

Visitors find Michigan's largest city transformed

Detroit stages a comeback

By Katherine Rodeghier
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You've seen the headlines: "Record Bankruptcy for Detroit" on the front page of The Wall Street Journal in 2013, "THE MOTOR CITY GOES BUST" screamed USA Today.

As the largest U.S. city to declare bankruptcy, Detroit was down ... but not out.

Few cities suffered more from the Great Recession than Michigan's biggest, but The D is finding its footing again and visitors are coming back. On cruises of the Detroit River they gawk at a skyline punctuated by some 90 skyscrapers being rehabbed by a wealthy entrepreneur. They find new hotels, shops, breweries and restaurants. More than 100 drinking and dining spots debuted since those headlines spelled doom in 2013 and continue to open on average of one a week.

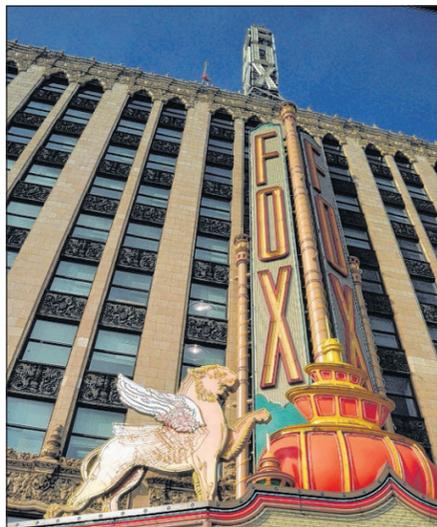
And The D isn't done yet. A multimillion-dollar hockey arena for the famed Red Wings will open in 2017 in the 50-block District Detroit multiuse development. A light-rail line, set to debut in April, will connect downtown with re-emerging neighborhoods. Attractions are springing up along formerly downtrodden streets and the riverfront. At least two tour companies will take you through the city and tell its comeback story.

You can feel the energy here. Human nature roots for the underdog. We cheered Rocky Balboa and our beloved Chicago Cubs.

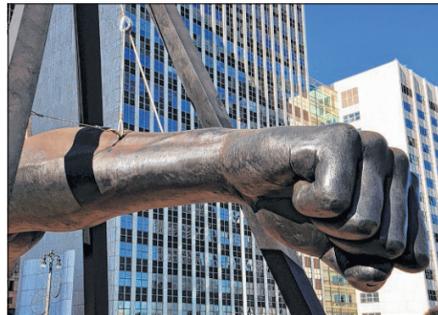
The D is having its Rocky and Cubby moment.

Rising from the ashes

Detroit has been here before. The Midwest's oldest major city burned to the ground in 1805,



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Detroit has the second-largest downtown theater district in the U.S. The restored 1928 Fox Theatre is among the venues.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
"The Fist," a memorial to Joe Louis, stands in Hart Plaza in Detroit where the boxer spent much of his formative years. Like Louis, the city embodies a fighting spirit.

a catastrophe memorialized on its city seal behind its iconic "Spirit of Detroit" statue outside its municipal center. Two Latin phrases translate as "It will rise from the ashes" and "We hope for better things."

To rebuild Detroit, Judge Augustus Woodward used the street plan for Washington, D.C. — based on Paris — and Woodward Avenue became its main thoroughfare with neighborhoods radiating in spokes. Prophecy is proving true again as block after block sent reeling from the recession comes back through more than \$11 billion invested in development projects.

To see the difference these billions make to visitors, start where Detroit started, at the river. Frenchman Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac walked ashore around the dawn of the 18th century and founded a settlement on what he called "le detroit," meaning "the strait." The Frenchman had it right; the Detroit River isn't a river at all, but a fast-moving strait connecting Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie.

It's also the city's front yard, one that had become a heap of rubble before a public/private partnership targeted 5.5 miles of riverfront for the Riverwalk. Nearly four miles of this ribbon of parklands with paved paths, public art, fountains and a 6,000-seat amphitheater have been completed. You can join locals walking or running its length, taking in the view of Renaissance Center, the tallest building in Michigan, and the Canadian coastline across the river to the south. Yes, in a quirk of geography, Canada is south of the U.S. here.

The Riverwalk's Rivard Plaza has a carousel with a mermaid and creatures native to the river. Rent a bike at Wheelhouse Detroit in the plaza and pick up paths through Michigan's first urban state park with wetlands, a marina and a lighthouse. A detour on the Dequindre Cut Greenway, a paved route on a former railroad bed, leads almost two miles from the Riverwalk to the Eastern Market.

One of the nation's oldest and largest operating public markets recently expanded and continues to thrive with food stalls, shops and entertainment.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
A mermaid is among the figures in the Cullen Family Carousel on Detroit's Rivard Plaza.



