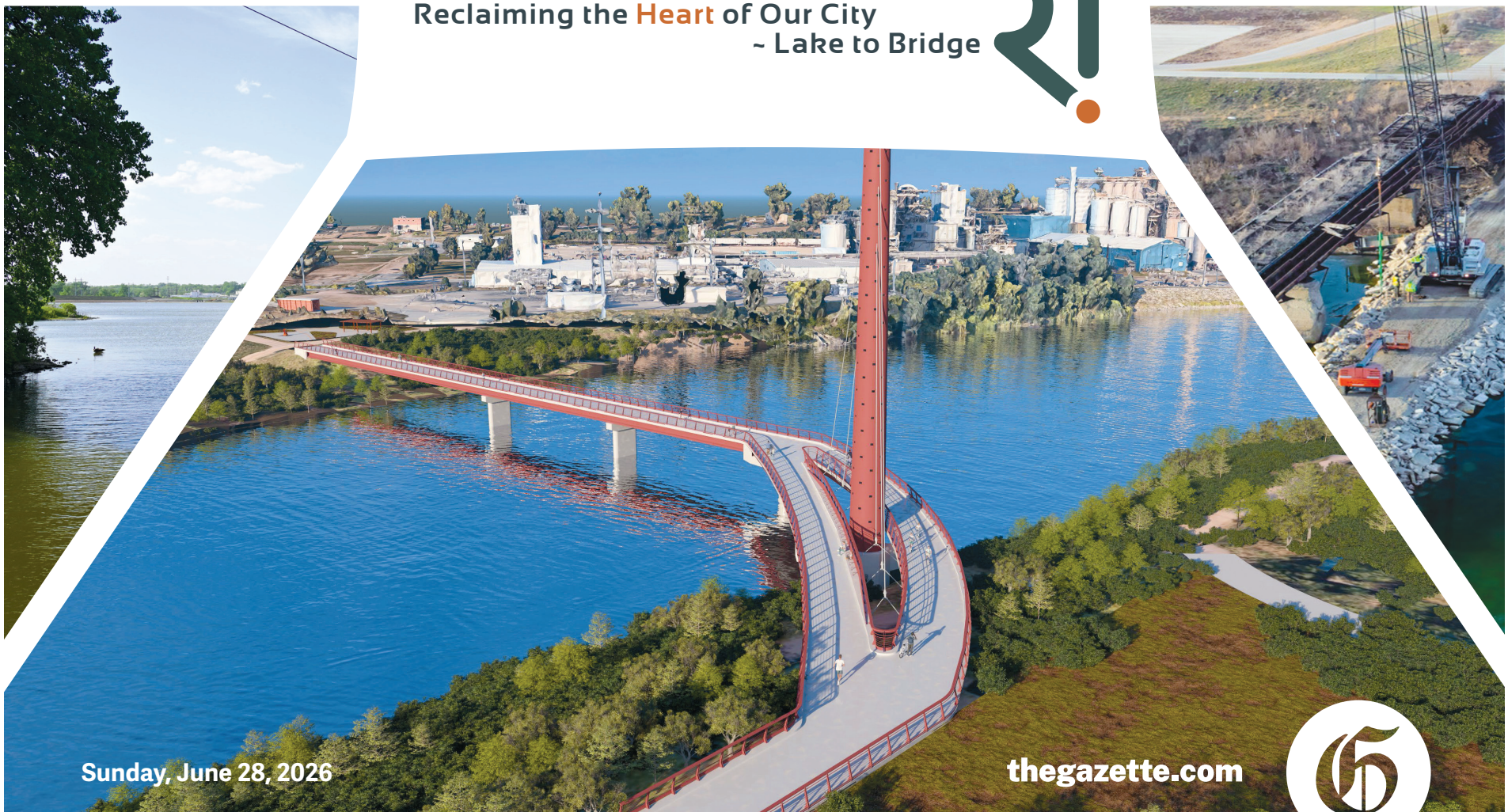




connect

Reclaiming the **Heart** of Our City
~ Lake to Bridge



Sunday, June 28, 2026

thegazette.com



Introduction

Ten years ago, two local, citizen-led grassroots organizations joined forces to create ConnectCR, a nonprofit with a vision to transform two eyesores in our community into assets for future generations to enjoy. For the past decade, ConnectCR has made countless presentations, raised money, hosted open houses and events, and attended many meetings to help guide the development and vision of ConnectCR.

