



# GREENWAY CURRENT

Volume 16 Number 1 • Winter 1996

## "Punt the Creek"...It's Coming!!

After eight years of concepts, plans, designs, fund-raising, promotion, approval, permits and finally construction, "Punt the Creek" has become a reality. Due in great part to the ongoing support of the Webb administration, the Greenway Foundation has, over the last year, coordinated the creation of this unique tourism attrac-

tion for Downtown Denver's Cherry Creek.

Working with Hensel Phelps, Kiewit Western and New Design construction companies, as well as Obermeyer Hydro Accessories, this six block section of Historic Cherry Creek has been transformed into a unique boatable waterway that will serve as host for the only known "punts" in the United States. Similar to a gondola, Cherry Creek's punts are 23 feet long, three feet wide and will seat up to four adults. Requiring less than two feet of water to navigate, passengers will be escorted up and down the Creek, courtesy of a punt guide who will navigate via a long pole with a rudder at the base. Each guide will be well versed in the history of the area (the birthplace of Denver) and will also offer an overview of how "Punt the Creek" became a reality.

Improvements involved with this \$1.5 Million project include a deepened and channelized Creek, a new trail and access ramp on the north side of the channel, and, to give the Creek the 24 inches of water needed for "punting", two stainless steel dams adjacent to Wazee and Delgany Streets have been installed, along with the only lock in Colorado that bypasses the upstream dam.

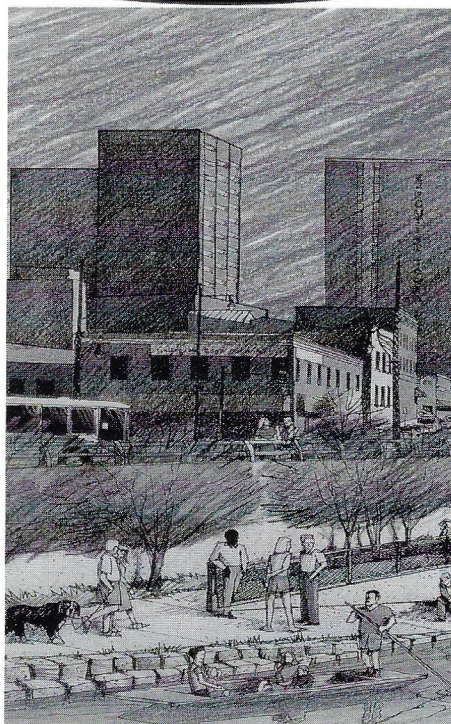
Construction was completed in late November, and this exciting amenity will be open to the public this summer. Design and engineering services were provided by MDG Assoc. and Recreation Engineering & Planning.

Making "Punt the Creek" a reality has been made possible through the generous support of a host of financial partners, including:

- Bank One
- Boettcher Foundation
- El Pomar Foundation
- Gates Foundation
- General American
- Great Outdoors Colorado
- Greenway Foundation Endowment
- Trillium Corporation
- Urban Drainage & Flood Control District

Scores of additional companies and individuals have donated funds through the Colorado Enterprise Zone program, which was a key component in our efforts to raise the needed funds to construct the project.

"Punt the Creek" promises to be an exciting and memorable opportunity to experience the past and future of our City. It is our hope that you will join us for a punting excursion along Cherry Creek this coming summer.





## Platte River Program 1995

The Spring of 1995 witnessed the creation of some new and valuable partnerships, all intent on furthering the protection and usability of Denver's South Platte River Greenway.

Working with Mayor Webb's newly formed **Platte River Commission** (see related article on page 5), the Greenway Foundation joined forces with the River Heritage Society and coordinated the establishment of several volunteer-based cleanup, enhancement, and outdoor education activity days. Also, a delayed but enjoyable inaugural Mayor's "Hats off to the Platte" celebration took place at summer's end (see related article this page).

Another result of Mayor Webb's firm commitment to the further enhancement and protection of Denver's "Only River in Town" was the re-establishment of the Greenway Foundation's "River Ranger" program. Working with Denver Area Youth Services and Denver's Parks and Recreation Department, eight Denver teenagers were employed to travel up and down the Platte River Greenway engaged in a variety of efforts to improve the conditions of the River, its banks, and tributaries.

The Ranger crew's work included tree planting and watering, graffiti removal, litter pickup, trail cleaning, and assisting with the various volunteer and activity days that took place throughout the summer. The crew also assisted in the renovation of one of the abandoned railroad bridges over Cherry Creek in LoDo, creating another pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the Creek.

The Greenway Foundation and the City have had preliminary discussions which should insure that these valuable programs will return in 1996. We are grateful for the ongoing support of the City as it continues to focus on our Greatest Natural Resource.

