



DETROIT: THE CITY BY THE RIVER

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Only 32 miles in length, the Detroit River has provided its namesake city with a vital corridor for transportation, trade, industry and recreation for over three hundred years. But, of course, its history goes back much farther, as native people have camped along the river's banks and harvested its bounty from time immemorial. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Detroit in 1701 as a key fur-trading outpost and the French became the first non-natives to paddle the waters. Working closely with the 'Three Fires' tribes (the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi), the French came to dominate the fur trade in the Midwest. However, as in many such encounters with indigenous people, the Europeans tended to get the better end of the deal, and the river, along with the settlement of Detroit, has been the site of as much violence as it has vitality. The siege of Fort Detroit was waged by the Odawa's Chief Pontiac and led to the Proclamation of 1763, hastening the American Revolution.

Race relations have also sunk roots deeply into Detroit's history. The Northwest Ordinance prohibited slavery north of the Ohio River, and the Detroit River—the primary crossing-point to Ontario— became an essential stop along the famous Underground Railway, allowing fugitive slaves to find a new life of freedom in Canada. 'Midnight' was the code word for the final leg of the Underground Railroad's northward trek because it was easiest to slip across the river after dark. Once midnight arrived, the slaves sensed that the end of their perilous journey was near.

By the latter part of the 19th century, the river's proximity made Detroit a leader in shipbuilding, and by the early 1900's, a rapid process of industrialization led to enormous prosperity and wealth which was, by and large, shared by the city's population. Henry Ford's innovations, including mechanized production and decent wages and benefits for his workers, made Detroit one of the most important cities in the world, and during this era, no location better symbolized American might and progress.

The revitalized waterfronts of Detroit and Windsor stand as testaments to the river's importance as an engine of prosperity. A natural boundary and point of connection between the United States and Canada, its waters have witnessed centuries of shared heritage, from Indigenous trade routes to early Francophone development of its ports and the ongoing revival of North American manufacturing. The river's banks reflect the tapestry of our intertwined histories.

The fascinating history of the Detroit River will be the focus of a 2023 two-hour production for Detroit Public Television, 'Detroit: The City by the River.' Emmy Award-winning director/producer Keith Famie of Visionalist Entertainment Productions will journey through time, up and down our beloved Detroit River, to uncover the richness of the past and gain a better understanding of where the river's meandering course will take us in the future.

Areas of Focus



Historical

- Early river inhabitants (Native Americans / Canadians)
- Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac / Fort Ponchartrain
- War of 1812
- Underground Railroad / US & Canadian
- Rum Running / Prohibition
- Boat Races
- Building of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel
- Building of the Ambassador Bridge
- Current build of the Gordie Howe International Bridge
- History of Belle Isle
- Dossin Great Lakes Museum
- Community development along the Detroit River
- Boblo Island Amusement Park
- Commerce historically on the river
- Recreation historically on the river

Ecosystems

- Belle Isle
- Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge – Humbug Marsh Unit
- Invasive species
- Wildlife migration patterns
- Pollution & remediation efforts

Partner Organizations (US & Canadian)

- United States Department of the Interior – Fish & Wildlife Service
- Department of the Army – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Coast Guard
- Belle Isle Conservancy
- Central Michigan University – Institute for Great Lakes Research
- The Detroit River Project
- Detroit Historical Society
- Great Lakes Commission
- Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge – Humbug Marsh Unit
- State of Michigan – Environment, Great Lakes and Energy
- University of Windsor – Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada / Pêches et Océans Canada

DETROIT: THE CITY BY THE RIVER

General Info:

The **Detroit River** flows west and south for 32 miles from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie as a strait in the Great Lakes system. The river divides the metropolitan areas of Detroit, Michigan, and Windsor, Ontario—an area collectively referred to as Detroit–Windsor—and forms part of the border between Canada and the United States. The Ambassador Bridge, the Detroit–Windsor Tunnel, and the Michigan Central Railway Tunnel connect the cities.

