

The Millrace is Job One

I know there are people in town who are being very coy and claiming that they are Millrace neutral. I'm not one of them, and I'm not Millrace neutered either.

After many years of promoting the restoration of our Lower Millrace, the part that flows through a 30" pipe under Mill St. (the approach to the Ferry St. Bridge) and under EWEB to the river, I know how many prideful smiles it would put on our town if we were to finally reverse this unfortunate interment, now over a half a century old.

The stars, if you'll just step outside your current limitations for a minute and look up, are in alignment. EWEB is moving off the Downtown Riverfront, the section between the HQ Building and the Steam Plant. The courthouse has all but erased Agripac and left a bare triangle of land to its east that is begging to be included in a new public passage to the river. The Mill and Broadway district is changing hands, under new management, clearing out and calling for a San Antonio-like Millrace passage to the river to bring out the true genius of the place. Every time I pass the abandoned Chevron gas station at Broadway and Ferry, I think that this is the time. Now is the time.

OK, that's theme one. Let's add another star to that firmament.

I've long been a fan of the accomplishments of the WPA, some of which have been on display again in the new Ken Burns' series on our national parks. When we were in desperate straights in the 30's and needed to put people back to work, we somehow managed to build a legacy we admire up to this day. Almost every small town in America has a park, a school, a bridge, a Civic Stadium, a public building, murals, libraries, theaters, lodges, trails, stone walls, monuments... that are the legacy of this period – when we were broke but far from broken.



Put one and one together and we have the Millrace Public Works Project.

There is plenty to be done and we have the shovels, labor and expertise to do it. We have the talent, the artists, craftspeople and designers to make it special, the way that the artisans and thoughtful workers of the 30's managed to do. We have the updated ecological knowledge to transform our Millrace system from a forgotten stretch of ditchyness into a healthy, multi-functional urban watershed.

There is plenty of work to be done – many needed jobs that could be created for the under and unemployed as we suffer through a jobless recovery. Why just rake leaves when we could be remodeling culverts so as not to decapitate canoers, as is presently the case? Or building paths between the university, downtown and the river through storm water gardens that clean the water from the urban river terrace

before sending it into the Millrace and to the salmon passing by?

There is new engineering needed at the intake to bring water by gravity through the system again. We need a new passage under Franklin Blvd. at 11th that will let more water flow into the Lower Millrace again, a tunnel that is wide enough to provide a pleasant canoeing experience.

A grand public portal under 6th Ave. and the Union Pacific Railroad next to the federal courthouse could open wide in the middle of the EWEB site and powerfully connect a Cannery Square at 8th and Ferry to the Downtown Riverfront.

There is underutilized public parkland at the Millrace intake near the Knickerbocker Bridge that could become a desirable up-stream destination of a sunny, summer day. Again. Here in the place where the story of Millrace Charlie began and where it is still being whispered in the trees.

Tired of hearing about the progress that other group is making with their Springfield Millrace? Isn't it time to do something about our own?

Legacy and labor unite!

Our Millrace is JOB ONE!

