

Iowa Rivers Revival

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For immediate release – Wednesday, January 30, 2013.

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Dubuque Named “River City of the Year”

Iowa Rivers Revival says the historic city is in the midst of a renaissance in revitalizing its relationship to the Mississippi River – improving recreation, protecting the environment and bolstering its economy.

Dubuque, Iowa. “Iowa Rivers Revival,” a group that advocates for rivers, has named Dubuque “River City of the Year” in recognition of the city’s visionary efforts to revitalize its connections to the Mississippi River.

“Dubuque has accomplished a remarkable turnaround over the last couple decades,” said Roz Lehman, executive director of Iowa Rivers Revival, “and the river is right at the heart of it all.”

“Dubuque has reconnected people to the river that inspired the town’s settlement so long ago,” Lehman said. “Once again, the river is making Dubuque a very special place to visit and live.”

Iowa Rivers Revival pointed to several key river-related projects, including:

- **The Port of Dubuque.** Starting with a new museum – now the superb National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium – the *America’s River* project has steadily and stunningly redeveloped the downtown riverfront, transforming 90 acres of industrial, underused brownfield property into a bustling center of history, tourism, recreation, commerce and civic pride. The Port of Dubuque continues to add or restore other features in recent years, including the Mississippi Riverwalk, the historic Shot Tower, a hotel and indoor water park, a conference center, a casino, the Star Brewery Building, and other businesses. Dubuque has additional plans to transform more of the Port area.
- **The Bee Branch Creek Restoration and Gateway Project** is “daylighting” or opening up the historic creek that was buried in a storm sewer more than a century ago. The Bee Branch project, under way after years of planning, will greatly increase stormwater capacity, improve water quality, and decrease the risk of flooding damage to 1,150 properties in three of Dubuque’s oldest neighborhoods. It will make a mile-long linear park stretching from the Mississippi to the heart of Dubuque’s historic North End. And it will be a community attraction for residents and visitors, with hike/bike trails, bridges, overlooks, gazebos, an amphitheater, benches, gardens, lights and 1,000 new trees.

“There are several common threads that run through the strong projects Dubuque has accomplished,” Lehman said. “The projects honor the river. They are environmentally sustainable for generations to come. They result from careful, focused planning processes involving the citizens of

Dubuque. They were done by a rich mix of public and private collaborators and financial supporters. They involve many jurisdictions and levels of government, with Dubuque at the hub,” Lehman said.

Iowa Rivers Revival cited some of the other projects earning “River City of the Year” recognition for Dubuque:

- **The Dubuque Water Trail** runs 11 miles along the Mississippi River and Catfish Creek. Iowa has a rapidly-growing system of water trails, but this is the first on the Mississippi. It offers great sightseeing with five access points, and runs from near Lock and Dam #11 downstream past the City and on to Massey Marina. Staff of the Iowa DNR, which collaborates on water trails, applauded Dubuque planners of the water trail, which was dedicated June 23, 2012.
- **Catfish Creek Watershed Management Authority (CCWMA)** is a multi-jurisdictional organization working on water quality, flooding and other issues in the 57-square-mile watershed. About half of the City of Dubuque is in the watershed, which includes residential neighborhoods, industries, rolling cropland, dense forest, steep bluffs and rock outcrops. The watershed is threatened by large amounts of soil and nutrients from both urban and agricultural runoff. The CCWMA is undertaking a Watershed Management Plan in 2013 and other initiatives.
- **Bike and Hiking Trails.** Dubuque has 45 miles of trails, much of it on the riverfront system that connects the Mississippi to community parks, the downtown, some of Dubuque’s oldest neighborhoods, and the *America’s River* project at the Port of Dubuque. Portions are designated as the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) through Iowa. The system is slated to keep growing, including the new Bee Branch MRT section.

Lehman said: “Dubuque is in the midst of a renaissance in revitalizing its relationship to the Mississippi River – improving recreation, protecting the environment and bolstering its economy.”

“Dubuque is a great example of public officials, community leaders, civic organizations, businesses and citizens who refocused on their river to improve quality of life,” she said. “Dubuque is thriving on teamwork and partnerships, collaboration and community involvement.”

“Dubuque is living up to its motto, ‘Masterpiece on the Mississippi,’” Lehman said.

More background and information:

Iowa Rivers Revival (IRR) is presenting the “River City of the Year” award to Dubuque, population 58,000, at a reception at 10:00 AM on Wednesday morning, January 30, at the Grand River Center on the Mississippi River in Dubuque. Mayor Roy Buol is accepting the award on behalf of the City of Dubuque. After the award presentation, Mayor Buol and other City leaders and staff will present a virtual tour on “Sharing Dubuque’s Story” about key river-related projects.

IRR presented a “River Town of the Year” award to Central City, population 1,250, on Jan. 21. Previous “River Towns of the Year” recognized by Iowa Rivers Revival are Webster City, Elkader, Coon Rapids, Cedar Falls, and Charles City. (For details, go to www.iowarivers.org.)

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

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