

Outdoor Adventure Center on Detroit's riverfront promises aquarium, waterfalls

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A look at the new Department of Natural Resources' Outdoor Adventure Center on Friday in Detroit.

Globe Building speaks of Detroit history

Once in danger

of demolition, the roughly 41,000-square-foot structure is famous for several reasons. It's a link with Detroit's 19th-Century shipbuilding industry. Its steel-frame skeleton was innovative for its day. And it was here that a young Henry Ford honed his machinist's skills before going on to tinker with the horseless carriage.

It took major surgery to turn the structure into the Outdoor Adventure Center. The old Detroit Dry Dock Engine Works has not so much been renovated as it has shed its skin to become something entirely new, rebuilt from the ground up.

Globe Building Outdoor Adventure Center

The state Department of Natural Resources' new Outdoor Adventure Center in Detroit is at Atwater and Orleans on the East Riverfront. It is scheduled to open to the public in early 2015. The attractions include:

- A kayak simulator
- An indoor waterfall
- An aquarium with native species of fish

When Gov. Rick [Snyder signed the grand bargain legislation Friday](#) morning, the ceremony gave Detroiters a sneak peek at the Michigan Department of Natural [Resources'](#)

[new Outdoor Adventure Center](#) on the east riverfront where the signing ceremony was held.

Carved out of a late 19th-Century industrial building variously known as the Detroit Dry Dock Engine Works and Globe Trading building, among other names, the remade structure at Atwater and Orleans is a \$16-million hybrid of some older brick walls and new structural elements, the exterior is a mix of both old and new. It is steps from the William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor along the Detroit RiverWalk.

DNR's director of the center, Linda Walter, said the just-completed building won't open to the public until January or February, when DNR's elaborate exhibits will be installed. Until then, the center is hosting a few [events](#)

like the bill-signing ceremony on Friday and a tour for the Rivertown Detroit Association last Thursday evening.

For decades, the derelict structure has stood undeveloped, despite numerous attempts. It was in line to be residential units several years ago, but the Great Recession and real estate bust killed that idea. It was finally remade in a public-private deal involving the Roxbury Group development team, the construction firm Walbridge, the DNR, and the Detroit Economic Growth Corp. Hobbs & Black [architects](#)

did the redesign.

Once fully opened to the public, the new DNR center promises to turn a huge eyesore liability into an anchor of redevelopment efforts.

"This is going to be the cornerstone for Rivertown along with a couple of others," said Chip Rohde, president of the Rivertown Detroit Association. "We are on our way back."

The exhibits planned by DNR promise to bring a jolt of state-of-the-art family fun to the riverfront. The center will feature a kayak simulator, an archery range, a simulated eagle's nest big enough for an adult, an indoor waterfall, a fresh-water aquarium stocked with native species of fish, and much more.

The construction of the exhibits begins Monday with an "Up North" exhibit. Already installed is an actual DNR airplane once used for aerial surveys and is now hanging from the ceiling.

"There's a million cool things to do," Walter said. "This will not be a walk-around-and-look. It'll be a go-do."

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