WATERFRONT PARK 2025 IMPACT REPORT

A Year of Connection, Growth, and National Recognition



Waterfront Park

Donor supported public park

WATERFRONT PARK 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

A Year of Resilience, Growth, and National Recognition

2025 was a year of highs and lows for Waterfront Park—a year marked by extraordinary achievements and unexpected challenges. From national recognition as the #1 Riverwalk in the country to the opening of PlayPort, our first step in a bold westward expansion, we celebrated milestones that will shape Louisville for generations. At the same time, historic floods tested our resilience, causing nearly $1 million in damages and reminding us why community support is essential. As an independent nonprofit stewarding 88.5 acres of Louisville's front lawn, we rely on private contributions to keep this space vibrant, welcoming, and free for all.

Who We Are

Waterfront Park, now more than 25 years old, has transformed Louisville's downtown waterfront from industrial blight into 88.5 acres of vibrant green space. The park stretches from the Community Boat House on the eastern edge to the Belle of Louisville and now includes PlayPort, our newest addition between 11th and 13th Streets on Rowan. We also manage the Big Four Bridge and its dynamic lighting program, ensuring these iconic spaces remain free and welcoming for all.

Together as a community, we've built a park that is more than a destination. It is a symbol of community pride and represents what is possible when we dream big. In 2025, that spirit was evident in every milestone we achieved.





IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS



Who Visits the Park?

- 2.5 million annual visits
- Local visitors come from all 7 counties in the region and all 26 Metro Council Districts
- Nearly ½ of all visitors are families with children
- Park visitors reflect greater overall diversity than the city's population, both in income levels and in racial and ethnic representation.
- 91% of visitors feel a sense of belonging in the park



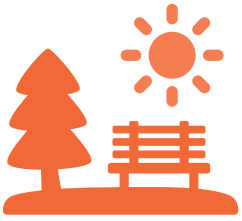
Health and Community Engagement

- More than 30 nonprofits utilize the park to fulfill their missions each year
- 200+ community events annually
- 5 miles of well-maintained walking paths along our river's edge contribute to the health and well-being of our community
- 958 volunteers with approximately 2,858 hours of volunteer time contributed to beautifying Waterfront Park in 2025



Regional Attraction

- #1 Riverwalk in the US
- Most visited destination in downtown Louisville
- 24% of park visitors come from outside the region
- 100,000 walk the Big Four Bridge each month of summer
- The Big Four Bridge's 1,472-LED lighting installation is active 365 days per year and accommodated 140 community-initiated lighting requests in 2025 to recognize civic and charitable causes



Environmental Impact of the Park

- 88.5 acres of park and green space
- 400+ tons of trash are removed annually by our maintenance team
- 265 dump trucks filled with flood debris removed from Waterfront Park in April 2025
- 1,500+ trees make up our tree canopy, with new trees planted each year to ensure its long term health and sustainability

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

PlayPort Opens – First Step in Westward Park Expansion

PlayPort, a 3.5-acre STEM-based playground built from repurposed industrial artifacts, opened in March 2025 as the first phase of a 22-acre westward park expansion. In its first nine months, it attracted more than 20,000 visits from 17,600 unique visitors, becoming a popular destination for families while delivering a major public investment in a historically underserved neighborhood. Located within a 20-minute walk of more than 10,000 residents, PlayPort expands access to learning, recreation, and community connection.



Overcoming Historic Floods

Waterfront Park endured two major floods in 2025, including the eighth-highest in recorded history, causing nearly $1 million in damages. With less than 24 hours' notice, hundreds of volunteers joined our staff to help tackle an enormous cleanup effort.

Waterfront Park was designed with flooding in mind: the TurfMutt Great Lawn plays a critical role in protecting our city and downstream neighbors by absorbing floodwaters. Thanks to this design, and an extraordinary community response, the park reopened for public enjoyment in record time. Behind the scenes, recovery efforts continued into early 2026.

WATERFRONT PARK NAMED BEST RIVERWALK IN THE NATION

We were honored to be named #1 Riverwalk in the United States by USA Today's 10Best. This recognition, nominated by travel editors and voted on by the public, reflects the pride our community takes in this iconic public space.



PROGRAMMING & EVENTS IMPACT

Events at Waterfront Park – Where Our Region Comes Together

With more than 200 events each year, Waterfront Park is one of Louisville's most actively programmed public parks, offering a wide range of experiences that make everyone feel at home. From yoga and charity walks to music festivals, cultural celebrations, and family movie nights under the stars, the park creates a sense of belonging that brings our entire region together.





