rivers are dynamic and natural. They are not man-made, such as Indianapolis' or San Antonio's engineered canals. Thus, MKM Architecture and Design is partnering with Houston, Texas, firm SWA Group, which brings a blend of international design perspectives married with the scope and capacity of metropolitan riverfront developments. SWA's recent success with the Buffalo Bayou project along Houston's downtown river system qualifies it to lead recommendations that incorporate Fort Wayne's hydrology and ecology.

MKM's critical role as the local advisor for the study seeks to broaden public engagement with our civic stakeholders. Three public workshops and forums are planned over the next eighteen months, and MKM seeks input to foster plausible outcomes.

Zach Benedict and Alec Johnson outline five goals for the study.

First, Fort Wayne must re-engage our rivers as a resource and as a recreational asset. We must re-define what it means to be a river town in a way that preserves the integrity of original Kessler and Hanna designs.

Second, drawing from our resounding success with Headwaters Park 1.0, the study seeks to invigorate public and private collaboration. That is, we need to encourage private investment along the rivers equitably for all stakeholders.

Third, riverfront development needs to integrate with the city's combined sewer overflow projects, thus merging recreational opportunities with municipal practicality.

Fourth, Fort Wayne floods. Projects and development opportunities must incorporate active flood mitigation. May Fort Wayne never forget that it receives a one hundred year flood, about every seven years!

Fifth, and lastly, civic dialogue needs to merge with our agricultural land partners upstream and downstream from our metropolitan boundaries if we ever hope to improve our water quality. Our combined sewer overflow project may not be enough if our citizens envision clear, clean water flowing through our downtown.

How do we make the civic experience of our rivers iconic for life in Fort Wayne? How do we place Fort Wayne's rivers in family photo albums and in the forefront of our civic recreation, as other cities have so tactfully completed?

One way to accomplish that goal, according to Mr. Al Moll, who is executive director of the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department, is to drive our youth. We have to develop opportunities downtown that contribute to our

quality of life, he says. We need to explore all ideas that maintain clean rivers and clean riverbanks. Al Moll reminds us how much downtown's vibrancy has changed just in the last ten years: The Grand Wayne Center, our downtown library, the Embassy Theater, Parkview Field, the Harrison, and the Anthony Wayne building, are just a few.

Another idea dear to Mr. Al Moll, and to Nancy Louraine at Turnstone, is to create a downtown sports arena that could provide opportunities for our city to host regional and national sporting events. Nancy Louraine is the executive director of Turnstone. Turnstone currently draws citizens from a one hundred fifty mile radius around Fort Wayne at its North Clinton facility, and a downtown sports arena could place Fort Wayne on the national sports map. To accomplish this, development would need to accommodate handicap accessible sidewalks, restaurants, parking garages, and hospitality facilities.

Perhaps passion bears from aspiration, or quite simply, from generational awareness. But one thing's for sure: Fort Wayne has its own local river advocate in Mr. Dan Wire. Dan Wire's passion for our rivers runs deep. Just as leisurely as Huckleberry Finn knows the Mighty Miss, Dan Wire learned every segment of our three rivers as a young boy, when his father and he would take broom stick soundings while floating along in the family pontoon boat. Dan Wire is the interim executive director of the Tri-State Watershed Alliance. You see, Dan Wire grew

up on the river. Dan Wire's travels make him a walking Google of river knowledge.

Here are a few river facts.

This area draws its geography from the old Lake Maumee. Lake Maumee once covered the entire tri-state river basin during our Earth's glacial period, but it receded to leave the three rivers that we now know.

Eight miles of rivers flow through downtown, which provides sixteen miles of shoreline that could be developed to create accessibility and tangibility for Fort Wayne's citizens.

Now, City Utilities controls our rivers so that it can provide our metropolitan area with high-quality drinking water. Three large reservoirs support our rivers; one near IPFW, one near Leo-Cedarville, and one north at Hurshtown.

But what gets in our way of the rivers?

The biggest is this perception of the rivers as a problem to be controlled (that is, flooding) rather than a recreation to be celebrated. People think the rivers are dirty. But, in reality, our rivers meet EPA cleanliness standards for human contact eighty percent of the time. And, our proposed Three Rivers Protection and Overflow Reduction Tunnel may increase cleanliness up to ninety-five percent of the time.

So which of Dan Wire's ideas are feasible?

Get people on the rivers. For some of us, people on the rivers may invoke images of the old river raft races, where heavily-beveraged local novices would demonstrate their poor shipbuilding skills. A paradigm shift is needed to value the rivers for their recreational opportunities. Get people on the rivers.

Dan says that Fort Wayne's rivers are landscaped such that one can float along through the middle of downtown Fort Wayne and never be spotted by anyone. Most citizens traveling through downtown by automobile never even see our rivers. Edit the landscape by selectively pruning overgrowth along the rivers. Allow our rivers to breathe.