And now, with the incredible support of our generous community and the City of Cedar Rapids, the ConnectCR project is close to becoming a reality.

This fall, the Alliant Energy LightLine™ will open, bringing new recreational opportunities for trail users. Families with children, walkers, runners and bikers will be able to cross the Cedar River with-

out any interference from vehicle traffic. They'll be able to stop, pause, even sit down in some places, and look out on the river, the landscape and our beautiful city.

Cedar Lake will also offer additional recreational opportunities. The new lakeside trail is already seeing an increase in walkers and runners. We anticipate that when additional recreation amenities are added this summer, even more people will come to experience this gorgeous nature oasis in the heart of our city.

As we approach the finish line for the Alliant Energy LightLine™ and a revitalized Cedar Lake, we'd like to take a moment to say, "thank you."

Thank you to all the donors who saw the vision and were willing to invest in this community bet-

terment project. A special thank you to our major donors, including The Hall-Perrine Foundation and the City of Cedar Rapids, who eagerly got behind this project early on and laid the groundwork for our success. That early backing and commitment led to more than 300 donations ranging from \$1 to \$1 million.

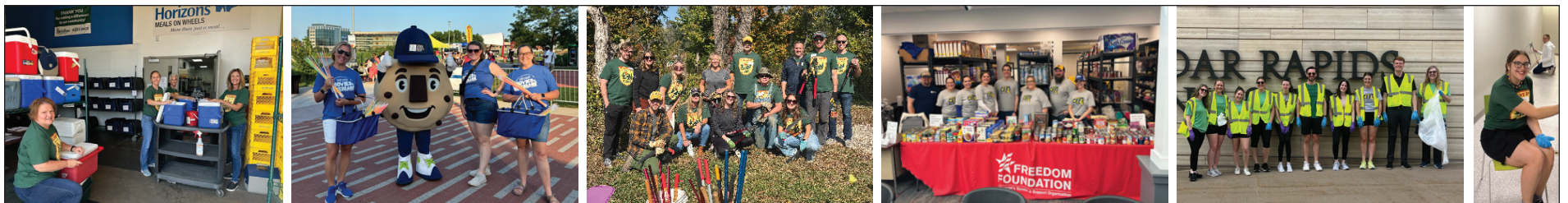
Also, thank you to all the volunteers who joined us in soliciting donations and raising more than \$8.3 million in private funds. And thank you to those who supported and cheered on this community betterment initiative. We appreciate you.

It's our hope that everyone will enjoy these stunning additions to our city for many generations to come. Get outside! Enjoy our city. We hope to see you lakeside or on the trails soon.

Mike McGrath
ConnectCR Board President

ConnectCR Board

Lee Clancey | Mike McGrath | Tom Peffer | Marcia Rogers | Steve Sovern | Derek Stepanek | Felicia Wyrick
City Council member Dale Todd, Ex Officio | Julie Kraft, Director of Organization Development | Jennifer Pratt, Liaison with the City of Cedar Rapids



A Community Partner You Can Bank On

As a local community bank, the word "community" makes all the difference. We believe the future of Cedar Rapids is strengthened through projects that bring people together. That's why we're proud to support ConnectCR and their continued efforts to create a stronger, more connected downtown Cedar Rapids.



Two grassroots groups in Cedar Rapids become one for positive change, community development

ConnectCR is the nonprofit organization overseeing the revitalization of Cedar Lake and the development of the Alliant Energy LightLine™ near Mount Trashmore. But how did this community organization come about?

It started with two grassroots groups in Cedar Rapids — two groups that were “really invested and passionate” about the community and making progress in the downtown area, said Felicia Wyrick, a ConnectCR board member. Separately, each group had spent years, resources and energy on their projects. What was going to really accelerate their plans? Becoming one.

