



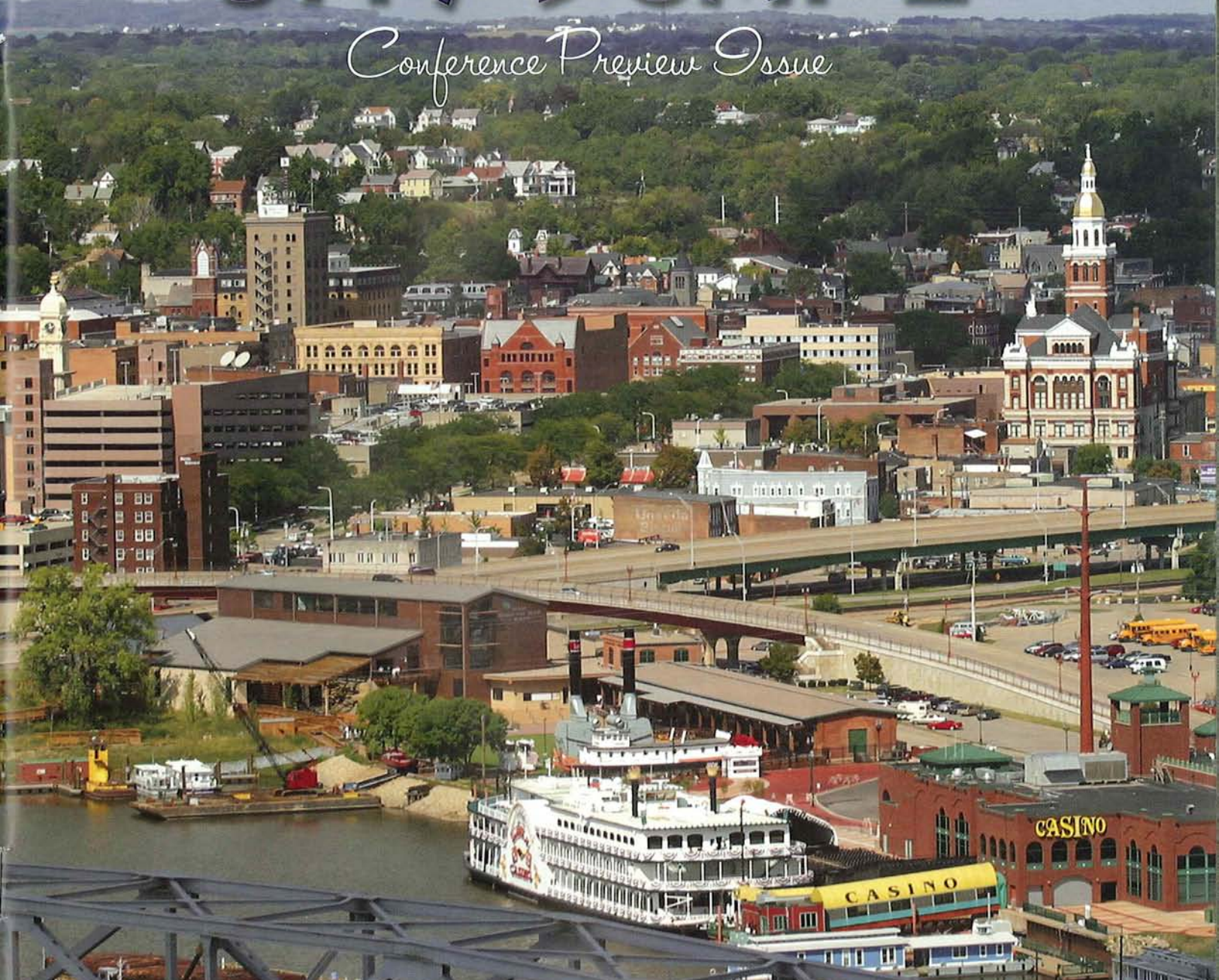
VISIONS FOR LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN IOWA

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Dubuque's riverfront port writes a new chapter in its long history

The Mississippi River and the city of Dubuque have been development partners since the city was first settled in 1788, when Julien Dubuque was granted the rights by the Meskwaki Indians to mine the land for lead. What started out with French-Indian fur trading, later became a center for heavy industry and now has become a major tourist destination for the state of Iowa. All of these transitions were derived on approximately 90 acres of land, known as the Port of Dubuque.

by Betsy Knoblock, Communications Coordinator

History and Industry

The Port's proximity to the river made it a natural partner with growing industry in the late 19th century. The area had become a junction for river transportation, as well as the developing rail and road systems. The Port was home to boat builders, lumber transporters and an ice harvesting industry.

