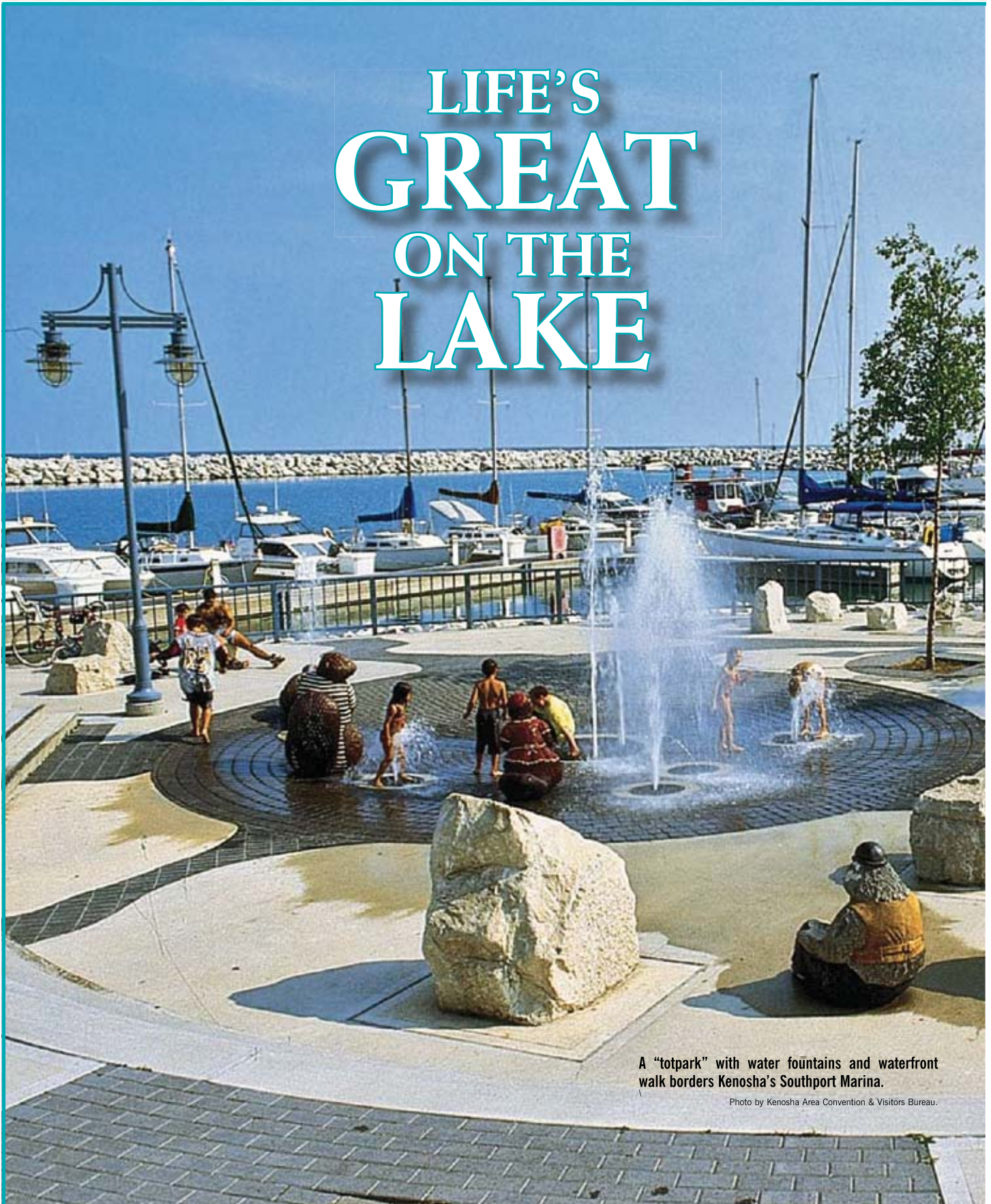


LIFE'S GREAT ON THE LAKE



A "totpark" with water fountains and waterfront walk borders Kenosha's Southport Marina.