As both groups were gearing up to begin fundraising for their individual projects, a community leader suggested that the Friends of Cedar Lake and the Southside Investment Board group

combine, “because then, it would simply be one community ask, and donors would not have to choose between the two projects,” said Steve Sovern, ConnectCR board treasurer. It wasn’t long after the idea was presented that a board was formed, and ConnectCR was born.

The City of Cedar Rapids contributed \$5 million and quickly established itself as a partner, forming the largest public-private partnership in the city’s history. That kind of support from any city or state is often unheard of for many grassroots groups.

“The city leaders saw the enthusiasm from supporters of both the lake and bridge, and they couldn’t ignore it,” Wyrick said.

ConnectCR’s capital campaign officially launched in the fall of 2018 to raise awareness and funds for building a

new pedestrian bridge and revitalizing Cedar Lake.

A few months later, the Hall-Perrine Foundation committed another \$5 million, “and we were off and running,” Sovern said. With substantial donations and recognized community contributors on the board, ConnectCR officially began engaging with an already excited community.

“So many people immediately saw the benefit of this project for the lake, the pedestrian bridge and the community as a whole,” said Julie Kraft, ConnectCR director of organizational development.

More donors signed on, including MidAmerican Energy and Alliant Energy. With Alliant owning Cedar Lake, any projects on the lake required the company’s permission. Alliant agreed to turn ownership over to the City of

Cedar Rapids for \$1, and “that’s when the real progress began,” Wyrick said. It was an incredible milestone for ConnectCR, and Alliant further supported the project by donating \$1 million.

To see the progress that’s been made, knowing the upcoming phases and having the continued enthusiasm from the community is “incredibly rewarding,” Sovern said. So many components of the lake, the bridge and its landings will reflect the city’s heritage and history while also setting the stage for new memories.

People will be able to walk out over the lake, use the LightLine or “bike down to the Sag to see the most beautiful sunsets on the Cedar Rapids skyline,” Wyrick said. For her, the most exciting part is “seeing all of the amenities that are included in our master plan come to life.”

Bridge concept history

The idea for what will soon be the Alliant Energy LightLine™ came during an October 2014 brainstorming meeting of the Southside Investment Board. The group, composed of neighborhood property owners, wanted ideas to bridge the connection between New Bohemia and Czech Village. The NewBo City Market was open, the flood control system was being built and the group was challenged to find “the next big thing.” They wanted to continue development in the area, improve residents’ quality of life and attract visitors.



Board member Steve Sovern, an avid cyclist and regular trail user, had ridden past the old CRANDIC Railroad bridge that spanned the river near Czech Village many times. During its early life, the bridge served as a walkway for workers on the west side, many of whom were of Czech heritage, to reach their jobs at the Sinclair Packing Company on the east side. Sovern saw the bridge, which had been extensively damaged by the flood, as a “Sleeping Giant” waiting to reconnect the two neighborhoods.

That simple brainstorming session and the community’s vision will soon become a beautiful pedestrian bridge offering safe passage for bikers and walkers to cross the river.

*For more than 25 years,
TrueNorth has proudly called
Cedar Rapids home.*

TRUENORTH

Since the beginning, TrueNorth committed to a legacy of community stewardship, investing in causes that make a positive impact and bring people together. Supporting ConnectCR reflects our belief that connection generates power, creating spaces that strengthen relationships and move our community forward.

truenorthcompanies.com/community-impact

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Timeline of Events

2013

A group of citizens interested in the preservation and revitalization of Cedar Lake forms "Friends of Cedar Lake."

November 2016

Friends of Cedar Lake completes Feasibility Study. Findings show "remarkably high market potential for recreational activities that could be associated with Cedar Lake."

June 2017

Cedar Rapids City Council passes resolution promising support of \$1 million/year for five years for the ConnectCR project, as well as authorization to acquire Cedar Lake and the CRANDIC/Rock Island Railroad Bridge for the project.

October 2017

The Hall-Perrine Foundation commits a \$5 million two-to-one matching grant to ConnectCR, provided the city can acquire Cedar Lake and the site of the Rock Island Railroad Bridge.

February 2017

Friends of Cedar Lake and Southside Investment Group merge to form "ConnectCR."