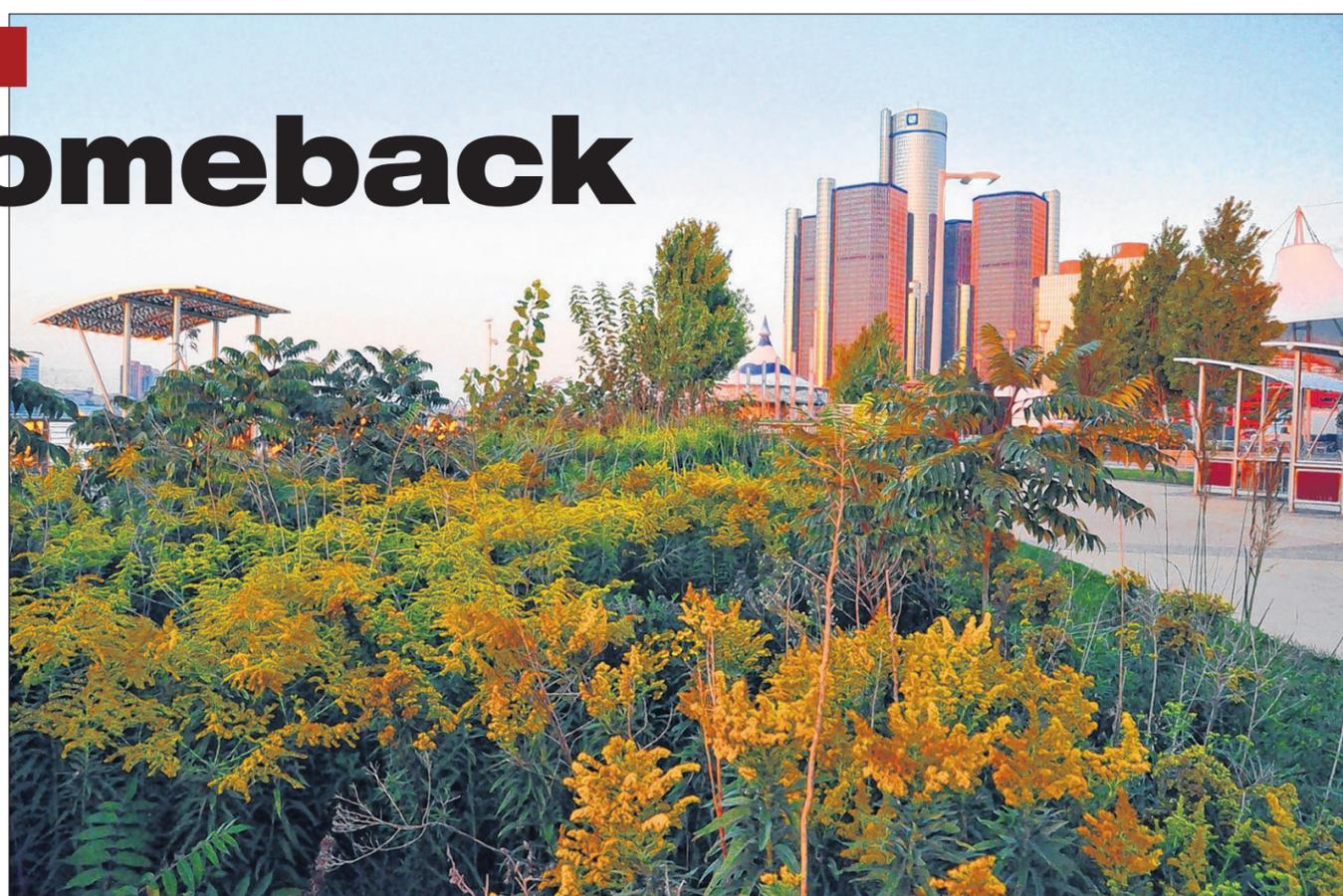
COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Reed Clancy, left, shows off a banana pie while co-worker Hannah Miller prepares to tuck an apple cheddar rye pie back in the display case at Sister Pie, one of the new businesses that have opened in Detroit's revitalized neighborhoods.

Booming downtown

The heart of Detroit, its central business district, has become a housing hot spot with 99 percent occupancy and waiting lists for condos and apartments in its rehabbed buildings. Visitors are flocking back, too. Hotels are seeing their third consecutive year of record occupancy.

One example of this turnaround: the Book-Cadillac Hotel. It became one of the city's top hotels when it opened in 1924 but quickly fell to ruin after it closed in 1984. Twenty years went by as thieves stole copper pipes and chandeliers, vandals spray-painted graffiti and shattered windows. Mother Nature played havoc in its Grand Ballroom sending ornate plaster crashing to the floor. A \$200 million reconstruction brought the Italian Renaissance building back with luxury condos on the top floors and the Westin Book Cadillac on the bottom.

Covering just one square mile, downtown Detroit has plenty of big-city amenities to lure you: more than 150 bars and restaurants and the largest theater district in the U.S. after



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
The new Riverwalk winds through Milliken State Park and Harbor, a 31-acre green oasis in downtown Detroit.

Manhattan with 13,000 theater seats in a two-block radius. Chief among these is the landmark Fox Theatre, opened in 1928 as a movie palace and restored as a 5,000-seat performing arts center.

