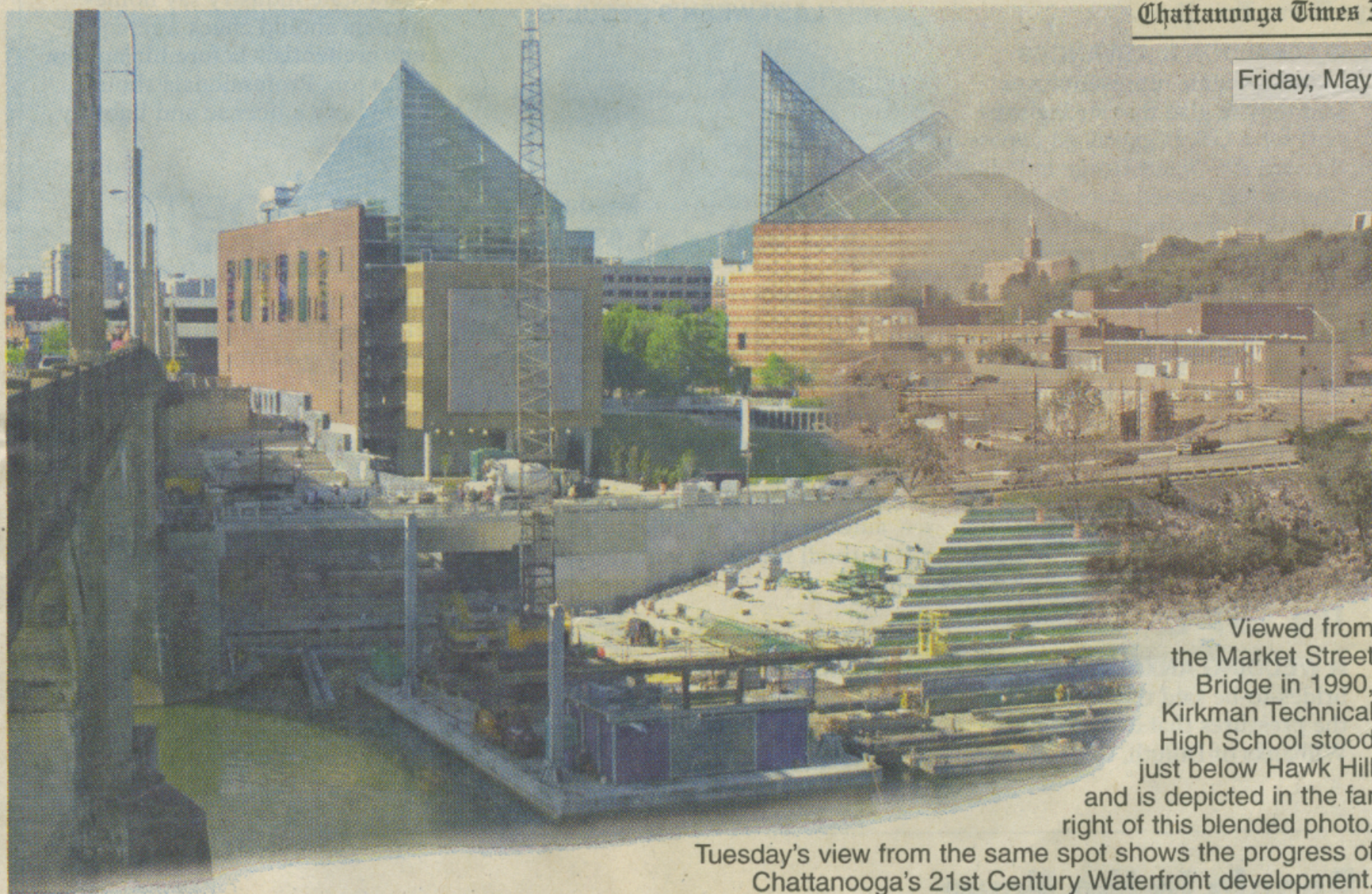


Friday, May 13, 2005



Viewed from the Market Street Bridge in 1990, Kirkman Technical High School stood just below Hawk Hill and is depicted in the far right of this blended photo.

Tuesday's view from the same spot shows the progress of Chattanooga's 21st Century Waterfront development.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BECK TOWERY/ORIGINAL PHOTOS BY JOHN RAWLSTON

A grand finale

Waterfront expansion, renovation come out for public use

BY M. TREVOR HIGGINS
STAFF WRITER

Chattanooga will commemorate its new look with a coming-out party Saturday.

The \$120 million 21st Century Waterfront gala celebrates the renovation and expansion of the Hunter Museum of American Art, the Tennessee Aquarium and the Creative Discovery Museum. It also allows citizens to revel in new public spaces: The Passage, the Chattanooga Pier, the Holmberg Pedestrian Bridge and a new public sculpture garden.

The \$450,000 celebration is set to begin Friday with the opening of The Passage, a tribute to American Indian culture at Ross's Landing, where the Trail of Tears began.

Saturday's festivities include morning tai chi on the city's newest greenspace, afternoon

acrobatics on the Market Street Bridge and waterfront fireworks at 10:25 p.m. to light the river renaissance.

But city leaders hope the festivities celebrate the future, too, and they believe the excitement will last well beyond the weekend when all the orange barrels come down.

"If nothing else ever happened, our citizens would be satisfied," former Mayor Bob Corker said. "But the fact is lots more is going to happen."