## Wabash Water Treatment Facility & Park

by David Carpenter - MDG Associates

The Greenway Foundation and MDG Associates are currently under contract with the Cherry Creek Valley Water and Sanitation District to master plan an educational/interpretive park in Denver. Water from a variety of sources will be contained and cleaned on this approximately forty acre site at Iliff and Wabash Streets. This project will be a state of the art water storage/treatment facility and an environmentally sensitive community park. Once completed, it will explain the value of water to park visitors and serve as a "living lab" for local schools.

Wabash Park will explore a variety of techniques for site irrigation, storm runoff purification/use and will demonstrate how water is taken from the natural system, used and returned

again. A two acre formal wetland garden will serve a dual purpose of cleaning the stormwater and separating the components of a wetland into gardens which will educate visitors about how wetlands are in fact nature's filter.

The master plan includes the Cherry Creek corridor which is the southern boundary to the site. Improvements will include formalizing the paths, stabilizing the Creek banks where necessary, improving the Creek as a fishery, providing enhanced habitat for wildlife, and removing/cutting back overgrown vegetation. The master planning effort will be completed in December of 1995.

## Activities Abound Along the Platte River Greenway

by Randy Choun - River Heritage Society

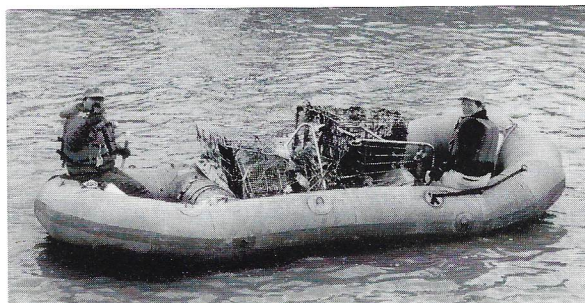
This summer, the Greenway Foundation and the River Heritage Society combined efforts to help bring a new focus to the Platte River Greenway. These efforts were made possible due to a contract with the City of Denver and the Platte River Commission.

The Greenway Foundation's River Ranger program was resurrected (see related article in the box to the left). The River Heritage Society employed five young people as River Raft Guides, running daily trips along the

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▼ The use of rafts to remove large debris in the River channel helped make the Earth Day Cleanup a resounding success.

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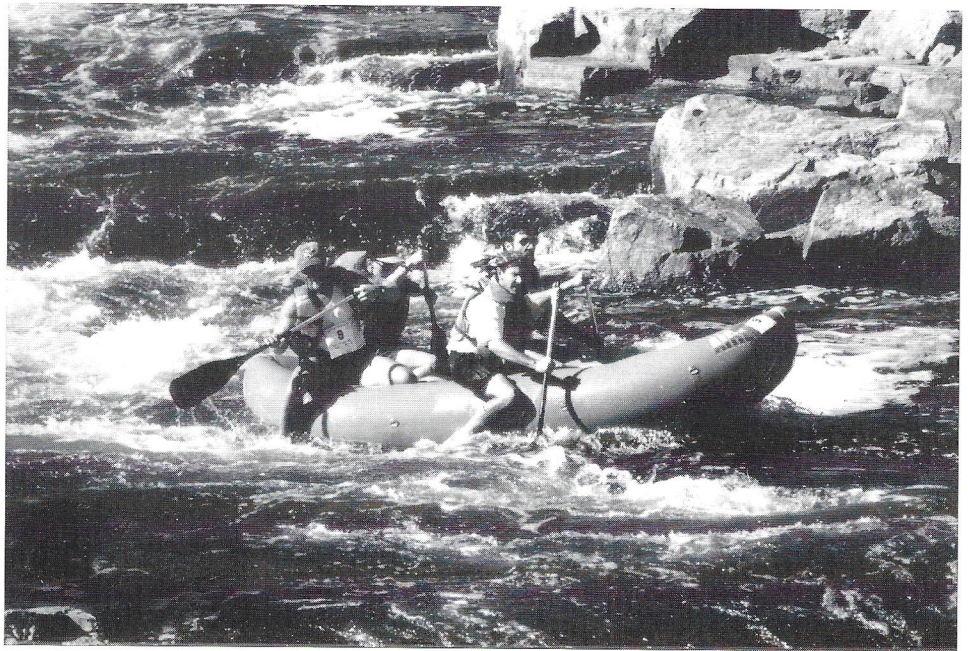


South Platte River near Confluence Park.

