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Ribbon-cutting held for new Brownsville wharf

By Christine Haines, Herald-Standard
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BROWNSVILLE - Saturday's rain shortened the speeches, but it didn't dampen the spirits at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Brownsville Wharf Riverside Park.

An estimated 200 people were on the wharf itself for the ceremony, while police estimate that about 600 people came and went throughout the day at the wharf and street festival set up on Bank and Water streets.

The showers held off through most of the speeches, though the rain did begin as U.S. Rep. Frank Mascara (D-Charleroi) took the podium. Umbrellas were quickly raised and the ceremony continued without a hitch.

"I grew up in Belle Vernon, and I spent a lot of time on this river," Mascara said.

The wharf was one of the first projects Mascara became involved in when he was first elected to congress. He said his assistant, Lou Lignelli, never let him forget about the Brownsville project.

"For the first year, I thought this was the only project on our books," Mascara said.

Nearly \$300,000 in federal funds was used for the project. The state Department of Conservation of Natural Resources contributed an additional \$200,000 in grants for the construction. State Rep. Bill DeWeese (D-Waynesburg) presented borough officials with a check for \$125,000

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Saturday.

"We're all trying to infuse new life and new dollars into this region," DeWeese said.

Fayette County Redevelopment Authority Executive Director Ray Polaski said the funds will be used for the next stage of the wharf development.

"The wall will be stucco. We will paint a permanent sign on the wall so people know we're here," Polaski said.

The funds will also be used for paving a parking lot to be used by people launching boats from the wharf and to install floating docks for recreational boaters.

"This is only a step, this is only a phase for the revitalization of this community," Polaski said.

Vince Vicites, chairman of the Fayette County Commissioners, noted that the Redevelopment Authority has committed its community development block grant funds to the wharf project for the past three years.

"I really feel Brownsville is on the upswing," Vicites said.

State Sen. Richard Kasunic (D-Dunbar) said the project is the third wharf to be located on the site. The first was built of logs in 1845 at a cost of \$963.54. The second was built of stone by the Works Progress Administration in 1934-35. When the Maxwell Lock and Dam was built in 1965 and the Charleroi Lock and Dam in 1967, the level of the river was raised in Brownsville, putting the stone wharf under four feet of water.

"We need to preserve our past and remember our past because it is going to be part of our future, also," Kasunic said.

Polaski noted that the wharf will serve not only as a stage for local entertainment, but also a stage for tourism in the region.

"We are looking forward to tour boats coming from Pittsburgh for people to visit the castle, visit the Flatiron Building and go to the restaurants in the community," Polaski said.

Mayor Norma Ryan thanked everyone for attending the opening and invited them to view the wharf at night sometime.

"There are solar lights that come on at night and it's really a beautiful place. It reminds you of a Mediterranean island," Ryan said.

Borough Council president Jack Lawver noted that it took the cooperation of numerous individuals and organizations to bring the project to fruition.

"There were a lot of consolidated efforts from many groups and many individuals to get us here," Lawver said.

"If you don't really care who gets the credit, you can accomplish anything," Mascara said.

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