One specific area of the Port earned its name from the ice harvesting industry and still holds the name today. The "Ice Harbor" was an area of protected water used during the winter months to supply ice to the local area. Large chunks of ice were cut out from the harbor and delivered to homes and businesses becoming the earliest form of refrigeration.

Another major industry in the late 1800's was brewing. The Dubuque Star Brewery produced Dubuque Star Beer starting 1898. Although its name changed several times and there were several closings due to economic conditions and prohibition, the brewery was a mainstay in the Port for more than a century.

In 1943, the Julien Dubuque Bridge was completed, connecting Iowa and Wisconsin. This initiated a major transition for the Port, as traffic was now being channeled over the area instead of through it. In addition, the Port was an easy target for flooding due to its elevation, which prompted the construction of a flood protection wall to protect the riverfront. The wall was completed in 1973, which not only changed the look of the area, but also prompted the closing of many of the Port's industries. The boat builders and brewery closed; later business closings included a petroleum storage facility, a brick-making facility and a bulk asphalt terminal.

By the late 1980's, the Port had become a wasteland of abandoned buildings and increasing ground pollution. The area remained dormant for the next two decades; this once-vital area of the community quickly declined into an eyesore. Pollution also became a problem since the Port's industries

functioned long before environmental regulations were implemented. The abandoned buildings contained foundry residuals, concrete rubble and industrial debris. The area became a "brownfield," which is land previously used for industrial purposes, or certain commercial uses, that is contaminated by low concentrations of hazardous waste or pollution. The Port had become an environmental concern; in order for the land to be reused, the area would need to be cleaned up.



Contaminated and dilapidated buildings filled the Port of Dubuque through the 1980's

The start of a new chapter

When the state legalized riverboat gambling in 1990, the Ice Harbor became home to the "Casino Belle" which was later replaced by the Diamond Joe Casino. With the gaming industry drawing in people from a large radius, the area started to attract tourists and the businesses that support the tourism industry. The city of Dubuque began to recognize that the Port of Dubuque could have a new chapter built into its history and started the process of creating "America's River Project: Port of Dubuque" in the late 1990's.

After receiving a grant to clean up the brownfield area, the city prepared the land to become home to hotels, a convention center, residential projects and retail space. The city's vision had an estimated price tag of \$188 million in order to complete construction the North Port. This became known as Phase I of the project. The project received a boost in 2002 when the state awarded a \$40 million Vision Iowa grant and the America's River Project was well on its way to becoming a reality.



America's River Project: Port of Dubuque

One of the unique attractions to the new Port is the National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium. The museum is entirely dedicated to the wildlife and history of the Mississippi River. It provides visitors with hands-on exhibits and live animal aquariums with turtles, otters and fish.

Other completed structures in America's River Project include the Grand Harbor Resort (hotel and waterpark), the Grand River Center (conference center) and the Mississippi Riverwalk (riverbank walkway).

The ripple effect

As the Port of Dubuque was getting a new face, the rest of the city took notice of the trend and started to take advantage of the renewed energy within the city and market for tourism. This ripple effect led to redevelopment on Main Street and other areas of the city, which is seeing renovation and construction tailored specifically toward entertainment and dining. As a result, property values have increased and renovation of historic buildings has become big business.

The impact of Dubuque's recent growth can especially be seen in the area of employment. In 1983, unemployment reached a high of 14 percent, with around 37,600 residents employed. In 2006, the rate was down to just 3.8 percent, with a workforce of nearly 52,900. Since January of 2003, over 2,900 new jobs were created and Dubuque County has been credited with 10 percent of the state's new jobs in the private sector.

Dubuque's new chapter, continued on page 26



Above: The National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium.

Below: The Grand River Center during Dubuque's Annual America's River Festival.

