Preserving history on the land

As the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary was being restored, project partners worked to protect its cultural resources, including remnants of its industrial history. Across the sanctuary, you will find signs of the rail and brewing operations that once existed here. You will also be able to enjoy some of the unique features that attracted the Hopewell culture and Dakota people to the area.

The caves at the sanctuary’s west end cooled beer from the North Star Brewery. As the contractor removed the polluted soil near the cave, archeologists discovered the brewery’s foundation, which dates back to 1855. The foundation was carefully documented and re-buried to ensure its preservation.

Wakan Tipi is sacred to Dakota Indians. In the 1970s the city covered the cave opening with a large, steel gate. By 2000 the cave entrance was buried by rock and debris. While the sanctuary was under construction, Dakota elders guided work to remove the debris and create a clay-lined wetland that captures the spring water flowing from the cave.

When the land was a busy rail yard, linear concrete pads were used for train maintenance. Most of the concrete on the site was removed to make way for restored habitat. Community members advocated for keeping five of the concrete pads to remind visitors of the land’s history and offer a unique and interesting walkway through the park.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum thanked volunteers at a June 2003 cleanup event.

PARTNERS IN CREATING THE BRUCE VENTO NATURE SANCTUARY

The sanctuary project is known as a “textbook example” of how neighborhood members can transform a community eyesore into a beautiful natural amenity. The sanctuary restoration has reestablished a visual connection between surrounding communities and the Mississippi River — and the new park has already stimulated community redevelopment in the area. While local citizens initiated the park project, many public and private agencies worked to create the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, including:

Nonprofit and Community Organizations
Lower Phalen Creek Project
Trust for Public Land
Friends of Swede Hollow
Lowertown Redevelopment Corp
Community Design Center - East Side
Youth Conservation Corps
Historic Saint Paul
Dayton’s Bluff Community Council
CapitolRiver Council
Audubon
Minnesota Environmental Initiative

Government Partners
City of Saint Paul
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Metro Greenways Program
National Park Service – Mississippi National River and Recreation Area
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Elected officials at the city, state, county and federal levels

Tribal Partners
Lower Sioux Indian Community
Prairie Island Dakota Community
Shakopee Mdewakanton Dakota Community
Upper Sioux Indian Community

HONORING BRUCE VENTO

Bruce Vento grew up on Saint Paul’s East Side. He was a congressman, a champion for the Mississippi River and an early supporter of this park. Congress- man Vento died in 2000 from lung cancer. Community members named this park after him to create a living legacy that will be enjoyed for many generations.