Install a lock to raise the average depths, thus creating flowing rivers, navigable rivers, and recreational opportunities along the rivers. If we raise the levels, Fort Wayne could enjoy twenty-four miles of additional riverfront in its downtown areas with no ecological impact. So, add docks that allow residents access to downtown destinations by boat.

Imagine how Fort Wayne could create national awareness and new revenue opportunities by hosting regional rowing regattas along a beautified downtown riverfront for Concordia's rowing crew. Imagine how these regattas could tie into other sports venues already established around the city that are making Fort Wayne a regional and national sports destination.

Dan wants to make the rivers the “green piece” of our downtown riverfront development. And notice Dan’s energy: you can’t have downtown development without it being downtown ‘riverfront’ development.

Dan Wire challenges us to give him someplace to park his car, kick off his shoes, and put his toes in the water. Keep access to our rivers free and hold back development by a block or two. Find a way to allow our citizens to put their toes in the water in downtown Fort Wayne.

And then there’s Kelly Lynch and the Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society. They wish to tie into the existing Headwaters Park by developing the former OmniSource site on the river’s north side into a new economic hub to be known as Headwaters Station. Headwaters Station proposes to operate the fully-restored No. 765 steam engine from a new Headwaters Station railroad terminal. “The initial concept suggests a recreated roundhouse and station, several miles of reactivated right of way, the potential for short line freight operations, connections between area points of interest, and an integrated, atmospheric experience that can romance the 21st Century audience.”

The opportunities marked by Headwaters Station are boundless, underscored by the enthusiasm of the families and civic groups that embark on the mighty 765. The 765 itself was resuscitated by the Society from its prior hulking hibernation in Lawton Park, and it now reigns supreme on the tracks. In 2012, the 765 operated

seven thousand miles of excursions around the eastern United States and carried seven thousand passengers. The 765 was financially sound enough to invest one hundred thousand dollars towards its own future capital maintenance projects. Also, just last year, the 765 flawlessly negotiated a journey through Pennsylvania's Horseshoe Curve, thus making railroad history as the first steam locomotive up to the challenge in thirty-seven years!

Headwaters Station resonates because of its genuflection to Fort Wayne's genesis. One should recall from local history that in the eighteen hundreds, this city's economic vitality was stoked by its geographic location at the epicenter of America's industrial surgency. The might of the railroad forged Fort Wayne's national relevancy, not a neglected outpost of a fort or an old canal that was obsolete soon after completion. One should also recall the elevation of the downtown railroad tracks in the nineteen fifties that subsequently spurred expansion of the city's northern half. The call for Headwaters Station screams as the engine that could transcend another generational renaissance.

Other cities around the United States embarked on similar railroad revivals. Just consider Chattanooga, Tennessee, whose Chattanooga Choo Choo railyard phoenixed that city's rejuvenation and sparked residential, high-tech, and industrial investment. Their courage makes Chattanooga one of the crown jewels of the Tennessee valley.

And so we find ourselves at a unique confluence of civic discussion here in 2013. Our vigation should give audience to possibilities that may not yet be tangible for the private sector and to possibilities that promote our social majesty.

So regardless of the options we chose as a community for our Legacy dollars, there is a point to all this. If we are serious about Headwaters Park 2.0 and Downtown Riverfront Development, we must draw from the lessons learned from prior generations and from those among us here today. We must possess the selfless courage to establish and support an independent development commission, just as we did with Headwaters Park 1.0. It is this courage that spawns civic contributions and fosters a selfless enthusiasm of engagement.

An independent commission allows us to view proposals through a clairvoyant lens, and to spark private and public collaboration. Also, an independent commission needs to include a maintenance endowment to preserve and protect our riverfronts for future generations. After all, our Parks Department cannot be expected to carry all of this on its own.

Eric Kuhne, just this year, in 2013, challenged us to capture the marketplace of development ideas that are flowing so provocatively in Fort Wayne today. These ideas promise to be our passport to the world.

Eric said, “In the twenty-first century, leisure is the new infrastructure.”

So let us foster ideas that promote our leisure and that underscore Fort Wayne's status simply as a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

Eric Kuhne expanded by stating that if we get the vision right, we get the budget right. But we've got to start with the vision.

Back in 1982, Fort Wayne earned the title as The City that Saved Itself. We earned this title from the selfless way we rolled up our shirt sleeves, while the nation watched from the bleachers of their living rooms and witnessed our Midwestern work ethic and our sandbagging hospitality on those national news programs during that memorable March week.

Many predictions were made during that March week in 1982. There were weather forecasts and sports forecasts. (In fact, residents who predicted that nearby Plymouth would beat Gary Roosevelt seventy-five to seventy-four in double overtime for the high school boys' basketball state championship would have had the upper hand on ol' Jack Frost.)

But the most prescient of all predictions made in Fort Wayne's history was the one made by Chief Little Turtle himself. He called this the glorious gateway at the confluence of the three rivers. Perhaps he was really predicting the year 2013. Perhaps his observation of the confluence referenced not our geography, but rather, our opportunities.

How we navigate these waters is up to us.

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