

Friends of the Chicago River



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2017 Chicago River Summit “Swimming the Distance” Aims to Make Urban Swimming a Reality

CHICAGO— On March 9, 2017, Friends of the Chicago River will lead water quality experts, policy advocates, and urban swimming champions in a dialogue about the feasibility of swimming in the Chicago River system. Building on enhanced water quality standards and increased recreation, the 11th Chicago River Summit’s theme *Swimming the Distance* poses the question “How Do We Get from Here to There?”

“For 37 years, we have been working to make the river clean, safe, and accessible,” said Margaret Frisbie, Friends’ executive director. “As a result, water quality has improved dramatically, sewage effluent is being disinfected, parks and boat houses are starting to line the river. Standards are now in place requiring river water to be clean enough for safe swimming, yet there is still no swimming. It is time to explore the reasons why—whether physical, biological, or a complex reflection of the cultural concerns associated with the river. We have a fundamental right to a healthy, vibrant, clean river that allows for recreation of all types, from fishing to kayaking and even swimming. It is our job to figure out how to make it all possible.”

The half day summit, sponsored by MillerCoors, includes presentations regarding open water swimming and public access in the Hudson River in New York City and the Willamette River in Portland, swimming’s current legal status, and water quality findings from Argonne National Laboratory’s tests in the Chicago River system over the past two years. Following the presentations, the Possibility Panel will explore what kinds of opportunities actually exist and inspire big ideas for the future. Speakers include

David Barra, director, New York Open Water; Jessica Dexter, staff attorney, Environmental Law & Policy Center; Willie Levenson, ring leader, Human Access Project; David St. Pierre, executive director, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago; and John Quail, director of watershed planning, Friends of the Chicago River. The panelists include Margaret Frisbie, executive director, Friends of the Chicago River; Josina Morita, commissioner, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago; Gavin Van Horn, director, cultures of conservation, Center for Humans and Nature; and Richard Wilson, city design director, Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture.

“High quality water is essential in every step of the brewing process at MillerCoors,” said Michael Nordman, community affairs manager, MillerCoors. “And at MillerCoors we have developed and implemented state-of-the-art water conservation techniques, which reduce runoff and waste to protect water as a vital natural resource for communities across the country. The Chicago River Summit is an ideal platform to promote our shared goals with Friends of the Chicago River in the city that we call home.”

The 2017 Chicago River Summit will be held from 12 noon- 4:30 p.m. at MillerCoors and includes lunch and a networking happy hour immediately following the program. Advanced registration is required and tickets are available for \$25. For more information and registration details, please visit <http://www.chicagoriver.org/get-involved/attend/2017-chicago-river-summit>

Founded in 1979, 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 6,000 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 communities across the watershed. Friends of the Chicago River is working to make the Chicago River one of the world’s greatest metropolitan rivers. For more information on Friends of the Chicago River, please visit our website: www.chicagoriver.org.