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## **Mayor Coleman Celebrates Restoration of Raspberry Island, Milestones in National Great River Park**

*Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, Chestnut Plaza on Upper Landing, Raspberry Island help Saint Paul reclaim beauty of Mississippi River*

SAINT PAUL – Standing in the middle of what had been a parking lot and, previously, a Naval training center, Mayor Chris Coleman welcomed officials, residents, and partners on Wednesday to Saint Paul’s newly restored city park, Raspberry Island. Featuring a red limestone walking path, lower island terrace with limestone seat walls, river access steps, an illuminated circular Aspen grove, and river-view and island-view seating areas, Coleman called the restored 2.2-acre park a showcase for downtown residents and visitors.

“In the shadows of downtown, below the bluffs of the Mississippi River, Saint Paul has a new park that reconnects the city to this great river,” Mayor Coleman said. “Here, in the middle of the river, downtown residents, workers, and visitors will have a wonderful park to watch river traffic, enjoy our city’s natural beauty, and have an intimate setting for gatherings. The Mississippi River is the lifeblood of Saint Paul, and the restoration of this island provides a new setting in Minnesota’s capital to enjoy the river that helped build this city and state.”

The island that sits beneath the Wabasha Street Bridge was named in the 1880s because of the raspberry bushes that grew on the island. It was home to Minnesota’s first athletic institution, the Minnesota Boat Club, which remains today. In 1948, it was renamed Navy Island when it became a Naval training center and changed back to Raspberry Island in 1995.

In 2002, a private investment by the Schubert Club to build a new band stand jump started the renovations. Shoreline erosion had jeopardized the island, so money was sought from the state to protect the shoreline and convert the island from a parking lot to a city park. Construction began on the \$5 million project in spring 2007.

In addition to shoreline revetment, the new amenities on the island include:

- special river-view and island-view serpentine seating areas;
- a new red limestone walking path lighted for nighttime use;
- new public bathroom facilities at the Minnesota Boat Club; and
- native plantings, including trees, shrubs, wildflowers, perennials, ferns, and ornamental grasses.

The new city park next door to Harriet Island is expected to serve downtown office workers and residents and be used for small events, weddings and informal recreational activities.

Completion of the restorations on Raspberry Island comes at the same time the city and its partners celebrated new milestones in other parks along the Mississippi River that are key components to the creation of the National Great River Park in Saint Paul. Up river from Raspberry Island on the north bank of the Mississippi River, the barge and boat landing at Chestnut Plaza on the Upper Landing in downtown was recently completed, featuring fountains, walkways and a public plaza.

And down river just below Dayton's Bluff on the eastern edge of downtown Saint Paul, a key piece of property was added to the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary with the help of the Trust for Public Land. Through a community-led effort, the sanctuary has transformed from a former rail yard and industrial area into an urban natural area with wetlands, bird sanctuaries, and nationally historic and cultural resources.

Launched in 2006, the National Great River Park is a 17-mile corridor that will transform Saint Paul's unique Mississippi River parks into a connected system that provides access to the river, promotes stewardship for Minnesota's most significant natural resource, and fuels neighborhood and community development. The National Great River Park encompasses 3,500 acres of public parks, trails, and open space adjacent to Saint Paul's neighborhoods and commercial areas. It is an important part of the National Park Service's Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.