Health, Wellness, and Economic Impact

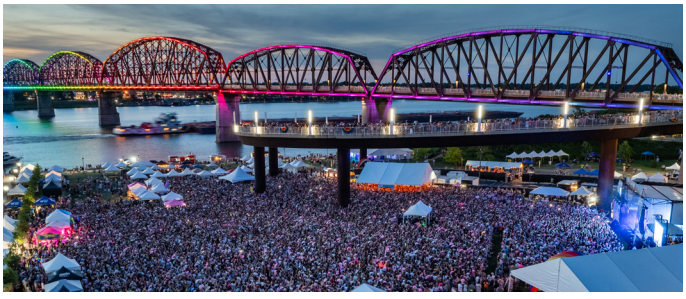
Events at Waterfront Park do more than entertain. They strengthen Louisville's health and wellness infrastructure and fuel our downtown economy. From charity walks and triathlons to outdoor fitness programs, the park promotes active lifestyles while drawing visitors who support local businesses, restaurants, and hotels.





Diverse Programming for All

Events at Waterfront Park span every interest: music festivals, flea markets, food truck rallies, triathlons, prayer vigils, educational summer camps, and more. This diversity makes the park a true reflection of Louisville's culture and community.





SIGNATURE EVENTS

Ford Waterfront Park Fourth of July

Louisville's largest Independence Day celebration brought 30,000+ people to our waterfront for fireworks, music, and community pride. This tradition thrives thanks to Ford's leadership and the support of dozens of partner organizations, making it a true community-wide effort that brings Louisville together.





WFPK Waterfront Wednesday

Our beloved concert series completed its 23rd season, welcoming an average of 10,000 guests per event and earning the title of Louisville's Best Destination for Free Entertainment.





New Family Events at PlayPort

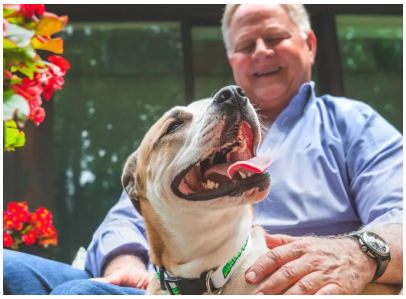
Two brand-new events introduced families to our newest STEM-based learning area, combining fun and education in an unforgettable experience.





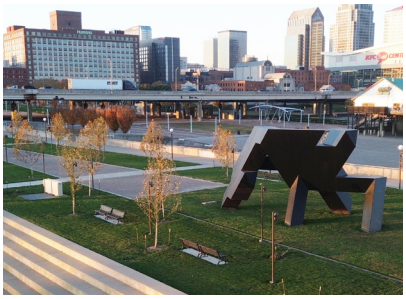
COMMUNITY IMPACT: PARTNERSHIPS, PROGRAMS, AND PROGRESS

Our achievements are made possible by partners who demonstrate commitment to a vibrant, accessible waterfront. In 2025, collaboration shaped every milestone, from national recognition to neighborhood revitalization. Each year, we work with hundreds of public and private organizations that support our mission through sponsorships, grants, in kind contributions, community events, and Big Four Bridge lightings. We are deeply grateful for this collective support and proud to highlight three partners whose impact in 2025 was especially meaningful.



TurfMutt Great Lawn in the National Spotlight

The TurfMutt Foundation helped keep our lawn healthy and welcoming for millions of visitors, ensuring families and pets enjoy a sustainable green space at the heart of the park. This partnership also elevated Waterfront Park nationally, with appearances on Lucky Dog and Mission Unstoppable with Miranda Cosgrove, showcasing our innovative programming and commitment to education.



Humana Foundation Revitalizes the Overlook

Thanks to the Humana Foundation, the Overlook received a major restoration in 2025. Originally built in 1998, the area is home to Tony Smith's iconic Gracehoper sculpture, which the Humana Foundation gifted to Kentucky Performing Arts. The Overlook now features more than 40 new trees, improved environmental health, and over an acre of new grass replacing the former crushed-granite surface. A new central plaza also enhances the space as a welcoming destination for community gatherings.



Ford Motor Company Drives Community Impact

Ford Motor Company's partnership reflects a shared commitment to vibrant, inclusive public spaces for all. Ford's support strengthened our green spaces and expanded opportunities for families to experience innovative play and learning. Ford's investment continues to be transformational for the park and the community.

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2026, Waterfront Park will advance the next phase of its westward expansion, engaging the community as plans move forward to transform 8.5 acres into new green space for wellness and connection. At the same time, the park will begin renewal planning for several beloved areas more than 25 years old, including the Original Children's Play Area, Festival Plaza and Water Feature, Harbor Inlet and docks, and the Community Boathouse. With a clear vision centered on health, learning, and togetherness, this work will preserve the park's beauty while building a future that reflects the best of Louisville.



WHY YOUR HELP MATTERS

Waterfront Park is one of Louisville's most beloved public spaces, welcoming approximately 2.5 million visitors each year and serving as the community's front lawn for gathering, celebration, recreation, learning, and connection. With parts of the park now more than 25 years old, critical areas need renovation and renewal, and as an independently operated park we rely on private support for nearly 75% of our annual operating budget. Our small team cares for 88.5 acres along the river—maintaining horticulture, trees, aging infrastructure, flood cleanup, grounds care, and free community programming—making donor support essential to keeping the park clean, welcoming, and vibrant year-round.

Your support ensures Waterfront Park remains beautiful and accessible for all—today and for generations to come.

JOIN US

Scan the QR Code to donate.

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