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COMMUNITY LOVE, ECONOMIC POTENTIAL MARK THE RIVERS A PRIORITY FOR MAYORAL CANDIDATE

Henry to Launch Pioneering Initiative to Celebrate Our Rivers

Fort Wayne, Indiana – Standing on the banks of the St. Joseph River in Johnny Appleseed Park, Mayoral candidate Tom Henry today announced his initiative to Celebrate Our Rivers. The project will encompass the first assessment of the community and economic potential of Fort Wayne’s rivers and riverfronts in the city’s history. It will be launched within the first 100 days of the Henry administration taking office.

“We love our rivers,” observed Henry. “They are Fort Wayne’s most recognizable symbol and hold enormous economic promise. We talk about them, point to them as untapped assets and dream endlessly about what they might be. Well let’s get busy and make those dreams come true. The initiative to Celebrate Our Rivers is my commitment to help bring our rivers to life.”

The initiative will be led by community volunteers working in collaboration with city staff and other specialists as needed. The representative members of the group are to be named within the first few months of the new mayoral term.

Celebrate Our Rivers will employ broad-based public input sessions and information-gathering techniques accompanied by supporting objective analysis. The study team’s charge will be threefold: 1) Examine the opportunities the rivers and riverfront areas represent; 2) propose steps to maximize these natural features for community and economic enhancement purposes; and 3) act as ambassadors to help engage the public in determining future direction.

The city of Fort Wayne is transected by the St. Joseph, St. Marys and Maumee rivers creating over 40 miles of shoreline within the city and almost 15 miles of riverfront in the downtown area. Throughout its history the city has relied upon the rivers for transportation and commerce, battled with them during floods and continually depended upon them for its water and sanitation. The rivers’ regional economic lifeline role was eclipsed long ago, but their recreational, natural resource, hospitality and tourism value have never been exploited fully.

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– Henry 2 –

“In the new economy, a city’s vitality is inextricably linked to the livability it offers,” noted Henry. “Nurturing the jobs and attracting the talent that will keep Fort Wayne competitive requires a quality of life that is equally competitive with infrastructure and incentives. Our rivers can be a centerpiece of that program. It is time we made a concerted effort to capitalize upon our community’s singular natural feature.”

Celebrate Our Rivers is envisioned as a catalyst for a long-term endeavor to optimize Fort Wayne’s three rivers. It assumes an inclusive approach that will address issues such as environmental concerns, flood management and financial considerations. Private sector funding partners will be sought as the cornerstone of any proposal.

A strategy and implementation timeline are anticipated outcomes of the process that embraces possibilities large and small and may include:

- Encouraging more river activities such as the recently reinstated Three Rivers Festival Canoe & Kayak Races;
- Improving and building more boat launches to supplement the four existing sites;
- Promoting boat tours to give more public access to the beauty and pleasure of the rivers;
- Exploring private residential and commercial development along the river's edge; and
- Investigating the interconnection of the Rivergreenway with all community trails.

“For much too long, we’ve turned our backs on the one landmark that both defines us and unifies us, the one attribute we as residents would love to enjoy,” added Henry. “Our rivers were the city’s first front door. They can once again become a gateway to opportunity. All it takes is setting our minds and hearts to it. I’m ready.”

The initiative to Celebrate Our Rivers will complement and be integrated with the city’s recent downtown, North River and comprehensive land use and development planning efforts.

Tom Henry is a Democratic candidate for Mayor of Fort Wayne. He is a successful business owner, a five-term Fort Wayne City Councilman and a nonprofit leader with deep roots in the community.

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