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Unusual Chicago River Museum Welcomes 250,000th Guest

Located in 99-year-old Bridgehouse at Michigan Ave and Chicago Riverwalk

CHICAGO—One of Chicago’s most unusual museums, the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum located in a nearly-century old bridgehouse on the Michigan Avenue bridge, welcomed its 250,000th visitor July 27, 2019.

Friends of the Chicago River opened the museum in 2006 to provide new access and understanding of the dynamic relationship between Chicago and its river. The cultural anchor of the Chicago Riverwalk, the museum is on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Wacker Drive.
The 250th guest of the McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum was Deb Lawrence of suburban Chicago who visited with Linda Raney of Sioux Falls, South Dakota and Janet Harvey of St. Louis, Missouri.

“A quarter of a million people have visited, many, no doubt, attracted by its unique location in an historic bridgehouse,” said Friends’ executive director Margaret Frisbie. “But the museum also tells the fantastic story of how a once-neglected waterway once primarily thought of as part of the sewage system is now valued as a natural and recreational asset.

“The Chicago River system and its bridges are at the heart of Chicago’s past, present, and future. As the river has improved, so has the popularity of the museum,” she said.

Exhibits celebrate Chicago's river and world-famous movable bridges, and visitors learn why it is important to protect the river and how to participate in its renaissance.

The bridgehouse, designed by Edward H. Bennett in the Beaux-Arts style, opened on May 14, 1920 to cannon fire, marching bands, ship horns and parades. A bas relief sculpture on its façade memorializes the Battle of Fort Dearborn.

The exhibits on the first floor paint a picture of Chicago when Native Americans and early European residents shared the rich ecosystem with a huge variety of plants and wildlife which thrived in the convergence of river, lake, woodland, and prairie. It also features a gear room which provides visitors the only chance see the working mechanics of any of Chicago’s world famous movable bridges.

The second floor describes the way the Chicago River system transformed Chicago into one of the world’s busiest ports. The third level provides great views of the river while the fourth explains how the booming metropolis destroyed the river’s health, the river’s reversal, and what we did to address the harm. The top floor focuses on today’s healthy river, as well as offering spectacular panoramic city views.
The museum was included in Thrillist’s “Most Chicago Things To Do In Chicago” and has earned a 4 ½-star rating on Yelp.

The McCormick Bridgehouse & Chicago River Museum is open Thursday-Monday from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m., from May 12 through October 29. The museum is closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays. General admission is $6 for adults, children 6 to 12 and students with an ID, $5. Admission is free on Sundays. For more information, go to www.bridgehousemuseum.org.

About Friends of the Chicago River
Friends of the Chicago River is an award-winning nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve and protect the Chicago River for people, plants and animals. With over 10,000 members, volunteers, and online advocates, Friends works to make the river greener and more accessible, while building awareness of the benefits that a clean, healthy river can bring to the surrounding community. Friends of the Chicago River is working to make the Chicago River one of the world’s great metropolitan rivers. For more information please visit our website www.chicagoriver.org.