A scenic view of the Quinnipiac River at dusk. In the foreground, a wooden pier structure with numerous vertical posts extends into the water. The sky is filled with dark, dramatic clouds, and the sun is setting, creating a soft glow on the horizon. The water reflects the sky and the lights from buildings in the background. The buildings are silhouetted against the twilight sky, and some lights are visible, suggesting an urban or town setting. The overall mood is serene and atmospheric.

A River Runs Through It

By **MELISSA NICEFARO**

PHOTOGRAPHS: IAN CHRISTMANN

The Quinnipiac River seen at dusk looking out to Front Street in Fair Haven. Ian Christman has photographed the river from New Haven to Southbury.

Exploring the Quinnipiac River Watershed

New Haven photographer Ian Christmann has lived all over the world and has seen most of the planet's most spectacular examples of natural beauty. But he says there is just something about the Quinnipiac River that draws him in.



The lush river is host to a wide range of wildlife from Osprey's to Otter.

“I live along it, I’ve rescued people from it, I’ve traversed the entire length of it and I love it,” he says.

The 45-mile-long river has personalities that are as diverse as the municipalities through which it flows. “In the New Haven area, you can see the lobster boats coming and going every day and when you go north, it is all marshland. It’s so serene and secluded,” Christmann says. “You can very quickly remove yourself from civilization.”

“The river is a natural resource that is both underutilized and abused,” Christmann says. He has photographed the river from its mouth in New Haven all of the way up to its headwaters in Southbury. His photos are on a traveling exhibit that has spent time in each municipality along the river.

“People need to protect that natural resource,” he says.

Roger Kemp of Meriden likewise cherishes the natural resource that is the Quinnipiac River. He lives for the days he can put his kayak on his car rooftop and drive down to the water for an excursion up the river.

“I think it’s one of the nicest ways to see nature,” he says. Kemp sits on the board of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association (QRWA.org), which represents all of the cities and towns along the river. The group’s main focus is education and outreach, science and monitoring, conservation and restoration and recreation and public access.

The association holds annual get-on-the-river events including this month’s Quinnipiac Downriver Classic canoe and kayak race; the Source-to-Sound Cleanup; the opening day fishing derby; and regular guided hikes and canoe trips. In addition, staff members are certified to offer basic canoe instruction and recruit and train students to become river interns.

“It’s a great way to give those first-timers who never had the chance to get out on a canoe to get out and experience the river,” fellow association board member Dan Pelletier says.

“You experience the river in a whole different way when you’re on it,” explains Pelletier. “You see both sides at once, and you’re not looking down on it. And since you’re always moving, you can see more. We want people to get out on the river and enjoy this great resource that we have.”

“In Cheshire, you’ll see people at their houses that back up to the river, sitting out on their chairs with a glass of wine,” he notes.

Pelletier, of Middletown, is also on the board



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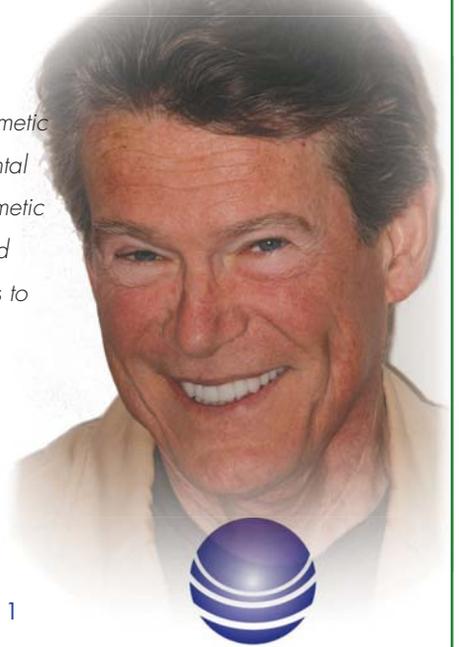


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The Quinnipiac River may look lazy in this aerial photo, but it's industrial past remains it's biggest challenge.

of the QRWA and is an avid canoe racer. He is a seven-time Whitewater New England Canoe Champion. Though Pelletier doesn't experience

the same roaring whitewater on the Quinnipiac River, he finds something even more precious: serenity.

"When I'm on the water, the river comes alive — the deer, the birds, even the plants," he says. "I become more in tune with nature and start becoming part of the river. I become part of the scene, part of nature."