2014

A group of citizens interested in further developing New Bohemia forms "Southside Investment Group." The group is challenged to create the next "big thing" for NewBo and Czech Village. The idea of a non-vehicular pedestrian trail bridge that could serve as an iconic symbol for the city is discussed.

Fall 2017

ConnectCR conducts feasibility studies to assess interest in the project and fundraising capacity.

July 2018

ConnectCR Capital Campaign Steering Committee is formed.



April 2019

ConnectCR publicly announces the "Awakening Connections" capital campaign. The organization has already raised \$4.6 million and calls on all residents to pledge support for the community project with a donation, large or small. The capital campaign goal is \$7 million.

September 2018

ConnectCR Steering Committee quietly begins seeking donations and pledges.

February 2018

ConnectCR presents project idea to state legislators in hopes of securing state funding.

March 2020

City of Cedar Rapids hires WSP, a project management firm, to oversee design and development of ConnectCR.



June 2020

ConnectCR announces it has surpassed its private campaign goal of \$7 million. The project is still accepting private donations while also actively pursuing grant opportunities.



October 2021

Official groundbreaking at Cedar Lake with the Army Corps of Engineers, the City of Cedar Rapids and ConnectCR marks the start of construction on the lake's levee and improvements.

July 2021

City of Cedar Rapids officially approves the North Shore Levee and flood protection project. This project will provide flood protection for Cedar Lake and the nearby businesses on Shaver Road.

September 2019

City purchases old CRANDIC/Rock Island Railroad Bridge for \$1 from CRANDIC.

June 2019

City completes purchase of the north cell of Cedar Lake from Alliant Energy for \$1.

November 2021

ConnectCR, along with Alliant Energy and the City of Cedar Rapids, announces the new name of the pedestrian/trail bridge: Alliant Energy Light

August 2021

ConnectCR unveils new pedestrian bridge design with the "smokestack" now replaced by a tower and moved to the west bank of the river. Additional donations within the past year include a \$1 million anonymous donation, increasing the fundraising total to \$8.3 million.

August 2021

State of Iowa approves \$525,000 from the state's lake restoration program to help pay for Cedar Lake flood protection and revitalization.



2022

mural painted in downtown Cedar Rapids as a tribute to ConnectCR. The mural located near Avenue SE and the Fourth Street bridge is approximately halfway between Cedar Lake and the future Alliant Energy LightLine™



April 2023

New renderings for the Alliant Energy LightLine™ are released. The 165-foot tower will feature interior and exterior LED lighting whose colors can be coordinated with local events, celebrations and causes. Bridge users will be able to stop and take in the view of the city and river from the bridge's west side, near the base of Mount Trashmore.

November 2023

Demolition of the CRANDIC/Rock Island Railroad bridge begins.



November 2024

Cedar Rapids City Council formally approves plans and specs for the Alliant Energy LightLine™.



November 2025

Lakeside trail opens at Cedar Lake, as does the top of the levee trail on the west side of the lake. Sag Wagon announces it will host a "Lap the Lake" event in December.

*Still to Come:

Right now

Construction underway on the Shaver Road cul-de-sac and trail head parking near Cedar Lake's southeast side.

October 3, 2026

American Discovery Trail (ADT) 250 Relay comes to Cedar Rapids and overnights here.

Fall 2026

Alliant Energy LightLine™ opens!

August 2023

ConnectCR holds a special event at Mount Trashmore to share the intention to "Recycle the Bridge." Pieces of the soon-to-be demolished CRANDIC/Rock Island Railroad bridge will be saved and recycled in signage and landscaping on landings near the future Alliant Energy LightLine™.

March 2023

City of Cedar Rapids awarded \$3 million for the "LightLine Loop." While not part of the ConnectCR project, the LightLine Loop name is inspired by the pedestrian bridge and a trail loop including this project and the bridge. The LightLine Loop project will bring a new roundhouse and festival street located near Czech Village.

- Cedar Lake's master plan is updated, and among the changes, the floating boardwalk has been moved to the north end of the lake. This creates another "loop" around the lake for trail users. The boardwalk will be for walking only.

