

My Neighborhood: Hudson River is Bob Walters' backyard

Written by Michael Nelson For The Journal News
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Bob Walters loves the outdoors. As a kid, growing up in the Bronx, he explored the parks in the Inwood neighborhood of Manhattan and launched boats from an antique boathouse on the Harlem River. Later, he launched his own business, touting solar energy during the Jimmy Carter administration.

These days, it's not that surprising to find Walters, a diehard environmentalist and proponent of green living, once again down by the river.

The first executive director for Beczak Environmental Education Center, Walters also helped build the Hudson River sloop The Sojourner Truth; he wrote River Notes, a local newspaper column, for a decade, and worked as a tour guide on the Yonkers Water Taxi. He also founded the Science Barge and is now its executive director. The Science Barge is a unique urban farm — basically a floating greenhouse that produces tomatoes, melons, greens, and lettuce with zero net carbon emissions, zero pesticides and zero runoff. For more on the Science Barge, which opens April 13 at 2 p.m., or any of the programs hosted by Groundwork Hudson Valley, visit www.groundworkhv.org.

Here's what Bob Walters loves about living in Yonkers:

1. Neighborhood:

I consider my neighborhood to be Warburton Avenue. This is the westernmost street in our neighborhood and has amazing views of the Hudson River.

2. The neighbors:

My neighbors are a great ethnic mix of people from all over the world. They are mostly working class, with 9-to-5 jobs. It is the type of neighborhood where folks still say good morning when you meet them.

3. Why did you move here:

Fifteen years ago, I was lucky and found a beat-up house that I could afford. My backyard is the Hudson River. Every day is a gift. ... Sunrise reflected on the Palisades, tugboats up and down, amazing ice floes and the occasional American eagle roosting in one of the backyard trees. The mighty Hudson was the reason I moved.

4. Shopping:

I shop in downtown Yonkers. It is a great mix of stores. ShopRite on Prospect Street has reasonable prices and a great staff. Jerry Gallela, the store manager, is a community-focused person (25 Prospect St., 914-376-5429). Martins Department Store has everything you need, from a spool of thread to Wrangler jeans (C.H. Martin, 2 Palisade Ave., 914- 968-3922, www.chmartin.com). I must admit I make a foray over to Ridge Hill to Whole Foods and L.L. Bean (1 Ridge Hill Blvd., 914-378-8090; 888-490-3836).

5. Dining:

I go to Restaurant Row on Main Street. I go to Paxos for breakfast. Louie and Rita have been downtown for years and are wonderful Yonkers people (24 Main St., 914-233-5656). For lunch I love Giovanni's for Italian food. Bruno and his brother Benjamin have great food at affordable prices (25 Main St., 914-375-1429). The Pizza Place is also great. Ron and his staff have great pizza (92 Main St., 914-709-1050). X20 is my favorite. Peter Kelly runs a great restaurant with an amazing wait staff with undeniably the best food in the Hudson Valley. The view from his balcony at night makes you feel like you can reach out and touch the lights of New York City (71 Water Grant St., 914-965-1111, www.xaviars.com). The Dolphin next door is a wonderful place to sit and relax by the river. Great seafood and great people (1 Van Der Donck St., 914-751-8170).

6. Take a break:

I like to do what I call poke around. The Hudson River has so many interesting and beautiful spots. Some of my favorites are the Piermont Marsh in Piermont. You can rent a kayak or canoe at Paradise Boats and a few minutes later you are in a unique and beautiful nature setting (9 Paradise Ave., Piermont, 8745-359-0073, www.paradisecanoeandkayak.com). The lower Croton River is a magical place to paddle and Scenic Hudson's Foundry Cove Park in Cold Spring is a step back into Hudson Valley history (www.scenichudson.org).

7. Nightlife and arts:

I meet a lot of people from Brooklyn and Riverdale that come to Yonkers for the arts. I love the exhibits at Blue Door Gallery (13 Riverdale Ave., 914-375-5100, www.bluedoorgallery.org), and the new gallery at the Yonkers Riverfront Library. Students from Sarah Lawrence help run the exhibits (1 Larkin Plaza, 914-337-1500, www.ypl.org). Recently the Hudson River Museum had an exhibit by illustrator Jerry Pinkney that was wonderful (511 Warburton Ave., 914-963-4550, www.hrm.org). In the summer we have Jazz on the River, which is great. At our own Beczak Environmental Education Center we host Urban H2O, which produces great folk music concerts (35 Alexander St., 914-377-1900, www.beczak.org).

8. One thing people don't realize:

Untermeyer Park on North Broadway is a hidden gem. Behind the walls is a premier garden and park that is an amazing tranquil and beautiful space. This Persian garden is world class. When I take Yonkers students there, they say, "I lived in Yonkers all my life and never knew about this place." Their jaws drop at its beauty (945 N. Broadway, www.cityofyonkers.com).