

Robert C. Valade Park

Brings Fun and Style to Detroit Waterfront



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARTIN CHUMIECKI

By **Marilyn S. Jones-Wilson**

For decades, Detroit's riverfront consisted of industrial remnants and private properties that cut off access to citizens and made it difficult to even see the water, let alone enjoy it. The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy has changed all that, starting in 2003, when the newly formed non-profit started acquiring and developing land for what will ultimately become five-and-a-half miles of public parks and community walkways.

Robert C. Valade Park, the Riverwalk's newest attraction, opened in October 2019, transforming a neglected industrial site into a vibrant recreational jewel featuring a playscape for children, a food and event space called The Shed, picnic areas and the city's only floating bar on a barge. Located off Atwater Street east of the Aretha Franklin Amphitheatre, the park offers yet another reason to hang out downtown.



LEFT: The Shed's clerestory windows are illuminated with color-changing LED lights that serve as a festive beacon from the street and over the patio. The dramatically slanting roof extends over the park entrance like a gateway.

ABOVE: The picnic area with its colorful fabric canopies offers public grills and benches made of reclaimed wood by the Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit.

Conservancy. "The park creates a cadence of kid-oriented spaces located about 10 minutes from each other. This means that a family can have a series of experiences while they move along the banks of the river."

The Shed, at 4,850 gross square feet, offers a light-filled space for casual gatherings, along with roll-up garage doors on either side that bring the outdoors in. In addition to a full kitchen, food trucks such as Smokey G's Smokehouse and Geisha Girls Sushi can hook up to offer year-round menus. A 120-foot bar for adult patrons will operate on a refurbished barge, bridging two boat slips and floating parallel to the Detroit River.

Commercial Contracting Corporation and Hannah-Neumann/Smith faced terrible weather, environmental challenges and a tight schedule to deliver the project on time with a perfect safety record over 14,370 work hours. During the wettest spring on record, the team stayed nimble to accommodate unanticipated site issues and design changes throughout construction.

Clearing Out the Past

An abandoned industrial site, along one of the world's busiest waterways, posed formidable trials for the construction team, which began clearing and installing underground utilities even before designs were final. Ground conditions were bad enough in the winter of 2018 that the

Named after a Detroit and former chairman and CEO of Carhartt, the 3.2-acre park originally held cement silos for a concrete plant, and more recently was used for buoy storage by the U.S. Coast Guard. Now, chairs and tables, umbrellas and barbecue grills line a sandy inland "beach," and colorful huts mimicking lifeguard stations invite children to climb and slide. A curving walkway leads kids through a hands-on musical garden where they can tap out tunes.

"Valade Park responded to a clear request from the community to have a public space in that part of the riverfront," said Mark Wallace, president and CEO of the Detroit Riverfront

LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE

MICHAEL J. DUL



& ASSOCIATES, INC

BIRMINGHAM, MI

248 644 3410

WWW.MJDUL.COM



The Shed offers a bright, comfortable space for gatherings as well as a full kitchen. Large garage-style overhead doors connect indoors to the outside.

crew had to demobilize for a while. Spring brought torrents of rain while designers continued to adapt to circumstances.

“The project seemed to morph quite a bit,” said Mike Helm, CCC project manager. “Trying to keep up with all the changes while moving things forward was very challenging.” Out of 193 days planned for construction activity, rain occurred on 45 of them, and 12 days were lost to complete rainouts.

Seemingly every historical site reveals unwelcome surprises underground, and this one was no exception. An old seawall had been backfilled with about 200 cubic yards of trash and debris, causing a 10-day delay before support footings could be poured in the barbeque area. The soil conditions required oversized concrete footings to offset poor bearing capacity. Colorful fabric canopies highlight the spot.



BUILDING LEGACIES SINCE 1946

SERVICES

- Construction Management
- Equipment Installation
- Facilities Management
- General Contracting
- Engineering
- Concrete
- Steel
- Interiors



COMMERCIAL CONTRACTING CORPORATION

Proud CAM Member Since 1999

MARKETS

- Automotive
- Commercial
- Education
- Healthcare
- Industrial/Manufacturing
- Food & Beverage
- Transportation
- Water/Wastewater

248-209-0500 • CCCNETWORK.COM
AUBURN HILLS • DETROIT • MEXICO

Soil with load-bearing capacity poorer than anticipated also meant changes to The Shed's initial plan. "The design and programming of The Shed necessitated a building that was larger and heavier than was originally conceived with the initial concept for Atwater Beach," said David Mefford, designer at Hannah-Neumann/Smith Architecture.

Due in part to the site's proximity to the river, the soil conditions were not sufficient to support the building with conventional foundations. Structural engineers Desai/Nasr developed a cost-effective foundation with performance-based geopiers to distribute the loads more evenly across the building.

Barging in on Budget

While the team adjusted to ongoing design tweaks, weather and a labor shortage, the last piece of the plan was finding and purchasing a barge suitable for retrofitting for the public. As costs rose and deadlines loomed, the barge's bottom line had to wait until the supplier finalized arrangements for the 61st Ford Fireworks, scheduled on June 24, 2019. Only after that could the design team obtain a barge and begin adding fencing and infrastructure during August and September, to be ready for the park's October completion.