February 2025

ConnectCR amenities work begins at Cedar Lake. First up will be a new lakeside trail and jetty on the lake's southeast side.

October 2024

ConnectCR presents an update to the Cedar Rapids City Council and hosts an open house to share the latest and final design for Alliant Energy LightLine™.

October 2025

First beams are placed on the Alliant Energy LightLine™.



April 2025

Official groundbreaking for the Alliant Energy LightLine™



Fall 2026

Bidding opens for upstream sediment removal and wetland/shoreland restoration projects at Cedar Lake's South Cell. Note: this is not part of the ConnectCR project, but its proximity and positive impact on the future of Cedar Lake make it relevant to those interested in the lake. Project completion estimate: Fall 2027.

October 4, 2026

Send off for the ADT 250 Relay.

Summer 2026

Construction begins on Cedar Lake's recreational amenities — playground and challenge course, ADA-accessible kayak launch, fishing piers, restrooms, NW nature area and trail reconstruction (north and south trail sections). Project completion estimate: Winter 2026-27.

Connecting 150 years of Cedar Rapids history

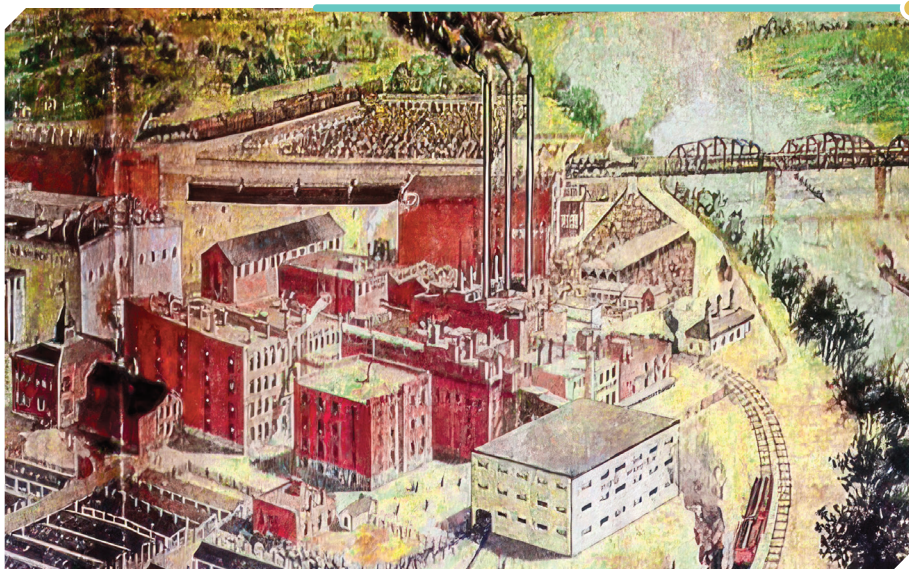
Over 150 years ago, a railroad bridge was constructed south of downtown Cedar Rapids. In addition to the railroad tracks, there eventually was a parallel pedestrian passage on the bridge, used by residents to walk to work at the Sinclair Packing House.

Historic flooding in 2008 took out a majority of the bridge structure, but that didn't stop one bicyclist, Steve Sovern, and his neighbors from seeing the derelict bridge as simply "sleeping in the river with lots of possibilities."

Sovern started referring to the bridge

as "The Sleeping Giant" back in late 2014. He says it was "the very kernel of the beginning" for what will eventually be The Alliant Energy LightLine™.

Through research, Sovern began to piece together more historical background about the original bridge, intending to incorporate it into the new bridge's design. During this process, Sovern learned about the bridge's builders, with Cedar Rapids residents Stephen L. Dows, John F. Ely and Charles E. Ives being credited with its original construction in the 1800s. It was Dows's coincidental connections that continued to surprise Sovern.



At the time, the bridge was an important component of the Burlington Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad. It was sold in 1903 to the Rock Island Railroad Line before eventually becoming property of Alliant Energy. That brought Sovern back to Stephen Dows, whose son, William G. Dows, started Iowa Electric Light & Power Company, now Alliant Energy. Alliant ultimately "sold" the bridge site to the City of Cedar Rapids for \$1 to clear the way for the LightLine's development.

