

The Benches of the Riverwalk

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

In all phases of the history of Baraboo, the Baraboo River has been significant. It not only gave the city its name, but also named the Baraboo Range which surrounds a large section of the stream. Also using the river's name is the hard and dense Baraboo Quartzite of the bluffs.

Starting with the French name Barbeau in the 18th Century, the Anglicized name Baraboo is proudly used today elsewhere in the world in countless ways, as enumerated in previous articles.

Today we write of the increasingly important use of the Baraboo Riverwalk. Stretching from West Baraboo to its Eastern terminal at Manchester Street, there are only two breaks in its continuity. Between Oschner Park and Mary Rountree Evans Park is a short stretch of sidewalk on Second Avenue.

A larger break occurs where a regular sidewalk gets one past the busy Walnut intersection with Water Street, and onto the CWM part of the Riverwalk. This joins the newest Riverwalk extension, from the CWM parking area to the full length of Effinger Drive and on to the Manchester Bridge.

The area covered by the Riverwalk is the most dramatic stretch on the 100 mile length of the usually lazy Baraboo River, for the river falls a total of 40 feet in its passage through Baraboo. The rapids and the fast flow of the water add interest to the many parks lining the river.

The Riverwalk is a joint venture between the DNR, the City, and the Kiwanis Club over the past 15 years. A small Kiwanis Park with Gazebo lies near the Broadway Bridge. Between the Evans Park and the Statz Park, land had to be purchased from over a dozen landowners, increasing the demand on the Kiwanis Club—they flipped a lot of pancakes just to help pay for the purchases of that land!

Kiwanis' participation was the result of considerable soul-searching by the club in 1994. Club funds then were being doled out to other groups for their particular projects, and thus Kiwanis had little to show for its efforts. After weeks of sometimes spirited discussion, the club tackled what has become a major local attraction, both to visitors and local citizens.

Essentially level in its nearly three miles through the city, the walk is readily available to the handicapped by auto. One can park directly next to the walk in the Ochsner, Evans, and CWM areas. Particularly convenient but less known is the parking lot for Statz Park, just south of the Donahue Terrace (Donahue Terrace was another Kiwanis project). All existing trails are hard surface.

Because of the natural beauty and tranquility of virtually the full length of the Riverwalk, many persons have memorialized a family member or event or deceased person with benches, some 34 in all. Respectfully spaced, and of modest planking at first, those earlier benches are to be replaced with the familiar and more recent light brown benches, tamper-proof and more comfortable. One person, John Langer, has two benches honoring him,

Mike Hardy, Baraboo's Parks and Recreation Director, has made available a complete listing of the 34 bench donors, saving your aging scribe from struggling the full distance of the Riverwalk to list, and perhaps misspell, the names of the donors.

The cost of a bench and its installation was not inconsequential, but the donors have added a new dimension to our city and our enjoyment of the River. So far the walk, including interruptions, is about 2.7 miles long.

There is not room to list other benched areas in town, but the Courthouse alone has a dozen or more, as do other parks, the cemetery, and many downtown businesses. Attached is a list of benches currently dedicated on the Riverwalk.

RIVERWALK BENCH DONORS

COURTESY OF MIKE HARDY, PARKS AND RECREATION

EIGHTH AVENUE TO SECOND AVENUE. (OCHSNER PARK, about .6 mile)

Jerome and Karen Mercer

Roland Ziegler

Bob Smelcer

Ralph and Faye Weiland

Gary "Herbie" Peterson

George Leslie Furse

Karen Mercer

Wilford, Hattie, and John Norman

Bob and Helen Dewel Anniversary

Roger and Vivian Howard

Patricia Gonzagowski

Ryan Dargel

Glacier Valley Garden Club

Hank and Irene Bosgaff

James and Marie Redlin

SECOND AVENUE TO STATZ PARK,. 4 mile

Oscar and Evelyn Fillhouer

John Patrick Fillhouer

Ronald LaMasney

Roland Ziegler

John Langer

Dean and Polly O'Brien

Patricia "Patty" A Boehlke

Kim Kalepp and Family

Jean Ruth Steen

BROADWAY_STATZ_KIWANIS PARK AREA, .3 mile

Richard "Bug" Simniok

Victor W. Anderson Sr.

John M. Langer

William "Bill" Hagedorn

Doug Hill, Pete Premo, and Jane Franzen

Marc M. Goff

James John Beckius Sr.

KIWANIS PARK TO CWM. Sidewalk, no Benches, .4 mile

FROM CWM ENTRANCE to EFFINGER DRIVE .5 mile

I Bench, CWM style, Jack Wright

EFFINGER DRIVE TO MANCHESTER BRIDGE, 5 mile

Harry and Grace Haslanger

Tom and Vicki Fleming

Herman and Marie Doering



A section of the Riverwalk, showing the gazebo in the Kiwanis Park Area. The walk passes under the Broadway Bridge, and on past Statz Park to Mary Rountree Evans Park. There are many benches.