

RECREATION



Pivotal moment for Cedar Lake

Liz Martin photos/The Gazette

City, county working on deal to cooperate on lake improvements

By Rick Smith, The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — Former two-term City Council member Tom Podzimek unintentionally has turned into a one-man promotional campaign for Cedar Lake.

Podzimek, who skied down the Mount Trashmore landfill south of downtown in early 2008 to prove its wintertime potential, this week has been showing up in the late afternoon to kite ski across the ice- and snow-covered Cedar Lake in an industrial area just north of downtown.

"You can go out and go for hours, back and forth, and up and down the lake," said Podzimek, who thought he was one of a few local people with experience attaching a kite to their waist and heading out on skis.

"Once you expose people to this kind of thing, there is an element out there who says, 'I'd like to try that,'" he said.

The 115-acre Cedar Lake, which was a resource for Alliant Energy's now-closed power plant next door, is a can't-miss feature for motorists on Interstate 380 and one that increasingly is a community priority for cleanup.

Mayor Ron Corbett said Thursday he is working on a plan with Linn County, Alliant Energy and advocacy group Friends of Cedar Lake that he hoped would lead to the transfer of ownership from the utility to a city-county entity this year as a first step in a cleanup and transformation of the lake and the area around it.

"Everyone is concluding that the best opportunity to restore the lake and provide recreational opportunities is to have the lake in public hands," Corbett said.

Linda Langston, chairwoman of the Linn County Board of Supervisors, said Thursday it is



Tom Podzimek sets up his kite on Wednesday before kite skiing on Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids.

likely the supervisors, the city and the Friends of Cedar Lake will sign a memorandum of understanding later this month or in February to formalize a commitment to work together to seek funds to improve Cedar Lake.

One impediment to Cedar Lake's redevelopment has been pollution in the lake bed. For years, the lake has been on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' "impaired" list of lakes, a standard that cautions those fishing to limit how much they eat of what they catch.

Dale Todd, who championed the redevelopment of Cedar Lake as the city's parks commissioner and a City Council member from 1998 through 2001, in recent years founded Friends of Cedar Lake.

"The Friends are very excited about what the (impending) agreement with the city and county does," Todd said Thursday. "Historically, everybody

has been so hypersensitive about the lake's liability, and it has prevented a common-sense discussion about the lake and its future. The agreement moves us to the next steps. This is further than we've ever been."

Todd said he was pleased to see Podzimek, who served on the City Council from 2006 through 2011, out on Cedar Lake this week to promote the lake's recreational prospects.

"Our challenge has been the (more recent) perception of the lake," he said. "With the lake no longer being used for industrial purposes, we think it's a perfect opportunity to change its focus to recreation and the environmental."

Corbett said he envisions the creation of a city-county entity like the Cedar Rapids/Linn County Solid Waste Agency to oversee the redevelopment of Cedar Lake. He said Alliant Energy is "not against" a transfer of the property to a public entity, but he said the parties need to work through environmental issues first.

Podzimek said Cedar Lake and Mount Trashmore are ready to make a transition from their working careers. He said a city, county, state and community effort to raise funds will make residents who live outside Cedar Rapids feel that the lake is there for their use, too.

"I think it's just a matter of time before it turns the corner and becomes reality," Podzimek said. "I'm 57, and you know, I may not live long enough to see it all done. But that's OK if you're moving in the right direction."

"In the meantime, we just have to do the best we can and go out and have some fun and promote the things we care about."

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TOP: Tom Podzimek ski-sails across Cedar Lake in front of Quaker Oats on Wednesday in Cedar Rapids. An 11-mph wind carried the former City Council member across the lake as temperatures dipped below zero.