With all the delays, changes and lost workdays, the ground team caught up with overtime and by overlapping activities where possible. Through value engineering, the project came in under budget and without any time lost because of safety issues. Wise planning and constant coordination with all participants resulted in the park's debut in time for the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's annual outdoor HarvestFest Detroit on October 22, 2019.

Given 2020's pandemic, full appreciation of the features and innovations will carry on into 2021, when the playscapes and interior spaces will reopen to public events.

Design of the park and The Shed embody connections between light, the outdoors, and people. Positioned along Atwater Street, The Shed relates to downtown as the project's southern urban face.

"The scale of the building was designed to complement the existing structures in the immediate vicinity," Mefford said. "The sloping roofline in the main events space opens toward the city's core. The roofline extends past the building, forming a gateway for pedestrians entering the park from Atwater Street."

On the east and west walls of the main events space, eight glass and aluminum overhead doors allow unobstructed views throughout the

building, into the park and to the riverscape beyond. In warmer months, opening these doors increases the connectivity to the outdoors, while providing access for food trucks to park alongside the building.

The Shed's exterior design called for cost-effective concrete block masonry that echoes the older industrial buildings in the neighborhood. "Overall, the design was intended to be minimalistic," Mefford said, "with attention given to detailing the exposed structural steel, simple and durable concrete floors, and exposed concrete block masonry."

Natural light floods the building from above from the windows that run below The Shed's roof. "The clerestory windows are illuminated with color-changing LED lights," Mefford said. "This provides a unique look, transforming the character of the building and park in response to major events and holidays."

GLASCO
corporation

contract glazier
glass distributor
sash distributor

Fire-Rated Glass

Float Glass

Laminated Glass

Aluminum Framing

Fabrication

Mirrors

Accessories



18205 WEAVER
DETROIT, MI 48228

Call: 313-838-1040
Fax: 313-838-2122
sales@glascocorp.com



Three whimsical huts with peekaboo windows create a playscape for kids to climb and slide. Evoking Miami lifeguard stations, the huts are constructed with durable, scratch-resistant wood.

Designing for Detroit. The diversity of our experience inspires innovative solutions.

architecture | planning | interior design | historic preservation



INS
Hannah-Neumann/Smith
MICHIGAN MINORITY SUPPLIER DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Beverly Hannah Jones, RA
beverly@hannahai.com

J. Michael Kirk, AIA, LEED AP BD+C
mkirk@neumannsmith.com

“The illumination also acts as a beacon to identify the project along Atwater Street and the Riverwalk,” he said. The colorful lighting makes the roofline windows glow like neon above the umbrella tables and chairs.

Environmental Stewardship

Given the abundance of sunlight pouring into The Shed, the environmentally astute design features insulated glass and non-conductive fiberglass resins, in addition to the white roof, to reduce urban heat island effect and maintain higher R-values required under the updated state energy code adopted in 2017.

An innovative system for interior framing, GreenGirt™ by SMARTci, mitigates the heat loss caused by thermal bridging that occurs with traditional framing methods. Instead of metal fasteners that hold heat, the system uses reinforced polymer materials to create a support framework with better thermal efficiency.

Elements throughout the park personify environmental responsibility and forward-thinking. For example, The Barge features a sanitary water system that recycles graywater, pumping it back onto land to prevent contaminated water from draining into the Detroit River.

Recycled materials such as reclaimed timbers were used for seating, flower boxes and for the chime posts along the musical walkway. The playscape’s cabins and walkways were constructed from galapa wood, naturally durable for long scratch-free life. The beach area uses sand from western Michigan dunes, and bike racks promote physical activity by patrons.

On The Barge, planter boxes and bench backs made of vintage Ford, Chevrolet and Dodge RAM tailgates add a uniquely Detroit touch.

Another Jewel on the River

The Robert C. Valade Park is yet another success in the mission of the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy as it strives to transform the city’s shoreline for public enjoyment.

“The city demonstrated amazing leadership and allowed us to turn this private development parcel in a public space,” Mark Wallace said. He attributes donors – the Molly and Mark Valade Family Fund, the William Davidson Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Mona and Richard Alonzo Fund, and the Walters Family Foundation – for making this dream a reality.

The Conservancy also received a \$50,000 grant for the project from the Gannett/USA Today Network as part of their initiative, “A Community Thrives.” “I’m proud that the park addresses community needs in such a direct way,” Wallace said.

As a Detroit, project manager Mike Helm appreciated being part of “a project that seems to be giving a lot of enjoyment for other people in the city.”

The project captures the character of Detroit as it continues to evolve into a vibrant magnet for residents and visitors alike. “The Robert C. Valade Park is a tremendous addition to the already dynamic riverfront of Detroit,” Mefford said. “It provides unique opportunities and experiences that will resonate with people of all ages and all abilities.”



MAP
MICHIGAN AIR PRODUCTS

MICHIGAN'S **thermaduct**
REPRESENTATIVE HIGH EFFICIENCY AIR DISTRIBUTION

TROY | GRAND RAPIDS | SAGINAW

michiganair.com (248) 837-7000
sales@michiganair.com

BENEFITS OF PRE-INSULATED PHENOLIC DUCT:

- HIGHER R-VALUES
- LOWER AIR LEAKAGE
- LIGHT WEIGHT
- REDUCED INSTALLATION LABOR
- LOWEST LANDED COST
- NO FIELD INSULATION LABOR
- 10 YEAR WARRANTY

Email us for a FREE product sample!