In addition, the two non-profits coordinated five volunteer days on the River. In April, on Earth Day, working with Colorado's Ocean Journey, over 300 youth and adults spent the day picking up trash along the entire 10.5 mile segment of the South Platte that runs through Denver. Volunteers heralded from several private and public organizations dedicated to improving the River, including: Colorado Division of Wildlife, E.P.A., National Civilian Community Corps, Metro Wastewater, Rocky Mountain Canoe Club, Design Workshop, High Country River Rafter and Pepsi Cola Bottling Co. of Denver. Over five tons of trash were collected, including couches, shopping carts, tires, water heaters, and an amazing array of miscellaneous garbage. The cans, bottles and plastic that were found were recycled.

The May event involved an educational program with the E.P.A. and Denver Public Schools. Gold panning was the favorite part of the day for the youth participants. Sixty trees were planted along the River in June in conjunction with National Trails Day and Denver's Dept. of Parks and Recreation. The Division of Wildlife assisted in a hands-on riparian habitat education project at Overland Pond Park in July. And finally, an "end of the year" second River cleanup took place in early November with over 50 participants.

The pinnacle of the summer was "HATS OFF TO THE PLATTE", the 20th Anniversary of Confluence Park. The day's events included a crazy four person relay race, music, raft and trolley rides, information and education displays along with food vendors. Mayor Wellington Webb and City Council President Debbie



▲ A four-person Relay Race, concluding with a rafting leg through the newly improved Confluence Park boatchute, was one of the activities that took place during the Mayor's "Hats Off to the Platte" celebration in October.

Ortega were present to congratulate the winners in the Relay Race as well as all other participants. It is our hope that this will become an annual event.

The Greenway Foundation and the River Heritage Society are pleased to have been able to generate these events and help bring a new emphasis to Denver's Platte River Greenway. We look forward to coordinating similar projects next summer as part of our ongoing effort to improve Denver's Greatest Natural Resource.



▲ Mayor Wellington Webb offers his vision for the Platte River Greenway during the festivities at "Hats off to the Platte"



# Cherry Creek South Greenway - An Expanding Amenity

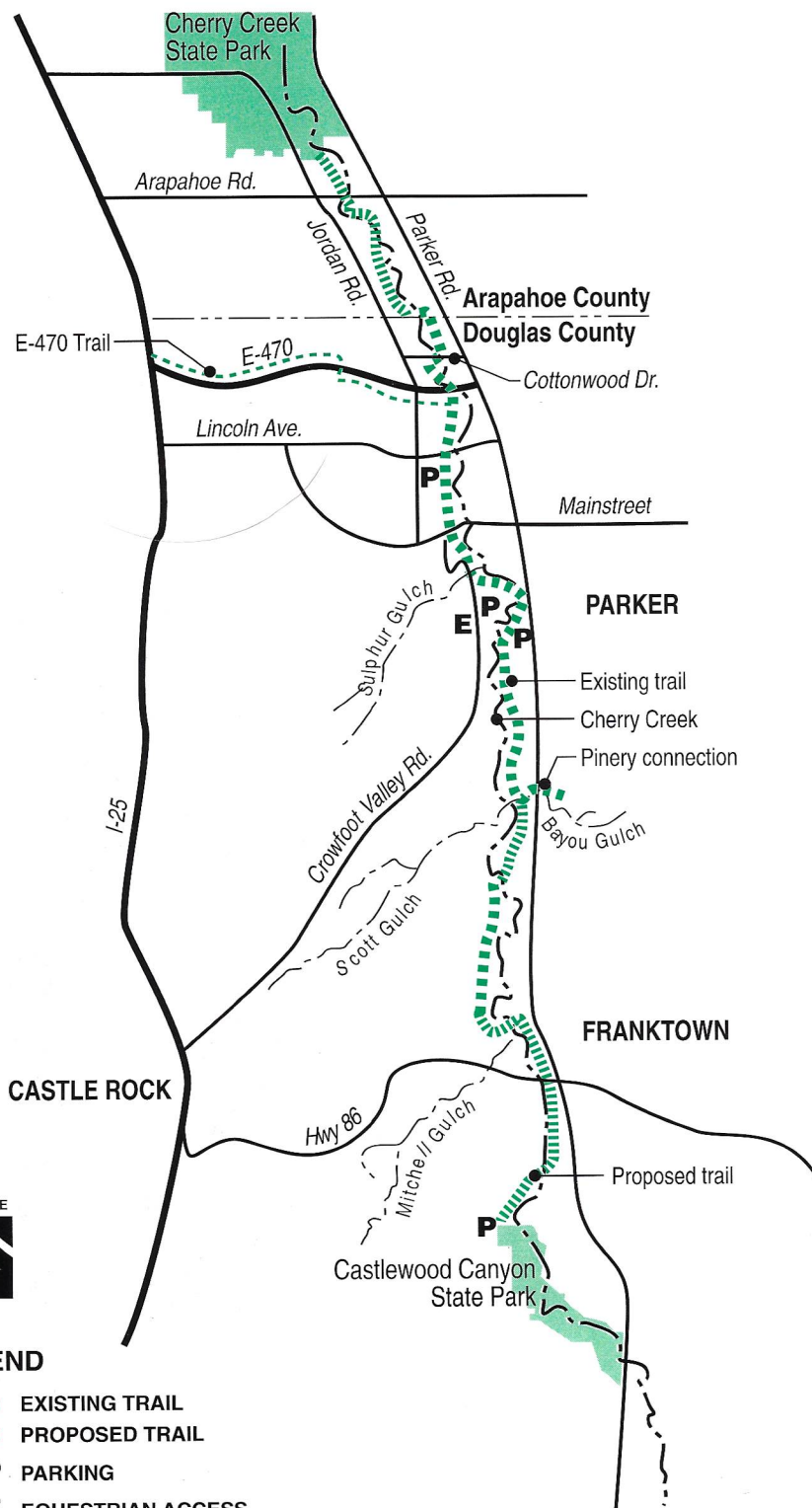
On National Trails Day, June 3, 1995, another 1.5 miles of trails along the Cherry Creek South Greenway were dedicated.