To put it simply, "the bridge builder's son started the power company that

ultimately gave us the bridge," Sovern said. Furthermore, today's descendants of Stephen and William Dows are financial supporters of ConnectCR.

Sovern, ConnectCR and many others who have partnered with or supported the project are ensuring that history is reflected in the new bridge that connects both sides of the city.

"It's the convergence of industry, labor, agriculture and our Czech heritage. That history will be reflected in the design and with historical signs on nearby landings," Sovern said.

History of Cedar Lake

Cedar Lake, often called the slough in Cedar Rapids lore, has had decades of a bad rap — but that hasn't always been the case.

The marshy lake in the middle of town once played host to Native Americans who found its shores amenable for trapping.

Geologists thought the area was once part of a large lake that filled the Cedar Valley before it was drained by the deepening of hills south of the city.



In 1909, the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City Electric Light Co. (forerunner of Alliant Energy) discovered, while installing intake and discharge tunnels in the lake, that it was fed by springs scattered at different places on the bottom. On April 29, 1911, The Gazette reported: "The entire slough in the northern part of Cedar Rapids has been purchased by the Cedar Rapids & Iowa City Electric Railway & Light Co., and in time will be made into a beautiful lake."

Cedar Rapidians often blamed Alliant and other adjacent companies for polluting the lake. Ongoing Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) soil testing indicated most of the pollutants in the lake came from adjacent housing developments that were built in the 1940s and 1950s. Foundations were often treated with chlordane to prevent termite infestations, and that toxic chemical seeped into the groundwater and leached into the lake.

As a result, the Iowa DNR recommended restrictions on the number of fish consumed from Cedar Lake. That restriction was lifted in 2008. The lake, which has been monitored for decades, was removed from the impaired waters list in 2015.

After the 2008 flood destroyed Alliant's power plant beside the lake, the company began decommissioning the plant and demolishing the building. This opened the door for a change of ownership. After Alliant committed to clean up and rehabilitate its nearby coal ash deposits, the City of Cedar Rapids purchased Cedar Lake for \$1.

That city commitment accelerated the trajectory of the Cedar Lake Master Plan. The trail along the lake is open, with more amenities coming this summer, including improvements to Shaver Road and additional parking. But the one thing that will never change? The best views of sunsets on a beautiful lake in the heart of our city.

The Alliant Energy LightLine™

The Alliant Energy LightLine™ features a striking 164-foot LED-illuminated tower that will bring light and energy to an area of the city that was once left in darkness. The tower's LED lighting can be programmed to change colors for community events and causes.



At nighttime, the lighting on the bridge's rails will create a line of light or "LightLine" across the Cedar River. The bridge and tower lighting will serve as a new visual landmark for Cedar Rapids — symbolizing connection, renewal and progress.

At 563-feet long and 18-feet wide, the bridge provides generous space for bicyclists, runners, walkers and families to safely

share the trail as they cross the river.

The Alliant Energy LightLine™ features a split-deck design on the west side of the river, thoughtfully created to accommodate both movement and pause. One side will serve bicyclists and walkers passing through, while the other invites visitors to stop, take in the views, and experience the beauty of the Cedar River and downtown skyline.

Signage

Donor signage will match the weathered steel look of the Alliant Energy LightLine™.



Informational signs will feature historical snippets about our region's connections to agriculture, industry, the railroad, river, trails and the people who settled here. Visitors might recognize the walkway brackets of the old railroad bridge being used for the signs. These brackets were the primary supports for the workers' walkway added to the railroad bridge, which local Stumtowners used to cross the Cedar River and go to work at the Sinclair packing house.



Building connections since 1946

Whether a bridge connects one neighborhood to another — or one professional goal to the next — every stride in the journey matters.

At UFG, we build bridges that connect business owners to insurance solutions, helping companies keep the wheels turning when the road gets rough.

As we celebrate 80 years in Cedar Rapids, UFG and the UFG Foundation are proud to support the community-enhancing efforts of ConnectCR.

Learn more about us at ufginsurance.com.

