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## City&Region

### A treasure uncovered

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MEDFORD — A couple of weeks ago, a crew team from Medford High School was nonchalantly rowing down the Malden River after school.

That would be a common sight in a lot of communities, including some of those nearby. But it is a new experience here, on a waterway that has been known, if at all, mainly for its astonishing level of filth.

“Lots of these inner-city kids didn’t even know what crew is,” marveled Mayor Michael McGlynn of Medford, viewing the scene from the deck of a spiffy new Tufts University boathouse. “Now you come out here, and you see people rowing.”

The river has undergone a reclamation: Malden meets Walden. The Malden River, one of the tributaries to the Mystic, snakes through Malden, Medford, and Everett. It was once the center of a thriving commercial district, but that was over a century ago. Now, one could drive along it every day without really noticing it, and as a waterway it has become largely unused. McGlynn guesses that most residents of Medford have never been on it.

Developer John J. Preotle Jr., who is building an office and residential project called River’s Edge in Medford, knew that building on top of a wasteland was no way to draw customers and that the site needed a transformation. But there was more than that driving his effort.

“The hope is that this will be a great project in a great area,” Preotle said.

It didn’t seem like a great area when Preotle and his partners decided to try to build on the site, which was cleared with years of painstaking effort by the Mystic Valley Development Commission. Nothing had been developed in that part of Medford in years, and the riverbank had long since been given over to various forms of juvenile delinquency. He understood that the river was not exactly the location of a dream condo.

But Preotle didn’t understand just what a nightmare the site was until workers uncovered the barge buried underneath it.

According to McGlynn, an iron barge once carried much of Medford’s trash out to Boston Harbor, where the load was set ablaze. This was in the 1960s, before there was an Environmental Protection Agency or much concern about pollution.

In 2006, apparently forgotten by everyone, the barge was still there, covered under a mountain of brush and debris. It was dug up, dismantled, and scrapped, a critical first step in building a \$10 million park on the waterfront. It had been buried for around 40 years.

“I remember what a dump this place was when I was a kid,” McGlynn said recently. “This has gone from being a dumping ground to a magnificent project that is going to improve the quality of life.”

While the buildings are the economic enter of River’s Edge, its

centerpiece is the park, which has already been recognized by the Boston Society of Landscape Architects, though it has just opened. The buildings will benefit the developers, but the boathouse, the park, and the river cleanup have restored a picturesque corner of the city to residents who have never known it in any useful form.

Preotle is no idealist. But he deserves credit for seeing that the project he envisioned could be more than just another nondescript office park.

As he shows a visitor a series of pictures that recorded the unlikely journey from eyesore to civic charm, his pride is palpable.

McGlynn said Preotle was initially met with suspicion. “When people heard a developer was coming in here, he was the natural enemy,” McGlynn said. “Now this will be the model for other developers.”

Most of the buildings on the site won’t be completed for some time, though Preotle professes to be unconcerned by the shaky economic climate in which he is launching.

Sitting on a granite stone close to the barge’s old resting place, he says he is glad his company has given something to the city hosting the development, and he believes business will take care of itself.

For now, Medford has a shining new playground. And a crew team.

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