

CURATOR'S CORNER

By Emily Ruby, Curator

Three Rivers Improvement and Development Corporation (TRIAD)

In the late 1860s and 1870s, some of the best oarsmen in the country built their reputations on Pittsburgh's rivers. Eventually, the increased use of the rivers as commercial roadways and industrial dumping grounds made the waterways unattractive and even dangerous for sports and recreational use. Almost 100 years later, a movement emerged in Pittsburgh to revive appreciation of our rivers and riverfronts, and to develop and use them as well.

In the late 1960s, a group of city, county, and state officials, as well as local business leaders, formed the Three Rivers Improvement and Development Corporation (TRIAD) to bring attention to Pittsburgh's rivers. During the 10 years it existed, the volunteer-run organization encouraged development of the rivers and riverfronts through clean-up days, advocacy, and a river show known as The River Renaissance Weekend. The event, a precursor to the Three Rivers Regatta, featured boat races, sky divers, and water shows where both local water ski experts and performance clowns

entertained the crowds. The first river show in June 1968, touted as "the greatest show on earth," also featured fish tagged with anywhere from \$2 to \$500 prize tokens. In 1970, the show featured a rowing race pitting the Pittsburgh Steelers offense against its defense; surprisingly, the offense won, which proved to be a big hit with the crowds.

TRIAD hoped to extend the effects of the renaissance of the city to its waterways, and lobbied for clean-up of industrial waste sites along the rivers and on the islands. TRIAD's president served as an arbitrator between the city and the Zubik family in the city's attempt to remove what had been dubbed "Zubik's fleet" from the North Shore riverfront in 1970. The collection of barges and boats from Zubik Towing Company had been rusting in that location for many years and their removal helped to bolster the downtown riverfront transformation.

Herr's Island, now Washington's Landing, offered yet another opportunity for TRIAD to attempt to turn a wasted site into a community asset. It advocated for turning the former stockyard island into a mixed use park, perhaps with restaurants and other amenities.

In addition, TRIAD led the efforts to clean up and stop erosion on Nine Mile



Flag from TRIAD.

HHC Collections, gift of Robert Fisher, 2015.15.28. Photo by Gina DelGreco.



Zubik's fleet.

HHC Detre L&A, Allegheny Conference on Community Development.

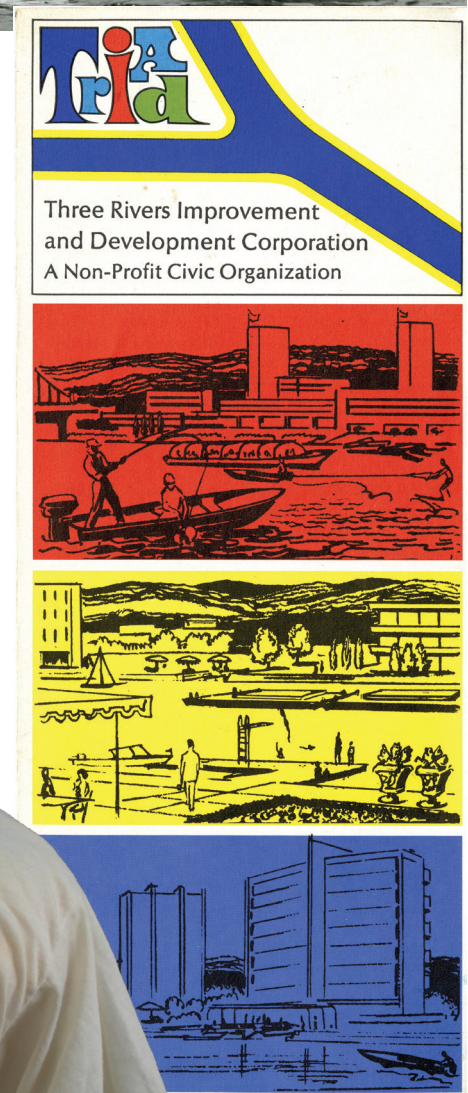


Island and helped pass a bill in the state legislature to protect the rest of the Allegheny Islands from industrial development. The group had less success in its attempt to open a museum dedicated to river history at the Point, but its recommendation for the site of the new convention center at 10th Street met with success.

In 1976, TRIAD put together an ambitious “Bicentennial Flotilla,” which visited 16 cities to promote its home state during the nation’s Bicentennial, but the flotilla’s costs eventually closed the non-profit. It filed for bankruptcy and closed in 1978. Although only operating for a short time, the influence of TRIAD’s efforts to clean and promote the use of the rivers can still be seen in the city. 🌀

Above:
Water skiing was a relatively new sport and local Pittsburgh performers were very involved in developing new techniques and wowing the crowds at TRIAD.

Right:
TRIAD brochure.



Pittsburgh’s Regatta grew out of the TRIAD river show. Depicted is Whitey the Clown and his water performance clown partner Edward “Buddy” Farrell, who began performing at the TRIAD festival and continued to perform for the Regatta.

Photo and brochure from HHC Detre L&A, Ronald “Whitey” Baldinger Papers and Photographs, 2015.0111. T-shirt from HHC Collections, gift of Ronald Baldinger, 2015.101.1. Photo by Liz Simpson.