You'll also find three — soon four — professional sports teams downtown: Tigers baseball, Lions football and Red Wings hockey. And the Detroit Pistons basketball team just announced it will move from the suburbs into the new home for the Wings in the Detroit District, a 50-block redevelopment straddling I-75 linking downtown to the Midtown neighborhood. The \$627 million Little Caesars Arena will seat more than 20,000 when it opens for hockey season next year and will share the space with the Pistons.

But the District isn't all about sticks and pucks, hoops and bouncing balls. It will have entertainment venues, restaurants, shops, residences, a 350-room hotel and a piazza almost as large as New York City's Rockefeller Center with a community ice rink below ground.

The QLine light rail service will run right through the District when it starts rolling along Woodward Avenue in April connecting it to downtown and Midtown.

Neighborhood revivals

Detroit's comeback has dozens of success stories scattered through its neighborhoods. Midtown proudly claims Shinola's flagship store and factory. Created by the founder of Fossil, it incorporated Swiss watch movements with American-made parts to make watches,

then branched out into leather bags, journals, accessories and, oddly, bicycles. It plans to open a hotel downtown in 2018.

Third Man Records, launched by Detroit native Jack White, lead singer and guitarist of The White Stripes, opened in Midtown in 2015. In addition to buying musical recordings, you can watch vinyl records made here at one of the country's few vinyl-pressing plants.

The Detroit Free Press picked a Midtown spot as its restaurant of the year. Chartreuse Kitchen & Cocktails, in a 1920s building next to the venerable Detroit Institute of Arts, turns the bounty of local farmers and foragers into innovative dishes from its open kitchen. Best seller? Its twice cooked egg with Brussels sprouts and salty cheese.

In the Rivertown neighborhood, the historic 1889 Bagley House became an upscale bridal salon through development incentives. Beautiful Bridal with Keasha Rigsby of "Say Yes to the Dress" fame opened in February 2016. Try-on parties allow groups of gal pals to enjoy a few cocktails while playing dress-up with gowns ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000.

Mansions in the historic Indian Village neighborhood, former address of some of Detroit's auto barons, are getting makeovers and businesses in the area are opening in abandoned buildings. Sister Pie bakery uses high-fat French butter in handmade pie crusts enveloping fillings made from Michigan produce picked at peak season. Salted Maple, though, ranks as a favorite year round.

Detroit's oldest neighborhood, Corktown,

was settled by immigrants from County Cork, Ireland, and has undergone a massive revitalization since the recession. Several restaurants on Zagat's list of America's Next Hot Food Cities — Detroit came in at No. 3 — have opened. Gold Cash Gold occupies a former pawnshop and kept its retro sign above its entrance. Slows Bar BQ has drawn cable TV and national media attention for its gourmet take on barbecue.

Across the street, you can shop for one-of-a-kind items at Detroit Artifacts, which offers an eclectic mix of vintage furnishings, industrial pieces, home goods and artwork.

And Corktown provides the setting for incubating new enterprises in an idea factory called Ponyride. Socially conscious artists and entrepreneurs can rent deeply subsidized space in its warehouse to try out new businesses. Tenants include metal and woodworking workshops, Beard Balm Detroit and The Empowerment Plan employing women living in shelters to make coats that transform into sleeping bags for the homeless. Detroit Denim, maker of American-made jeans, shirts, tote bags and accessories had space here before it moved its factory to Rivertown. Detroit is the New Black continues to use the space for screen printing clothing it sells at its downtown boutique.

Take a tour of Ponyride at 2 p.m. Wednesdays to discover the next new thing in "The Comeback City."

Information for the article was gathered during a writers' conference sponsored by the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Visiting Detroit

Tourist information: Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau, visitdetroit.com/

Tours:

Detroit Experience Factory: detroitexperiencefactory.org/

Show Me Detroit Tours:

showmetourstours.com/_index.php

Ponyride: ponyride.org/tours

Where to stay:

Westin Book Cadillac: (313) 442-1600, bookcadillacwestin.com/

Greektown Casino Hotel: (313) 223-2999, greektowncasino.com/hotel/

Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center: (313) 568-8000, marriott.com/hotels/travel/dtwdt-detroit-marriott-at-the-renaissance-center/

Where to eat:

Chartreuse Kitchen & Cocktails: chartreusekc.com/

Sister Pie: sisterpie.com/

Gold Cash Gold: goldcashgolddetroit.com/

Slows Bar BQ: slowsbarbq.com/locations/corktown/

Shopping:

Shinola: shinola.com/

Third Man Records: thirdmanrecords.com/

Beautiful Bridal with Keasha Rigsby: beautifulbridalwithkeasha.com/

Detroit Artifacts: detroitartifacts.com/

Detroit Denim: detroidenim.com/

Detroit is the New Black: detroitisthenewblack.com/



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER
Roslyn M. Karamodo, founder and CEO of Detroit is the New Black, uses Ponyride for screen printing clothing she sells in her boutique. The warehouse in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood offers subsidized rent to budding entrepreneurs for startup businesses.