Photo by Kenosha Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

When Lee Iacocca closed down the Chrysler manufacturing plant on Lake Michigan's western shore in 1988, he made a lot of Kenosha, WI, residents mad. Nearly two decades later, it turns out he may have done the city — and the region's boaters — some good.

After closing up shop and tearing down the buildings on the 42-acre site, Chrysler did some remedial environmental cleanup and gave the land to Kenosha.

The property sat vacant for several years until the city, led by Mayor John Antaramian, came up with a redevelopment model for lakefront living with recreational boating at its core. And that's made a lot of Kenosha residents very happy today.

"Our condominium now sits right where I used to see them building cars when we started boating here in Kenosha 30 years ago," reports David Cioni, a long-time resident of Gurney, IL, and now full-time resident of the mixed-use community that has been evolving on the plant site since 2000. "And my boat is tied up just a few blocks away in one of the best marinas on Lake Michigan.

Rust Belt This Ain't

"This lake has some beautiful harbors and we've been to them all, but we just kept coming back to Kenosha, even as grungy as the lakefront used to be," says Cioni, who has owned 13 sailboats, ranging from a West Wight Potter 19 to a Farr 40, and has now transitioned to a trawler.

"Kenosha's done a terrific job of diversifying its economy since Chrysler left, with industrial parks for light manufacturing and distribution centers on the western side of the city, and now a boat-oriented community on the lake.

"And all the redevelopment here, like Southport Marina where we keep our boat, HarborPark that's our home now, and Celebration Park, a beautiful open space right on the water, has sparked renovation in the older downtown area.

Kenosha has become a great place to visit, but an even better place to live."

Instead of being weekenders as they once were, the Cionis sold their Illinois home in July and made the move to the full-time waterfront lifestyle in HarborPark. This is the keel of Kenosha's emergence from a city wedded to heavy industry, with its back to Lake Michigan. It's now a boater-friendly community that puts its finest asset, the sixth largest lake in the world, on display.



Photo by Sylvester Gorelik

HarborPark, which sits on former industrial land between the Kenosha Harbor entry and Southport Marina, has helped make the city a drawing card for events like this "tall ships festival" in 2003. Simmonds Island Marina is in the foreground.

But the community is still evolving with residential, retail and commercial development underway to complement a good mix of tourist attractions like the new Kenosha Public Museum and a waterfront amphitheater. The development is served by a 25-cent, two-mile electric trolley line that links residents and visitors alike to the downtown and on to a commuter rail station with service to Chicago, only an hour and 15 minutes away.

Today, Kenosha is marketing itself as a target town for tourists, boasting the 1866 Southport Light Station now being renovated as a marine museum, no less than four nationally designated historic districts and the original Simmons Island Marina with its charter fishing fleet. But for boaters — about 25% of homebuyers are also boat owners — this a gem of a place to live, and it's attracting young families as well as empty nesters and retirees.

From Brownfields to Blue Waters

"Kenosha was like a lot of small cities on the Great Lakes during the Industrial Revolution that developed into ports for interlake shipping and used their lakefront land for industry," reports Bary Moreland who grew up in this city of 90,000 roughly halfway between Milwaukee and Chicago. "In many small

port cities those factories, warehouses and shipping piers are long gone but Kenosha held on longer than most."

Moreland, who today operates Southport Marina, says that during the latter half of the 20th Century, automobiles ranging from Nash Ramblers to the Renault Alliance to American Motors' Gremlins and Jeep vehicles were built or partially assembled on the 42-acre site until Chrysler bought out AMC in 1987 and closed the Kenosha plant a year later.

The name Kenosha is an Anglicized variation on the Chippewa Indian name Kinjoe or Mas-ke-no-zha (spellings vary), which means "place of the pike" and the original 1835 settlement

became known as Pike Creek or Pike River. But because it was considered the southernmost location suitable for a port in Wisconsin (then part of the Michigan Territory), it soon became known as Southport.

Although chartered in 1850 as the city of Kenosha, the name Southport still identifies the southeastern lakefront neighborhood as well as the marina built adjacent to the then-vacant industrial land in 1991 as a first step in revitalizing the area. Kenosha added city-owned land adjacent to the tract, bringing the total lakefront parcel to 69 acres.

