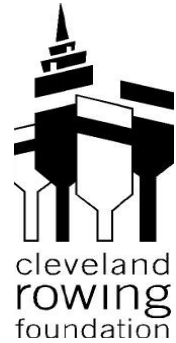


CLEVELAND ROWING FOUNDATION

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RIVERGATE PARK...THE POSSIBILITIES

While enterprising real estate developers and supporting civic organizations are undoubtedly vital to the process, Cleveland's ability to attract smart, creative people who want to live, work and play in the heart of the city might ultimately come down to a little-known organization's capacity to maintain a boathouse on the Cuyahoga River.

At least that's what circumstances in Philadelphia and Oklahoma City suggest.

The local organization – known as the Cleveland Rowing Foundation – currently operates the only boathouse on the Cuyahoga River specifically designed for rowers, kayakers, dragon-boat racers and canoeists. Since it was founded twenty years ago, the Foundation has gained over 800 individual members, several club and corporate affiliates, and eight educational associates representing high schools and colleges in Northeast Ohio.

But the potential of the Foundation to influence Cleveland's future is not in the membership it attracts. Rather, its capacity to spur economic growth is best seen in what occurred in places like Philadelphia and Oklahoma City when those cities began to view the Schuylkill and Oklahoma rivers, respectively, and the boating organizations on them, as complementary assets whose value to the city transcended rowing. Indeed, if what occurred in Philadelphia and Oklahoma City is any indication of rowing's potential impact on a city's economic growth and revitalization, the success of downtown Cleveland in regaining residents and visitors may be just around the bend, but for a very small yet critical community investment in the Cleveland Rowing Foundation itself.

The Philadelphia Story

For much of its history, Philadelphia has been represented by the Schuylkill. In art and literature, no one image has better captured the river's past and present significance than Thomas Eakins' nineteenth-century masterpiece paintings depicting scullers along the river. Today, those images are moving out of museums and into the minds of city planners who are using the river, and rowing, to draw millions of people – and dollars – to the City of Brotherly Love. But more than just tourist attraction or an annual regatta – large and lucrative as that regatta is – these planners are using the sport to rebuild the city's core. That effort is called Schuylkill Banks.



As Philadelphia's newest riverfront destination, Schuylkill Banks is home to greenways, parks, docks, award-winning residential developments and active industrial sites that are making way for livable spaces. Built on the reputation of the river and its long-time attraction to rowers, the project is constructed around Boathouse Row, a venue known to rowers the world over. But Schuylkill Banks moves beyond rowing in its literature, with a master plan that provides riverfront opportunities for hiking, fishing, skating, walking, cycling, studying, and running, all around a blueprint that recreates Philadelphia's inner core as a place to live, work and play. None of this would have been possible, the developers say, without the river's initial attraction around rowing.

Oklahoma City: Where the wind comes rushing down... the river?

Driven by the vision to build a program that could put Oklahoma City on the map as home to community rowing organizations as diverse and competitive as any found anywhere, a group of local rowers, backed by civic officials, businesses, and real estate developers, united in 2002 to form the Oklahoma Association for Rowing (OAR). Until that moment, few beyond the local college scene knew the sport existed in Oklahoma City.

But like the Philadelphia Story, the success of this endeavor has extended well beyond rowing. After its founding, it became apparent that OAR needed a home of its own. With the help of a city-backed fundraising campaign, it went from having borrowed space in a nearby riverfront café to owning one of the premiere modern boathouses in the country. But what is truly remarkable about this story and the \$3.5 million boathouse is not its translucent polycarbonate walls that provide dramatic nighttime images of the building "floating" above the river; it is not the reflecting pool at the "bow" of the building nor is it the deck, lobby, and event room for receptions and meetings.



What is truly remarkable about the story and the boathouse is the decision the city and organizers made to locate it in the heart of downtown Oklahoma City as a means of urban revitalization.

