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Posted April 19, 2006

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Old train trestle gets new life as fishing pier

Eyesore transformed into eye candy

By **Andy Behrendt**
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An 1880s-era trestle that once carried trains across the Fox River will be returning to life again soon — this time as a public pier.

Thanks to \$200,000 from a river-damage settlement with Georgia-Pacific Corp. and a durable design that withstood a significant fire two years ago, the structure extending over the river from Porlier and Adams streets on Green Bay's east side is expected to open by the end of May as a fishing pier and observation point.

The Porlier Pier is born from an idea older than the Fox River Trail, which begins nearby, and it's long awaited by those such



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Work is nearly finished on the fishing pier and observation point over the Fox River from Porlier and Adams streets on Green Bay's east side. Photos by H. Marc Larson/Press-Gazette

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as John Corpus who were involved from the beginning.

"It kind of ties some activities for that trail, at the head, to the downtown," said Corpus, a member of the Leadership Green Bay team that first considered the possibilities in 1999. "I think you'll see people from the hospitals go down there, sit on there and have lunch on that area."

Also ready to serve local fishing enthusiasts this summer, it's an east-side counterpart to the city's other recreational fruit of the Georgia-Pacific settlement — Leicht Memorial Park, which will also come online this year as a waterfront festival grounds on the west side of the Fox River.

"It's going to be a quiet place — a reflective place, a place to fish, a place for kids," Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt said of the pier. "And it's funny because on the other side is the festival grounds — it's going to be thousands of people, very active."

The Porlier Pier, enclosed by wooden railings already completed, for now is fenced off while crews finish work on the land leading to it. The \$200,000 sum also included significant structural analysis and engineering that people won't see, said Bill Landvatter, city parks chief.

The trestle has been unused since the 1990s. Similar to the nearby train bridge extending westward from Allouez, it connected to one of the city's most notable structures — a swing bridge at the center that rotated to let ships pass.

The eastern trestle, already eyed for the pier, made news in September 2003 when it was set ablaze in an apparent arson case. But it remained structurally sound, and reinforcements added to the pier's support structure for the project weren't specifically a result of the fire, Landvatter said.

"If it can withstand that freight train and the fire, it certainly is going to hold people for many, many years," he said.

Jogging on the nearby trail Tuesday morning, John Lefebvre of Green Bay liked the looks of the project.

"I go past here a lot. It's a nice improvement," said Lefebvre, an avid runner and bicyclist, though not a fisherman. Still, he liked the prospects as a lookout point, since, along the trail, "I see people going to the water where they can."

After the city secured the settlement funding, Leadership Green Bay — an outgrowth of the Green Bay Area Chamber of Commerce — didn't have to do much work financially, Corpus said. But he said those involved from the

Grading is in progress on the land leading up to the Porlier Pier. With lighting and asphalt still to be added, the \$200,000 pier project should be complete by the end of May. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is expected.

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onset are looking to cap the project by providing signs, a parking lot or fish beds.

The rest of the train bridge may also see activity again someday, Landvatter said. Long-range plans call for a trail connecting to the west side along the span if the city might be able to operate the center swing bridge.

For now, the pier will do.

"It basically turned what we considered to be an eyesore — and I think many did, especially after the fire — into a very usable feature for the public, which is going to be terrific," Landvatter said.

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




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