

Iowa Rivers Revival

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Council Bluffs Named “River City of the Year”

Iowa Rivers Revival: “Council Bluffs and its partners have made enormous progress in a very intentional mission -- making the riverfront the center of life and a great place for people to live, work and play.”

Council Bluffs, Iowa. Iowa Rivers Revival, a group that advocates for rivers, has named Council Bluffs “River City of the Year” in recognition of the city’s outstanding efforts to renew its connections to the Missouri River.

“It’s a great success story,” said Roz Lehman, Director of Iowa Rivers Revival (IRR).

“Council Bluffs’ recipe includes strong vision, focused planning, and constant collaboration,” Lehman said. “The result is outstanding features and events that are bringing citizens and visitors back to the river to live and work and play. It’s a model for communities all over Iowa.”

Iowa Rivers Revival is presenting the “River City of the Year” award at a reception Friday morning (10 a.m.) at Harrah’s Casino overlooking the Missouri River. Mayor Matt Walsh, Mark Eckman, Executive Director of the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Larry Foster, Director of Park and Recreation and Public Property, are accepting the award on behalf of Council Bluffs.

Iowa Rivers Revival pointed to several key river-related projects in and near Council Bluffs:

- **Tom Hanafan River’s Edge Park.** Dedicated May 22, 2013, the 90-acre public park is located right on the riverfront, with a beautiful view of downtown Omaha across the Missouri. The new park already is bringing tens of thousands of people to the river for music and community events, public art, sightseeing, and recreation. “The park’s success has been instantaneous,” the city told IRR, “and its popularity is fueling a general re-birth of enthusiasm, on both sides.”

“The Park is a catalyst for more riverfront development and activity,” Lehman said.

- **The Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, and recreational trails.** “The 2,300-foot-long bridge is a spectacular feature, day or night, connecting Council Bluffs and Omaha over the Missouri and drawing people back to the river,” Lehman said.

The \$22 million “cable stay” bridge opened Sept. 28, 2008. It connects to over 100 miles of recreational trails on both sides of the river, including Council Bluffs’ 13-mile-long **Riverfront Trail** for bikers, walkers, runners and skaters. The Trail connects river-related features, including Tom Hanafan River’s Edge Park, Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, Dodge Riverside Golf Club, Harrah’s and Ameristar Casinos, and the Western Historic Trails Center.

- **The Playland Park Master Plan.** Playland Park is a 30-acre redevelopment site bringing people back close to the river. It abuts Tom Hanafan River’s Edge Park and the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge, and it will include pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods, two public green spaces, tree-lined streets, a central boulevard, professional office and retail space, and two high-rise residential towers. Construction is slated for 2015.

“It’s a signature gateway project for the city and southwest Iowa,” Lehman said. “Council Bluffs is making it appealing to live and work and recreate close to the river.”

- **Council Bluffs makes a high priority of protecting the environment and water quality.** “The city has adopted a ‘green’ strategy for development along the Missouri and tributaries,” Lehman said, including using pervious pavement and other means to foster stormwater management. The city bought out dozens of homes inundated by the Flood of 2011, and returned the areas to undeveloped condition. Tom Hanafan River’s Edge Park incorporates many “green infrastructure” strategies. River cleanups are organized by citizens and the “Missouri River Relief” organization.

Council Bluff is partnering with the University of Nebraska to envision strategies for improving stream ecology, access, and economic vitality along the Indian Creek Corridor.

“Council Bluffs is protecting and preserving the Missouri River greenbelt and natural space along the riverbank for flood protection, recreation, and water quality and habitat,” Lehman said.

- **Council Bluff’s efforts to come “Back to the River” are built on very intentional planning, and strong partnerships.** Planning includes extensive community involvement and work with universities and other experts. Partnerships include Council Bluffs’ collaboration with Omaha and other communities nearby on the Missouri; with county, state and federal agencies; with businesses and organizations; and with volunteers and other citizens.

“Council Bluffs is very quick to say its success is a result of local and regional collaboration, including strong cooperation with its neighbors in Omaha,” Lehman said. “IRR continues to see the common thread of collaboration as a key to success in thriving river communities.”

“Connecting people to the river is key,” Lehman said. “Council Bluffs demonstrates a commitment to celebrating and protecting the Missouri River for generations to come.”

More background and information:

Iowa Rivers Revival presented a “River TOWN of the Year” award to Manchester, Iowa (population 5,200), on March 4. Other previous River Towns or River Cities of the Year recognized by Iowa Rivers Revival are Webster City, Elkader, Coon Rapids, Cedar Falls, Charles City, Central City, Dubuque, and Decorah. (For details, go to www.iowarivers.org.)

Iowa Rivers Revival was founded eight years ago to be a voice for rivers. IRR is committed to helping Iowans work on education and public policy to restore and protect Iowa's rivers and streams.

Helpful web sites:

www.iowarivers.org

<http://www.councilbluffs-ia.gov/>

<http://www.travelcouncilbluffs.com/>

<http://loessfest.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Council-Bluffs-Iowa/103107309730219>

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