The result of the decision is beyond remarkable. With the development of OAR came the start of a juniors program that helped several inner-city rowers earn collegiate athletic scholarships; this then got high schools excited about the sport and opened up new windows of opportunity for hundreds of students. Meanwhile, a strong masters program brought adults together to row recreationally and competitively. With the program businesses found their ability to compete for national corporate talent increase dramatically. Finally, another program, for at-risk youth, was created to share rowing's

lessons of teamwork and leadership with disadvantaged children from area schools and during summers. With it the city's youth became more engaged in civic life and juvenile crime started to go down. Lastly, Oklahoma City University made the decision to join two other local universities and added rowing as a varsity sport in 2003. In 2004, in celebration of their centennial anniversary, OCU staged the first Head of the Oklahoma attracting more than 400 rowers and 15,000 spectators to the banks of the Oklahoma River. Today, the university credits its rowing program with driving admissions to the 100-year-old public institution to all-time highs – factors that the city's two other, private universities say also contribute greatly to their enrollment.

The net result? Oklahoma City has once again become a desirable place to live, work and play.

Opportunities in Cleveland: A New Image of the Cuyahoga River – Finally!

The vision of Cleveland's leading real estate developers and civic organizations presents a downtown landscape that includes apartments, lofts and condominiums; retail and restaurant districts; and sporting and entertainment venues that stretch from Historic Gateway to East Fourth Street and across town to the Warehouse district. It's an impressive picture, but only in a few minds does it include rowing.

And why should it? Like Oklahomans of past, most Clevelanders know little of the storied history of rowing on the Cuyahoga River or that a Cleveland Rowing Foundation even exists. There are few vantage points where the river is actually seen at sidewalk level (on Ontario Street, for example, you have to be at least three stories above ground to know that the river is below you), and there are few places or activities remaining in the Flats that regularly draw people to the river's edge.

Fortunately, this is about to change. From Dan Gilbert, owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers and a force behind the casino movement, to Scott Wolstein, who is extending the vision of the Flats from a summer nightlife experience to a year-round commercial, recreational and residential venue, the importance and image of the river is about to take on renewed significance.

For the Cleveland Rowing Foundation, the renewed attention could not be timelier. Ironically, the owners of the facility that serves as the boathouse have informed the Foundation that the casino initiative has led them to redefine use of the property. As a result, the Foundation must find a new home. If it cannot, the program will cease to exist. Although rowing continues to grow in Cleveland, the absence of a place to keep boats will certainly signal its fast demise.

A Request to the Greater Cleveland Civic and Philanthropic Community

The Cleveland Rowing Foundation has identified a parcel of land that includes a facility that could be converted to a boathouse. Less fortunate in this bit of good news is the timing required for the acquisition of the property.

The Foundation has partnered with the Trust for Public Land to secure an option on a seven-acre parcel with over 1,100 feet of river frontage. It is well situated to provide a home for current rowing and dragon boat programs as well as space for expansion. But the option expires on December 31, 2009 with a one-time renewal until March 31, 2010. To secure the property the Foundation must raise \$3.6 million.

The boathouse campaign provides Greater Cleveland's business and philanthropic community a rare opportunity to shed once and for all the still-prevalent, decades-old image of the burning Cuyahoga River in the national media. Equally important, the campaign would provide broad economic benefits to the city on the whole (as it did in Philadelphia and Oklahoma City) and more specifically to the groups that have been actively using the boathouse:

- Four public and private high schools
- Three colleges
- An adult rowing club with individual members who enjoy the recreational and competitive sport of rowing.
- Organizations that serve at-risk youth

The community's investment in the boathouse would also:

- Serve as a catalyst to spur economic growth
- Preserve and expand public recreational access to one of Cleveland's treasures, the Cuyahoga River
- Enhance the Flats as an attractive recreational destination for families
- Serve as attractive amenity for young urban professionals, a key target demographic for any vibrant city
- Promote healthy lifestyles in a very visible setting
- Create 'green connections' to bicycle trails and adjacent city park
- Convert current industrial site to a more natural area with open space and restored habitats
- Significantly strengthen the Cleveland Rowing Foundation and secure its future

Many, including the Plain Dealer, are both endorsing and encouraging such a vision. In a lead editorial the day after a referendum passed on casino gambling, the newspaper urged its backers to view the various big projects coming on line at roughly the same time as "a unique opportunity to reshape downtown." It recommended a task force to study the idea. A rowing community fits this vision but unfortunately not the task force's timeline. Your support is needed now.

The Cleveland Rowing Foundation would greatly appreciate the opportunity to share our proposal of Rivergate Park with you. Please contact Theresa Gang, the CRF Executive Director, at 216-308-4183.