

## **HEADWATERS PARK MISSION STATEMENT**

**By Geoff Paddock, Executive Director, Headwaters Park Alliance**

The Headwaters Park Flood Control Project is an environmentally sound addition to the Fort Wayne area, bringing several important goals together. Among these goals are flood mitigation, economic development, recreation, and outdoor education.

The first and most important aspect of the Headwaters project is to curb the flooding problem and the damage it causes to the citizens of Fort Wayne. The park's natural construction will actually aid in the free flowing of the Saint Mary's River. Because structures are no longer located in the thumb area of the park, they do not act as an impediment to the flowing of the flood waters. Therefore, Headwaters Park should actually decrease some of the devastating effects caused by recent flooding. Because businesses will no longer be located in this flood prone area, the damage to the city's economy will be much less severe after a flood is experienced. In 1985, the damage in the thumb alone was estimated to be \$3.9 million – more than half the total damage estimated for the entire community. Flood damage to the area from the floods of 1978, 1982, and 1991 amounted to over \$10 million.

Another goal of the project is to enhance the overall economic development efforts of the community. Headwaters has become home to such annual festivals as Germanfest, Greekfest, Ribfest, the Three Rivers Festival and many others. The park provides use to thousands of people and has become a focal point for festivals and other events. In 2020, twelve festivals will join nearly 30 other not-for-profit, business, and children's events in finding a home in the park. It is estimated that over 600,000 people will use Headwaters Park this year, which now hosts activities every month of the year.

A third important aspect of the park is to connect the downtown area with the Rivergreenway. Headwaters serves as an intermediary point along the Rivergreenway, which consists of a series of parks and trails along the rivers of Fort Wayne. Educational opportunities, especially for our area's young people, abound in the park. They can spend time learning about and identifying various kinds of trees, flowers, and native Indiana grasses near the Great Meadow, as fog misters shoot from the top of a 21<sup>st</sup> century pavilion and from around the parks. At the same time, they can learn about an environmentally conscious way of dealing with flood waters. During festival season from May until October, young people can experience various kinds of languages, dance interpretation, craft design and other applications of the arts. On hot summer days, they can refresh in the large, interactive water fountain. Over 400,000 people have skated on the outdoor ice rink during the past seventeen winter seasons, and another 100,000 people have enjoyed the rink as spectators or as participants in free ice skating shows.

Headwaters Park is bringing more people to downtown Fort Wayne. It attracts citizens to the city from all parts of Northeast Indiana and Northwest Ohio and serves as a welcome addition to the economic development efforts of the Fort Wayne area.

The architectural plan, as developed by Eric R. Kuhne and Associates and implemented by Grinsfelder Associates, took years to develop and perfect. The architects determined this plan would best serve the ultimate use of a park located in a flood plain. It was only after careful study and public input that this plan was adopted by the Headwaters Park Commission.

In the late 1990s, the developing Headwaters Park project became one of the largest public-private partnerships existing in Northern Indiana. Together, both the public and private sectors raised nearly \$17 million to complete the downtown revitalization. Because of its broad appeal, support came from all areas of the community. The State of Indiana contributed \$2 million, mostly through Build Indiana funds for land acquisition. Fort Wayne and Allen County governments contributed \$5.2 million for land acquisition, environmental remediation, and business relocation costs. The Headwaters Park Commission raised just over \$9.7 million from private sources and secured \$850,000 of this as a partial maintenance and operating endowment. Over 2,000 citizens had their names engraved on walkway bricks. Others purchase park benches, lamp posts, or one of over 600 trees added to the downtown landscape.

Headwaters Park was endorsed by the Isaac Walton League, business and labor groups, the Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce, and the Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Since its completion, the park has won many honors. Among them are the Building Contractor's Association award for best project for the addition of the Lincoln Financial Pavilion; the Indiana Parks and Recreation Association Outstanding Park Development Award; the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Indiana Concrete Association; and the Honor Award for best project in the entire state from the Indiana Chapter of the American Association of Landscape Architects. It is a lasting legacy to the city that saved itself from devastating flooding and was completed in its entirety with the construction of the Lincoln Financial Pavilion in 2005 and the Madge Rothschild Pavilion in 2008. Truly, this project has united our community and will serve it a century from now.

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