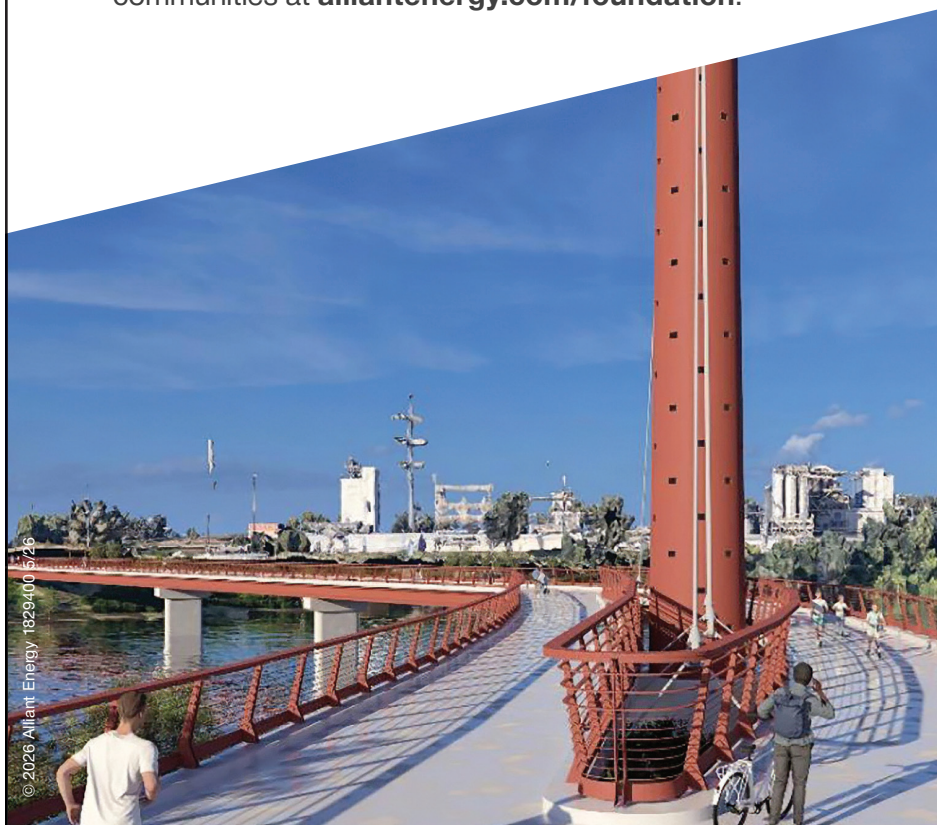




We build for Cedar Rapids' future, and for you.

We're proud to partner with ConnectCR on the Alliant Energy LightLine, a new pathway for connection, recreation and community.

Learn more about how we help build stronger communities at alliantenergy.com/foundation.



American Discovery Trail 250

A driving force of the ConnectCR project is enhancing connections within the area's trails, making them more attractive to trail users from across the country.

Two coast-to-coast trails pass through Cedar Rapids: The American Discovery Trail and the Great American Rail-Trail.

To commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary, the American Discovery Trail is hosting ADT 250, a coast-to-coast relay across the United States. The relay begins July 1 in California, where trail users will set out with three batons, each carrying a copy of the Declaration of Independence. Participants will pass the batons from one trail user to the next until they reach Washington, D.C., around Thanksgiving.



The American Discovery Trail runs from California to Delaware and is featured on a mural by Greene Square in Cedar Rapids.

The ADT 250 relay arrives in Cedar Rapids on Saturday, Oct. 3, and plans are underway to welcome relay participants at Cedar Lake. The batons will overnight in Cedar Rapids, and a special event will send them off from Mount Trashmore on Sunday, Oct. 4. Other community events are currently being planned for this weekend to celebrate ADT 250, our nation's 250th, and our connection to national trails.

Local participation in this relay event is strongly encouraged! Participants can walk, run, bike or even rollerblade on the trail as part of this relay. Locals will also be carrying and passing the batons. More details on the ADT 250 relay and a free sign-up sheet are available at discoverytrail.org.