

Why a Riverfront Education Center Makes Sense –by Matt Jones

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Of course, there will be changes along the riverfront here in Allen County. Nothing is static in our world and the riverfront through Fort Wayne is no different. The question isn't why are we considering this but rather what took us so long?

The very asset that lent itself toward the establishment of Fort Wayne and the success of Allen County has been there all along. It is no longer the hub of transportation and trade that it once was but that doesn't mean it isn't relevant to our economy.

It all depends on your perspective of who we are and where we are headed as a community.

To say that we are the home of three rivers isn't enough. We should have an education center, or at least a curriculum, to convey the relevance of the rivers to our lives.

As a matter of fact, part of the headwaters of the Wabash and all of the Maumee River are here and become the two largest rivers flowing out of Indiana.

If you didn't know these facts then this would exemplify the need for more education about our rivers in Allen County and the surrounding region-maybe this alone isn't enough to warrant the development of a center by itself but so many other crucial factors impacting our rivers and community at-large might.

If you did know these simple facts then you are ahead of most the people in the area.

What you may not know is what may be discovered, researched and displayed at an education center as a part of the riverfront development plan.

The results of different studies demonstrate the need and will of the people for cleaner rivers.

An Allen County survey demonstrates the rivers as valued but that people are unsure of the nature and extent of their pollution. This same survey demonstrates a "need to improve" the rivers.

A Fort Wayne survey demonstrated similar results and lack of knowledge concerning watersheds.

The "Plan-It Allen" study identified the rivers as valued corridors for many things-from the environment to community draws.

Survey after survey concludes the public wants to have cleaner rivers but typically do not know the status of them or of the issues and impacts.

These are not isolated studies and we have heard this for the past hundred years about what could be achieved using the rivers as a focus. One such success was Headwaters Park.

In a region that holds the waters of so many of Indiana's great rivers and the eastern gateway to the lakes, we could stand to demonstrate the relevance of our waters to the community and the nation and provide community access to the science and ongoing research done here.

Indiana is the smallest mainland state west of the Appalachians but has more water per area than many of the other states to the west. We have twice the percentage of water-to-land than Nebraska-a state twice the size of Indiana.

With all this water comes the responsibility-and the mandate-to educate the people of the watersheds and demonstrate what is necessary to keep them clean. The US EPA and other state and local organizations agencies are all charged with the mission of educating the public and providing opportunities for outreach as well.

Why not gather all these efforts together in a centralized riverfront education center that is optimal for public visibility and the ability to conduct research and activities as well?