

Points of View

FROM THE EDITOR



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

The Mighty River

Chain-link fencing, orange construction barriers and yellow tape still surround the new park in downtown Yonkers, adjacent to the train station. On Monday, however, a group of students, environmental professionals and media were allowed inside for chance to wade into the park's featured attraction.

The site used to be a parking lot known as Larkin Plaza. Along its perimeter is a hodgepodge of buildings, including the Riverfront Library, the Department of Motor Vehicles, the post office, and Philipse Manor Hall — a 17th century historic site owned by the State of New York. Within walking distance is an even more eclectic collection of

spots, including upscale restaurants and the county's busiest soup kitchen.

In the middle of this neighborhood of contradictions, students put on waders, picked up nets, and stepped into the Saw Mill River. With those nets they caught eels, blacknose dace and tessellated darters as newspaper photographers and a documentary film crew from Canada recorded the activity.

Present were representatives of Groundwork Hudson Valley, including three Dobbs Ferry residents — board of directors president Rob Baron, river program director Ann-Marie Mitroff, and development director Holly Malekian. Ground-

work helped develop the plan for the park.

For decades, that section of Yonkers had been defined by its problems, including crime and poverty. Today, it's the focus of significant improvement efforts by both for-profit developers catering to the middle class and upward, and by nonprofits such as Groundwork, which are helping lower income residents.

In the middle of this upswing is the Saw Mill River. For almost a century a tunnel contained the river as it passed under the parking lot and into the Hudson. Today, the river has been partially diverted from the tunnel and through the park.

Once complete, the park will be the centerpiece of downtown Yonkers.

In the Rivertowns, the Saw Mill flows without fanfare alongside a parkway and a railway. Unlike the Hudson, it's rare to see a painting of the Saw Mill by the many artists who populate this area. Instead, the river is too often used as a trash receptacle, as evidenced by the refuse removed during a regional cleanup of the river held last month.

So it's nice to see the Saw Mill receiving some overdue attention. Though it may never inspire art or literature or songs, the Saw Mill is a mighty river, though in a modest way.