In the ongoing effort to connect Cherry Creek State Park with Castlewood Canyon State Park, a distance of 23 miles, this newest addition brings over fourteen miles of multi-use trail to this beautiful and unspoiled corridor.

Funding for this latest section was made possible by the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, Douglas County, a Great Outdoors Colorado Trails Grant, and countless individual and corporate donors.

Design and funding efforts for the five miles of trail between Cherry Creek State Park's southern boundary and the Arapahoe/Douglas County border continue to progress, as do the efforts to complete the trail southward under Highway 86 into Castlewood Canyon State Park, a distance of approximately four miles.

As always, we are grateful to all those who have helped make this project an exciting and continued reality.



◀ Cherry Creek South Greenway trail connects Cherry Creek State Park to Castlewood Canyon State Park.



# Denver's South Platte River Urban Corridor Project - The Campaign for the River

by Andrew Wallach, Project Director/Marc Alston, Project Coordinator, Mayor's South Platte River Commission

## History

The history of Denver is intertwined with the South Platte River. Denver's origins are tied to the banks of the South Platte due to the discovery of gold. The River was very different before 2,000,000 residents surrounded its banks, and proceeded to misuse and abuse the River for over 100 years. The South Platte was much wider, not confined to a defined channel, and subject to major yearly flooding. Unfortunately, as Denver grew, its River quickly became a place in which you put your waste and turned your back.

In the 1970's, attitudes about urban rivers began to change. The Greenway Foundation played a leadership role in looking at the South Platte Corridor through Denver as an amenity to nurture and protect. Between 1975 and 1983, the Platte River Greenway was established and served as a national model for urban river restoration.

## Recent History

While much has been accomplished over the last two decades by the Greenway Foundation as well as a host of other public and private organizations, there are still many areas along the South Platte River Corridor in Denver that can be improved. In late 1994, Mayor Wellington Webb formed the South Platte River Working Group to explore opportunities for enhancing the River as it passes through the City and County of Denver. The Working Group was comprised of numerous federal, state and

local government representatives, as well as private and non-profit stakeholders (including the Greenway Foundation). In February, 1995, Mayor Webb endorsed the written recommendations of the Working Group, entitled "A Vision for the South Platte River". Recommendations included insuring flow and quality levels needed to support recreational and environmental needs along the River, improvements for riparian and aquatic habitat and flood control, creation of additional parks, enhancing care and safety, an added focus on environmental education and increasing community awareness of the South Platte as a resource.

*continued on page 6*

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▼ **Adjacent to Public Service Co.'s Arapahoe Power Plant, a newly-created boatchute opened in December, 1995. The project was accomplished through the cooperative efforts of the Public Service Company and the Urban Drainage & Flood Control District.**

