

## Forum: Point State Park -- shining the crown

**As the Point State Park makeover begins in earnest, remember that it's meant to serve our rivers and history, our present and past, says JIM BROADHURST**

Sunday, October 01, 2006



**The bastion battle** One of the most controversial aspects of the \$7.1 million renovation of Point State Park is the filling of the trench that surrounds the reconstructed Music Bastion, which simulates the original walls of Fort Pitt. Once the trench is filled, the shape of the bastion will be outlined in granite. Project planners point out that only a small percentage of original bricks make up today's bastion walls. They say filling the trench will provide an active space for games and concerts. Opponents decry the change as a denigration of the historic nature of the site. They say the bastion provides a unique attraction at a time when history tourism is on the rise.

Every time I visit Mount Washington and look out at the Golden Triangle, I feel both pride and inspiration. From that hillside perch, you can see an amazing view of Pittsburgh, the confluence of the rivers and Point State Park. Watching the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers rush together to form the Ohio, one can't help understanding why that point of land has held strategic importance for hundreds of years.

The building of Point State Park remains one of the crowning achievements of Pittsburgh's first Renaissance. Gov. Edward Martin authorized the creation of the park in the 1940s as part of the same legislation that funded the restoration of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The park was intended to be a place of quiet contemplation -- a place for reflection on the site's nationally important role in the colonial era -- complete with

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plantings appropriate to the 18th century.

Conference on  
Community Development.

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But over the years the park also has become a place for public gatherings, which endeared it to all of us in a way quite different from its original intent. I know my family has long enjoyed the colonial fairs, festivals, concerts and fireworks in the park. Those many events have exacted a heavy toll, causing permanent damage to both the park's infrastructure and landscape. It just wasn't built for all the different uses we have asked it to support.

Point State Park still inspires from the distance of Mount Washington, but up close much of it is tired and in disrepair. It remains the great symbol of our region, but it no longer reflects the excellence to be found here, nor does it reflect the opportunity we have -- unthinkable in the 1940s -- to reinvent our riverfronts and showcase our unique topography by reconnecting the city to the water.

As we work to retain our residents -- especially our youngest -- attract talented workers and encourage tourism, we need to put our best foot forward. We need the beautiful green space at the park that provides a quiet retreat, and we need an active destination for kayakers, fishermen, bicyclists, joggers, school children and rollerbladers.

When I was invited in early 2001 to chair a community effort to create a new master plan for the park, it didn't take me long to accept. From our perspective now, in 2006, the effort was well timed and well worth it, given the more than \$2.5 billion that has been invested in and around the park in Downtown Pittsburgh.

Our company, Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, opened its first Downtown restaurant in 2005, Six Penn -- just one example of our Downtown's long-awaited revival. Some 1,500 residential units also are in various phases of development. A city with world-class assets and aspirations deserves a world-class park.

As we brought together a park planning committee, we set out to make it broadly representational. We knew we would want to bring many diverse voices to the table. Out of this process I was surprised to learn just how many people feel a close and personal connection to the park. Point State Park is truly everyone's park.

What we heard loud and clear is that people believe the park should be accessible for all sorts of uses. There are those for whom its history is paramount, those who hold as dear the special events that bring tens of thousands of people into the park, those who live nearby and visit in the park every day. But there were many others, as well -- active recreational users of the park, boaters and garden clubs, to name just a few -- and so our committee grew to 73 members, representing more than 50 different organizations.

Over a two-and-a-half year period we held more than 40 planning meetings and public workshops to create a plan that could meet the challenges we set for it. In January 2004, the master plan was announced with an event widely covered by local media.

It was an enormous challenge to develop a plan that could meet everyone's needs. We wanted a park that could attract constant use, but not overuse, and a plan that would protect this nationally significant park for future generations and make its important history come alive for our children and grandchildren.

We collaborated with talented experts, like landscape architect Marion Pressley, and we

brought together the public and the private sectors to create a new place that respects the old: a place that offers people from all walks of life a variety of experiences in a beautiful setting, enriching Pittsburgh's urban life and providing beautiful open green space for the growing number of Downtown residents.

Our next step was to find the funding to implement the plan. Both the state and our foundation community have responded generously, and phase one of construction is about to begin.

With this plan, the park can become a spectacular place that brings together our rivers, our history, our sense of community, our families, great entertainment, outdoor recreation and beautiful green space, all in one central urban location.

That's a park, and a symbol of Pittsburgh, that can make us all proud.

[Back](#)

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