"The genius of this entire redevelopment is that it incorporated recreational boating from the very beginning," Moreland says. "The city leased the marina to a private operator and it was always full but had limited services and amenities."



Photo by Kenosha Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

City parkland parallels 400-slip Southport Marina on Lake Michigan.

Moreland and his partners, who also operate Harborside Yacht Center in Milwaukee and Green Bay, took over Southport Marina in 2004 to begin upgrading facilities and expanding dockage. Today the full-service marina boasts 350-slips — with 50 more soon to come — a 50-ton boat lift and a boaters' clubhouse with fitness center, heated swimming pool with hot tub and an 80,000-sq.-ft. heated indoor boat storage building plus a Carver and Silverton dealership.

The residential component, HarborPark, starting about two blocks north of the marina, is neatly laid out on a peninsula between the original harbor entrance, which provides water access to the Kenosha Yacht Club and Simmons Island Small Boat Harbor, and a lakeshore park to the south.

All units include one or more terraces, patios or balconies. The streets of HarborPark are laid out with views facing Kenosha Harbor and Southport Light Station to the east, Southport Marina and the lakeshore stretching south toward Chicago (on a clear day you can see the Sears Tower). To the east, beyond the breakwaters and the Pierhead Lighthouse built in 1906, lies Lake Michigan itself.

And that's a view that suits boaters like Bob and Joanne King just fine. The Kings, retirees from Northbrook, IL, bought their HarborPark condominium from plans, before ground breaking.

"We visited Kenosha eight or nine years ago and quite honestly, we weren't impressed," Bob King reports. "They

didn't even have electric at the marina then."

But the Kings returned five years ago, took one look at what was in the planning stages for the lakefront and they were hooked.

"I tried to visualize how nice it would be to live here and, believe me, it's measured to all my expectations and more," says King, who keeps his 38-foot Marinette cruiser, *King's Joy*, at Southport and gives the marina very high marks for facilities and services. "Instead of having a long run down the river to get to Lake Michigan, like we did in St. Joe, here I'm out in the lake in three to four minutes.

"We get to see the moon rise out of Lake Michigan from our window or watch the boats heading out the entry as we're eating breakfast on the balcony," King adds. "We can go for walks along the lake at midnight and feel safe. I don't know what I did right to deserve all this."

Waterfront Revival

Happy campers like the Kings are spreading the word and Moreland says there are five new residential projects currently under way including the \$28 million HarborPlace, an upscale condominium and retail development that broke ground in July adjacent to the marina. It consists of seven buildings in a pedestrian friendly layout including 58 town homes, "condominium urban lofts" with water views, plus 43,000 sq. ft of retail space.

Yes, Kenosha certainly has come a long way since David Cioni launched his first sail-

boat in the harbor in the early 1970s.

"At that time there was no marina here; in fact, when I bought my Catalina 22, there were precious few slips to be had anywhere along the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan," Cioni reports. "I kept the boat on land at the Kenosha Yacht Club and we had to launch it each time with the club's electric crane.

"Launching was always quite an ordeal and then we had to look at that grungy plant as we would motor out into the lake," he adds. "Back then, I could never have dreamed that one day I would end up living in a beautiful condo right in that very spot" he adds. "Now I can walk to my boat.

"I guess Lee Iacocca ended up doing us a great big favor." ■

— By Ryck Lydecker

For more information, visit:

Kenosha Convention & Visitors Bureau:
Kenoshacvb.com
southportmarinakenosha.com



SHORE LEAVE IN KENOSHA

For transients stopping off in Kenosha or waterfront house hunters on a visit, one place not to miss is Frank's Diner at 508-58th St., in the historic downtown, a quick trolley ride or leisurely walk from HarborPark. It's the oldest continuously operating lunch car diner in the U.S., dating to 1926. Celebrities, including Bela Lugosi, Duke Ellington, Liberace and the entire Lawrence Welk orchestra, have eaten at Frank's and the signature "Garbage Plate" entrée is a K-Town favorite. Open for breakfast and lunch only; ph: 262-657-1017