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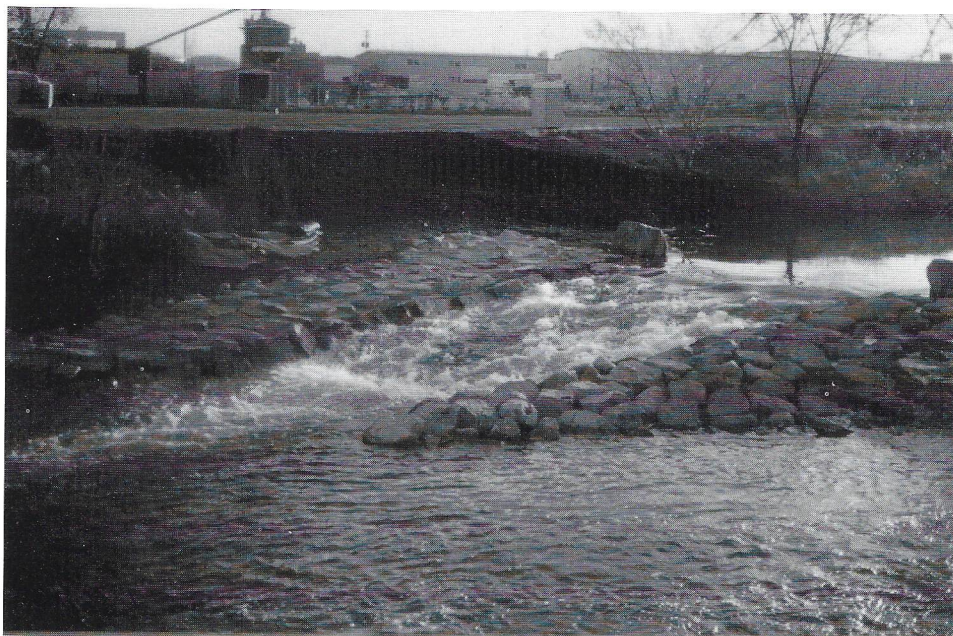






Illustration by Jeffrey Joyce

▲ **Improvements to the Globeville area of the South Platte Corridor in north Denver will feature flood control, improved wildlife habitat, river access and trails, and redevelopment of the 50-acre abandoned Northside Wastewater Treatment Plant. River restoration and flood control construction will begin in 1996.**

### *THE CAMPAIGN... from page 5*

One of the recommendations included within the report was for the Mayor to create a South Platte River Commission, which was established under an Executive Order on February 2, 1995. The responsibilities of the Commission are to:

- Make recommendations on needed River improvements and opportunities.
- Help create partnerships among local, state, and federal agencies, as well as private and non profit organizations.
- Plan and fund improvements.
- Share information on River activities.
- Make recommendations on coordination of River activities with other jurisdictions.
- Oversee implementation of Mayoral recommendations on the River contained in "A Vision for the South Platte River."

### **Current Activities**

The 27 member Commission includes: the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Managers of several City Departments, and representatives of the various stakeholder groups. The Mayor currently co-chairs the Commission

with Joseph Blake of Mission Viejo Co. Five Task Forces have been established to manage the implementation of various improvement initiatives. The current Task Forces are:

- **Instream Flow Issues** - Current efforts are focused on identifying goals for fishing, wildlife and boating activities along the River and developing recommendations for ensuring adequate River flow and quality levels necessary to support those uses.
- **Environmental Education and Improvement** - The Greenway Foundation's "Greenway Experience" is being used as one of the models for an expanded educational focus on the South Platte. The Commission is very aware of the tremendous potential for young people to learn about their environment from the River. In addition, several cleanup and enhancement activities have already taken place (coordinated by the Greenway Foundation), and the River Ranger program has been reestablished (see related articles within this newsletter).
- **Upper Central Platte Valley** - A river restoration and flood control improvement project is under preliminary design for the section of the River between 8th Ave. and 13th Ave., including a new and improved boatchute through the area of the Zuni Public Service Plant at 13th Ave.
- **Riverfront Park** - The Mayor has established the area along the River between I-25 and 23rd St. as Riverfront Park, which includes Gates-Crescent Park, Fishback Landing and Confluence Park. Improvements at Gates-Crescent Park and Fishback Landing, as well as the new



Centennial and Rockmont Parks, will be completed in 1996. Land acquisition for Commons Park, between 15th St. and 20th St. below Union Station will also move forward.

- ❑ **North Denver/Globeville** -The first phase of construction of a river restoration and flood control levee project will begin in 1996. Options for redevelopment of the Northside Wastewater Treatment Plant property adjacent to the River have been identified. The National Guard may lease a portion of the property, and construct an armory beginning in late 1996.

Celebrating the past and present successes of the River is very important. On October 7, 1995, the inaugural "Hats Off to the Platte" was held at Confluence Park (see related article within this newsletter). The event celebrated both the 20th Anniversary of the Platte River Greenway as well as the recent "Rebirth of the Platte" through the efforts of the South Platte River Commission. Activities included a Relay Race, exhibits and music. This will be an annual event.