It's not unusual to see an eagle, swan or turtle. Back in bygone days, harbor seals populated the river at the mouth of New Haven Harbor.

Much has changed since those days, according to Kemp. "Over time, we've mistreated nature. Now cities are becoming more concerned about the environment and air quality, but we want the water quality to be as important in the future," Kemp says.

"More and more, I see young people enjoying the river — high school kids and teenagers are taking the kayak out for an hour or so for some spring and summer fun." On May 19, the QRWA hosts the 33rd annual Downriver Classic canoe and kayak race. More than 100 people competed last year.



The upper part of the river that flows through Southington, Meriden and into Cheshire is cleaner than the lower portion which passes through Wallingford and North Haven before flowing into New Haven Harbor. There are, however, significant efforts made to continue cleaning the river.

A grant from L.L. Bean will go toward maintaining the upper five-mile canoe and kayak trail that starts in Cheshire and terminates in Meriden. This summer, according to Pelletier, a grant from the Quinnipiac River Fund will go towards a four-mile canoe and kayak trail that



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The river's five-mile canoe and kayak trail runs from Cheshire to Meriden and is a hotspot for these boaters. 'You experience the river in a whole different way when you're on it,' river Watershed Association board member Dan Pelletier says.



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runs from Wallingford into North Haven.

"It will go toward cleaning up trees that fell across the river in Hurricane Sandy and stations will be installed where boaters can read about the surroundings and habitat," Pelletier explains. "In all, it'll be nine miles of canoe and kayak trail with signage."

According to Christmann, "Part of the river in Wallingford is impassable due to the trees [fallen] across the entire river. I tried navigating that section and I wound up having to climb over 21 trees."

A \$20,000 grant from the Quinnipiac River Fund will present many opportunities to access and explore the river this summer. Parks and trails along the shore include Quinnipiac River Park and Dover Beach in New Haven, the Quinnipiac River Linear Trail in Wallingford, the Quinnipiac River Gorge in Meriden, and Quinnipiac River State Park in North Haven. The Fargeorge Preserve, a land trust property located on Quinnipiac Avenue, houses marked trails that provides unique access to the Quinnipiac tidal marsh.

Nancy Alderman is on Quinnipiac River Fund's advisory committee and says the reason there is money available for the river and the reason the Quinnipiac River is an endowed river stems from

a lawsuit 20 years ago.

"The Upjohn Chemical Co. made a tremendous amount of chemicals that polluted the river. They did not keep within the permit, so the Connecticut Fund for the Environment sued them for exceeding the amount of pollutants they were permitted to put into the river," she explains.

Today that fund is managed by the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and makes money available through grants for research, education, restoration activities and other relevant projects. For 20 years, the fund has supported cleanup efforts and research on the Quinnipiac River. Alderman says \$1 million went into the foundation with the stipulation that the income from it would be used to clean up the river. The fund gifts about \$10,000 a year to organizations such as the QRWA and provides grants for projects that will enhance the river.

"It's one thing to have scientists and researchers looking at what the pollution is, but it's another thing to get people to care about this river," says the Community Foundation's director of grants and scholarships, Sarah Fabish.

"The University of New Haven has been studying at the mouth of the river — the changes in algae and plant life that is encroaching on the

environment because of the pollution. We look at all aspects, but at the heart of it is: How do we make this a cleaner river?" Fabish says.

The Quinnipiac River was created from a glacial lake and naturally has a long and rich history. The river was named the Quinnipiac River, or "long water land" by the Native Americans who originally inhabited the region. In 1614, the river was rediscovered by Europeans who settled on the banks.

In subsequent years, fishing huts, farms and homes began to dot both sides of the river. At the river's mouth in New Haven, rich oyster beds and a river port helped the area begin to prosper. Back then, few understood how important the oysters really were as natural filters and purifiers of the river.

In the 19th century, as manufacturing plants and residential development found the banks of the Quinnipiac River, pollution and erosion followed. Oysters no longer thrive, but due to efforts by groups such as the QRF, the area may once again be home to a healthy oyster population.

"It really needs a level of community advocacy to get people to pay attention," Fabish says. "In order to get people's attention on this, we need advocacy. There are things still getting into that river that shouldn't get into the river." ❖

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