

A trail and a river, linked

June 08 | 2022



Photo 1: Covington Mayor Joe Meyer accepts the new way-finding sign from Frances Mennone, a member of the Ohio River Way board, and Brewster Rhoads, its chairman.

Photo 2: One of the Voyageur canoes carried Covington's city flag along part of the 250-mile journey. (Photo from ORSANCO/Annette Shumard)

Photo 3: Ohio River Challenge paddlers and local officials cut the ribbon on Covington's riverfront.

Photo 4: City Commissioner Michelle Williams salutes the new look of Riverfront Commons and Covington Plaza.

Paddlers on 250-mile trek down the Ohio

stop to help dedicate Covington Plaza access point

COVINGTON, Ky. – The opening of the \$6.5 million Covington Plaza along the Ohio River in 2021 represented not only a dramatic physical transformation of a previously raggedy riverbank but also a new era of public access.

On Saturday, two 30-foot-long Voyageur canoes paddled by 18 modern-day adventurers pulled to the water's edge to formally acknowledge and "bless" the City's new philosophy by cutting a ribbon and dropping off a sign.

Their focus?

A tiny concrete ramp, located just under the Suspension Bridge.

The ceremony celebrated that ramp for what it does -- provide a place for paddlers to drop canoes and kayaks into the water. But it also called attention to what it represents – a link between the 11-mile Riverfront Commons hiking and biking trail and the region's most important geographic feature.

"The dream that so many people had for so many years is finally coming true," Covington Mayor Joe Meyer said during the ceremony. "The goal of City fathers has for years been to reconnect our city to the river. Floodwalls are delightful. But they bring 'bad' in that they wall us off from the river in a negative way."

The paddlers – called "voyageurs" in tribute to the hardy souls who paddled similar boats during the fur trading days of years past – stopped in Covington on their 250-mile Ohio River Challenge trip from Portsmouth, Ohio, to Louisville.

Members of the Ohio River Way Coalition, they invited Covington to join the marketing and advocacy coalition as a way to promote recreation, attract tourism, and stimulate economic development along the river.

"Where else in America can you paddle, fish, water ski, hike, bike, and camp while touring Underground Railroad and Native American sites, historic river towns, 19th century architecture, picturesque Main Streets, farmers markets and dozens of breweries, wineries, and distilleries?" asked Brewster Rhoads, chairman of the Ohio River Way's board.

On Saturday – which was National Trails Day – the group gave Covington a customized 24-inch by 30-inch metal wayfinding sign designating the canoe ramp as mile marker 471 along the river. The City plans to mount the sign where it won't be ripped away by future floods.

The Ohio River Way group's trip started May 31 in Portsmouth and is expected to end Thursday with a ceremony in Louisville. One of the boats flew the Covington city flag along part of its journey.

More images

A 3½-minute video from ORSANCO – the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission – about the trip and the Covington ribbon-cutting ceremony can be viewed on Facebook at Ohio River Way Challenge. Photos can be found on Ohio River Way's Facebook page.

Covington Plaza – the so-called "crown jewel" of the six-city Riverfront Commons plan first proposed by the regional organization Southbank Partners some 20 years ago – was dedicated in summer 2021. City leaders said it represented a new era in riverfront development and a monumental shift in the public's access, as explained at Reconnecting to the river.

On Saturday, Covington Commissioner Michelle Williams pointed out the concrete hiking and biking paths, the 1,350-seat amphitheater, the canoe launch ramp, the overlooks, and other features of the plaza.

“This did not look like this when I arrived (on Commission), I promise you,” she said.

More about Ohio River Way can be found at www.ohioriverway.org, where you can also find how to access a digital guide to the Ohio River.

###