Funding for moving ahead in all of these areas is in the Mayor's proposed budget for 1996. Public participation will be a component of all of these efforts. In addition to participation by staff from various City agencies, 23 other organizations (including the Greenway Foundation) are actively involved in bringing about these exciting improvements. The efforts of the Commission are coordinated through the Mayor's Office with Andrew Wallach as Project Director.

## The River is a Denver Priority

Mayor Webb has made the further improvement of the South Platte River Corridor one of his top priorities for his second term. The "Campaign for the River" is an effort by the City and County of Denver, along with its many partners, to improve the River Corridor as a place of enjoyment for Denver's residents. The Campaign focuses on making Denver's River an amenity to be cherished by its citizens as it builds on the earlier successes along the River. Under Mayor Webb, Denver will be moving forward aggressively to allow the South Platte River to meet its potential as stated in the Mayor's 1995 "Vision" report... "If we protect and care for our River, and help restore its beauty, the South Platte will bring our children and theirs unmatched recreational, educational and development opportunities".

For more information, please call Andrew Wallach at 640-4156 or Marc Alston at 640-3528.

- ▼ There has long been a vision of a major park in the Central Platte Valley. The centerpiece of the South Platte Corridor Project is Riverfront Park. When complete, Riverfront will include Gates Crescent, Fishback, Centennial, Confluence, Commons, and Rockmont Parks and will encompass over 120 acres along 1.5 miles of the River.



Designed by Mark Hess, DPO



# The Forgotten Nile of North America

by Evie Shuster

The year was 1974. The man was Joe Shoemaker. The project—Returning the Platte to the People.

Joe Shoemaker, a man of action, served three terms in the Colorado State Senate (1962-1976). It was during the last two years of his final term that the River project began to take shape.

Joe could see a bright future for the River and the City. From the beginning of the work, he recorded information that would one day become a book. *Returning the Platte to the People*, by Joe Shoemaker with Leonard A. Stevens, was published in 1981. This article bears the title of one of the book's chapters. Stevens was a free lance author who had set aside his writing in 1974 to head up the Housatonic Valley Association River organization in his New England community.

On June 17, 1974, Denver's Mayor Bill McNichols announced the formation of a new committee named the Platte River Development Committee to study cleaning up the River. It would be chaired by Joe Shoemaker, a man publicly identified with the Joint Budget Committee for the State of Colorado. Joe had a reputation for being a tough chairman.

For many Denverites there is a vivid recollection of the flood of June 16, 1965. To quote from his book, Shoemaker described the River in flood:

"Instead of the normal 300 cubic feet of water per second (cfs) or the 3,000 cfs that we call exceptionally high water on our raft ride (described earlier), the raging South Platte hit us with the astonishing flow of 150,000

cfs. By the time the flood was in the center of the City, it had damaged every bridge in its path from the south and the tide was gathering an increasing load of debris—trees, sides of buildings, entire mobile home, telephone poles, trailing wires, an armada of old and new automobile tires, operable and junked cars, entire lumber yards, fences, tanks loaded with the Lord knew what. And as it was all swept into the City, debris piled up against bridges forming massive dams. As they held back the water, it spread out like a sea across the City."

Having described the flood, he concluded, "In any event, the River went back to being its old dirty self, except that action was taken to prevent another such flood."

In 1974, Shoemaker began the work Mayor McNichols had given him. The committee of nine civic-minded citizens had its work cut out for it. Ted Bendelow, Vice-chairman, Harold Berglund, Dana Crawford, Hiawatha Davis, Jr., Marjorie Hornbein, Pat McClearn, Philip Milstein, Daniel R. Trujillo, and John Zapien were all known within the structure of city government or community action groups. Each had an interest in reclaiming the Platte. Their reasons differed, but their goal was a common one.

After setting up the rules and sounding out the concepts of the committee members, Shoemaker insisted upon a tour of the River which he later defined as one of the most important events in the committee's history. What they saw was not a pretty picture. It was in fact an elongated floating dump of rubble, twisted iron, and an artery of rubbish and dirty water.