EARLY REWARDS

Already, attendance is up at the aquarium, the Hunter and area hotels. There is increased interest in living downtown, and developers have responded with the addition and proposed addition of hundreds of new homes in the area. Two hotels are planned

for the North Shore.

"It was all about building a city," Mr. Corker said. "Certainly we wanted more Chattanoogaans to enjoy it, for it to be more animated, for millions of dollars in development (to occur)."

"I think it's one of those things we'll look back upon at some point and be able to measure in tangible ways," he said.

Bob Doak, president of the Chattanooga Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, said he is projecting the booking of 150,000 hotel room nights this year, up from 58,525 booked in 2003.

"We've had a great community that's been visited by millions of people, but it just got a lot better," he said.

Visitors Bureau workers already are using the water-

front renovations to change the way they sell Chattanooga, he said.

Over the next several weeks Mr. Doak's group is hosting 30 meeting planners and 20 travel writers to show off the city's new look.

Improvements to the Hunter Museum of American Art also are paying early dividends in increased interest. Spokeswoman Ellen Hayes said there is "no comparison" between crowd size before and after the renovation.

"In the old days I could walk around the galleries and not see anybody," she said. "You can't do that anymore."

The Hunter has a goal of attracting 120,000 visitors this year, triple the previous average of 40,000 annual visitors,

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Mrs. Hayes said.

Cindy Todd, the Tennessee Aquarium's director of marketing, said visitation there also is up. The grand opening weekend drew 40 percent more people compared to the same weekend last year, she said. Aquarium officials expect to draw more than 1 million visitors this year, up from 856,000 last year, she said.

City leaders expect The Passage to broaden Chattanooga's draw, as well.

Functionally, The Passage provides a way for pedestrians to go from downtown to the river without crossing Riverfront Parkway.

Emotionally and artistically, it is the return of the Cherokee people to Ross's Landing.

As the birthplace of Chattanooga and the first departure site of the Trail of Tears, Ross's Landing is protected under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. When redevelopment plans called for altering of the site, the city was obligated to contact the Cherokee people, said Dr. Richard Allen, a policy analyst with the Cherokee Nation.

"What we were doing was going to impact a cultural and historical resource," said Ann Coulter, former president of the RiverCity Co.

CULTURAL APPRECIATION

Representatives of the RiverCity Co., the Cherokee Nation, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians and the National Park Service met in March 2003. The park service idea was to incorporate statues and stockades, Dr. Allen said.

"We politely thanked the park service but rejected their idea. (Ross's Landing) wasn't theirs to interpret," he said.

Likewise, Ross's Landing wasn't just about Chief John Ross having a business there or just about the Cherokee removal. The Cherokee culture is a living culture, Dr. Allen said.

"In order for Chattanooga to understand its history, it would have to go back into the pre-contact era and bring it forward," he said.

Ms. Coulter went to Oklahoma and North Carolina to meet with Cherokee representatives and artists. After money was set aside to create public art, the plan for the Passage became clear. The artwork in the Passage is the only public display of Southeastern Native American art, Ms. Coulter said.

Dr. Allen said he thinks the art represents a historic Cherokee presence here and a symbolic Cherokee return.

"It's not a reversal of the Trail of Tears, but it does acknowl-

edge that we were there," he said. "I think people will know the things sacred to us. The mountains, the river, the landscape. All of that belonged to us. It's a sacred place."



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN McRAE LOFTIN

Dancers practice on the new Chattanooga Pier for their performance Saturday. Choreographer Stephan Koplowitz created the piece for the grand finale celebration.

ANOTHER BEGINNING

To celebrate the renewed appreciation of Ross's Landing's Cherokee culture, Friday's dedication will include Cherokee games, crafts, a fire lighting ceremony and the tale of the Little Water Spider narrated by actor Wes Studi and Gayle Ross.

The grand finale celebration on Saturday will feature a performance on the Chattanooga Pier by 50 local dancers. The show, choreographed by Stephan Koplowitz, also will feature a video highlighting Chattanooga bridges.

Project Bandaloop, a group that combines dance with rap-pelling, will perform while suspended from the Market Street Bridge to music performed by Chattanooga Dan Landrum. The Chattanooga Symphony and Opera will be performing as well, and the ribbon-cutting ceremony will include both fireworks and a laser light show.

But while this celebration will mark the end of the most recent part of Chattanooga's river revival, some changes are far from finished. The National Park Service currently is developing the Moccasin Bend National Archeological District, a 750-acre piece of land on the river that eventually will become part of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park.

"Our citizens will think of ways to use the waterfront that they haven't imagined at this point," Mr. Corker said. "It's going to be a fascinating thing to watch."

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SATURDAY SCHEDULE

- 2 p.m. Project Bandaloop performance
- 2:15 p.m. Music by Red Bank High School Concert Band
- 2:30 p.m. Sailboats in river
- 2:45 p.m. Music by Choo Choo Kids
- 3:45 p.m. Music by Chattanooga Boys Choir
- 4:30 p.m. Music by Porter & Stout
- 5:30 p.m. Music by Citico String Band
- 6 p.m. Hot-air balloons lift off from Coolidge Park
- 6:30 p.m. Music by Hammeron
- 7 p.m. Powered boats in water
- 7:30 p.m. Music by Letty & Georgia
- 8:30 p.m. Southern Saxophone Quartet plays musical logo; remarks by dignitaries
- 9 p.m. Stephan Koplowitz choreographed dance performance
- 9:30 p.m. Chattanooga Symphony & Opera performs on barge stage
- 10 p.m. Project Bandaloop performance