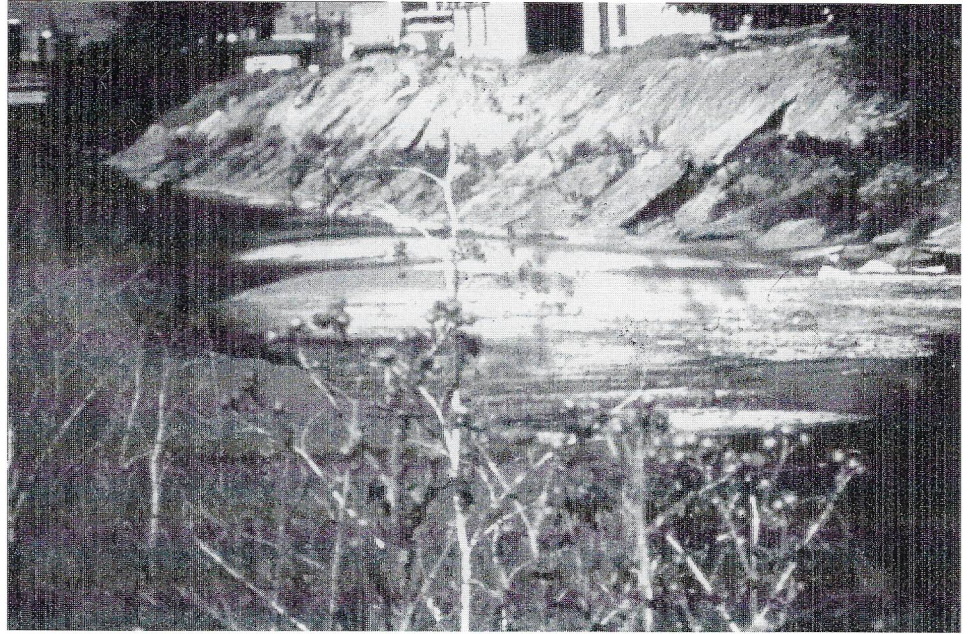
It was after that tour the committee came to an agreement that it should treat the project not with a River-as-a-whole approach, but rather, select specific areas of improvement and work from that premise.

Following a total of four and a quarter hours of formal meeting, a tour of the River, and two weeks' time, the committee had established its working plan. Four specific project areas along the River had been chosen and development responsibility had been assigned to two committee members for each segment. There were the south, the south-central, the north-central, and the north segments. Each group had been allotted \$200,000, except for the longer north, or Globeville, segment which would receive \$250,000.

That is how the rejuvenation of the Platte began. It is a project that flew in the face of bureaucracy with its time-honored tradition of stalling. It is a story of people who have the ability to recruit volunteer groups and individuals, establish design and planting programs, and pursue a common goal. It is a project that continues to show what can be accomplished by dedicated citizens who have the desire to roll up their own sleeves and go to work.

Once a disgrace to the Queen City of the Plains, now the confluence of Cherry Creek and the Platte River, rich in the golden history of Colorado, is becoming a showplace for the future of the Platte River Valley development.

For several years Confluence Park, dedicated on Earth Day 1980, has been a center of activity. Concerts brought the public to its amphitheater to enjoy summer nights filled with music. Aquatic activities have brought kayak racing in waters that



*Before*



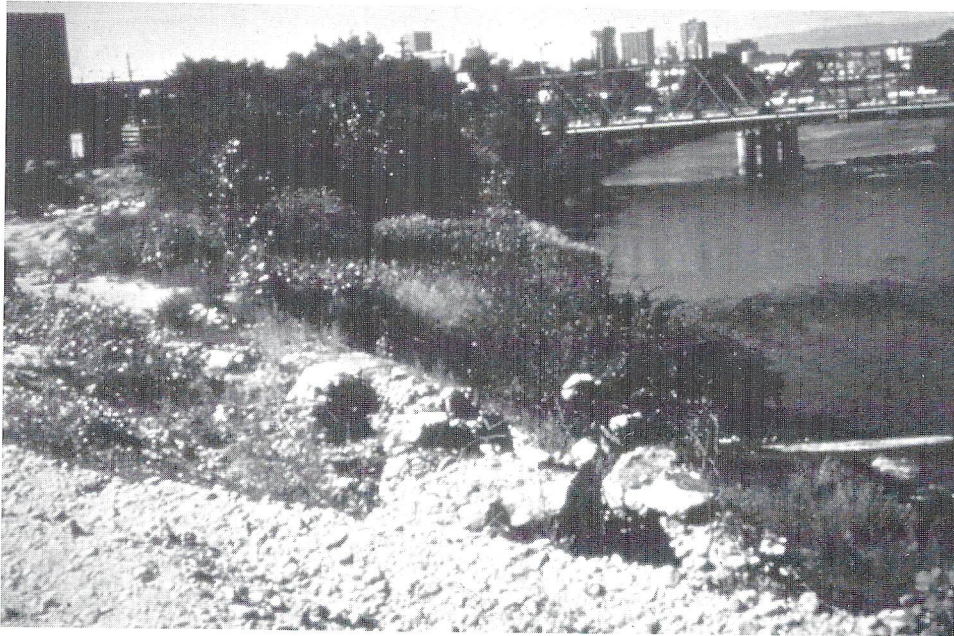
*After*

include a man-made boat chute. Farther upstream, the squeal of happy rafters reverberates among the Greenway-planted trees that line the River. The rebirth of the Trolley along a refurbished waterway has become the hors d'oeuvre of many a tourist's introduction to Denver.

▲ Large sections of Riverbank formerly covered with concrete and rubble have been replaced with scores of cottonwood trees and native grasses.

*continued on page 10*





*Before*



*After*

▲ Landfill dumpsites and various public works storage yards that formerly "adorned" several sections of the River are now home to a variety of actively-used parksites.

#### *FORGOTTEN NILE... from page 9*

An outgrowth of reclaiming the Platte has been development of miles of bicycle and walking trails within the City along both the South Platte and Cherry Creek.

In 1982, Jeff Shoemaker, Joe's son, officially joined the efforts of the Greenway Foundation when he be-

came its Executive Director and only employee. His contemporary concepts and connections have added greatly to the Greenway Foundation's efforts.

In 1991, the Greenway Foundation began work on its long-standing goal to bring recreational boating to the waters of Downtown Cherry Creek. In the summer of 1996, that goal will become a reality. An aggressive capital campaign has resulted in contributor commitments of \$1.5 million. Construction of Phase 1 of a suitable waterway on Cherry Creek from Larimer to Delgany Street was completed at the end of December, 1995.

In May of 1996, beautiful downtown Denver can be seen from a new perspective. Its historic landmarks will come alive as knowledgeable guides narrate the turns in the path this small mining town followed to become today's vibrant metropolis. Specially designed punts, reminiscent of the famous gondolas of Venice, will gently glide down scenic Cherry Creek. What a unique and peaceful way to experience the sights and history of Denver!

These minimal water displacement, flat-bottom boats require as little as a ten inch depth of water. The same boat builders in Cambridge, England, who use wood for the English version, have built the Greenway Foundation's five punts of fiberglass, a lighter material.

Nattily-clad boatpeople, each wielding a long pole to push off the Creek's bed, will propel the little crafts along Cherry Creek. The Greenway Foundation is working cooperatively with Denver Public Schools and Auraria Higher Education Center to secure enthusiastic young operators. The ones chosen for this new adventure will be people-oriented, have a flair



for the dramatic, and a feeling for Denver's rich history.

A new excitement has burst into the Platte Valley corridor where trains once brought those who would develop the West. Gone are most of the rails. In their place, a state-of-the-art amusement park rises from the cin- ders. Elitch Gardens brought its 105-year history from North Denver to the banks of the Platte. Here it began a second century and a new era when it opened the 1995 season.

The crack of the bat echoes throughout the glistening 55,000-seat Coors baseball stadium. This burgeoning area is in the sights of twentieth century developers of other athletic venues. In every season, the cheers of sports fans will roar like thunder along the South Platte Valley. And that's just for starters, in the place we call LoDo.

"Punt the Creek" will be joined by another water-related, major attraction in the Valley when the \$67 million Colorado's Ocean Journey Aquarium debuts along the River on Water Street in the fall of 1998. The enlarged Confluence Park continues to make its mark on the spot where gold glittered in the 1800s and led the Gregorys and the Russells to begin their search for wealth.

The glistening nuggets of today sit on those same banks of a flowing Denver's valley of the past and into the future will be the Forgotten Nile of North America-no longer forgotten, no longer the butt of jokes, instead a lively salute to a contemporary City of Denver whose citizens were imbued with a vision.

*Ed. note: Evie Shuster is a long-time supporter and contributor to the Greenway Foundation.*

► The concept of recreational boating on the South Platte River was considered laughable in the 1970s. Two decades later, Denver is host to a variety of white water boatchutes, including the largest and most popular at Confluence Park, Denver's birthplace. ►



Before



After



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Joe Shoemaker**  
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Director

## Your Support Makes the Difference!

### Annual Membership

\$30.00 for you or a friend. Included in the membership is a Membership Card entitling you to:

- All copies of the newsletter printed in the year you are a member.
- All new members will receive a copy of our book *Returning the Platte to the People*.

### Commemorating Member

For \$100.00, have a contribution made towards the Greenway Tree Fund in the name of a friend or loved one. (Also includes all privileges of an Annual Member).

### Corporate Member

\$250.00 includes a limited edition print by well known artist William Condit entitled *Seasons Along the Platte*. All prints are signed and numbered by the artist. (Also includes all privileges of an Annual Member).

*Newsletter designed by Red Pepper Design • 290-9411*



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