The river's English name comes from the French *Rivière du Détroit* (translated as "River of the Strait"). The Detroit River has served an important role in the history of Detroit and Windsor and is one of the world's busiest waterways. It is an important transportation route connecting Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, and Lake Superior to Lake Erie and eventually to Lake Ontario, the St. Lawrence Seaway, and the Erie Canal. When Detroit underwent rapid industrialization at the turn of the 20th century, the Detroit River became notoriously polluted and toxic. Since the late 20th century, however, a vast restoration effort has been undertaken because of the river's ecological importance.

In the early 21st century, the river today has a wide variety of economic and recreational uses. There are numerous islands in the Detroit River, and much of the lower portion of the river is part of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. The portion of the river in the city of Detroit has been organized into the Detroit International Riverfront and the William G. Milliken State Park and Harbor. The Detroit River is designated both an American Heritage River and a Canadian Heritage River—the only river to have this dual designation.

The Detroit River flows for 32 miles from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie. By definition, this classifies it as both a river and a strait—a strait being a narrow passageway connecting two large bodies of water, which is how the river earned its name from early French settlers. However, today, the Detroit River is rarely referred to as a strait, because bodies of water referred to as straits are typically much wider relative to their length. The river forms the southern portion of the waterway connecting Lake Huron to the north and Lake Erie to the south, with other portions including the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair.

The Detroit River is only 0.5–2.5 miles (0.8–4.0 km) wide. It begins with an east-to-west flow from Lake St. Clair, but curves and runs north to south. The deepest portion of the Detroit River is 53 feet (16.2 m) in its northern portion. At its source, the river is at an elevation of 574 feet (175 m) above sea level. The river is relatively level, dropping only 3 feet (0.9 m) before entering Lake Erie at 571 feet (174 m). As the river contains no dams and no locks, it is easily navigable by even the smallest of vessels. The watershed basin for the Detroit River is approximately 700 square miles (1,800 km²).



Since the river is fairly short, it has few tributaries, the largest being the River Rouge in Michigan; this is four times longer than the Detroit River and contains most of the watershed. The only other major American tributary to the Detroit River is the much smaller Ecorse River. Tributaries on the Canadian side include Little River, Turkey Creek, and the River Canard. The discharge for the Detroit River is relatively high for a river of its size. The river's discharge averaged over the year is 5,300 m³/s (190,000 cu ft/s), and the river's flow is relatively constant.

The Detroit River forms a major element of the international border between the United States and Canada. The river on the American side is all under the jurisdiction of Wayne County, Michigan, and the Canadian side is under the administration of Essex County, Ontario. The largest city along the Detroit River is Detroit, and most of the population along the river lives in Michigan. The Detroit River has two automobile traffic crossings connecting the United States and Canada: the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit–Windsor Tunnel. Both are strongly protected by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Canada Border Services Agency.

The upper portion of the river is one of the two places where a Canadian city lies directly south of an American city. In this case, the city of Detroit is directly north of the city of Windsor, Ontario. The only other location where this occurs is Fort Erie, Ontario, which lies south of several cities in Niagara County, New York. The cities and communities southwest of Detroit along the American side of the river are popularly referred to as the Downriver area because those areas are said to be "down the river" from Detroit. Several of these communities do not border the Detroit River but the term "Downriver" refers broadly to the cluster of 18 suburban communities that lie to the southwest of the city of Detroit and to the west of the Detroit River.

The Detroit River contains 31 charted islands. The majority of the islands are located on the American side of the river. Many of the islands are small and uninhabited, and none are divided by the international border, as the two countries do not share a land border along the river. Grosse Ile is the largest and most populated of all islands, and Fighting Island is the largest Canadian island. Most islands are located in the southern portion of the river.



Historical Use:

Europeans first recorded navigating the Detroit River in the 17th century. The Iroquois traded furs with the Dutch colonists at New Amsterdam by traveling through the Detroit River. The French later claimed the area for New France. The famed sailing ship *Le Griffon* reached the mouth of the Detroit River in mid-August 1679 on its maiden voyage through the Great Lakes. Later, when the French began settling in the area, they navigated the river using canoes made of birch or elm bark. Handcrafted vessels were a common mode of travel across the river, and pirogues and bateaux were also used.

As the North American fur trade intensified, European settlers expanded their trade westward into uncharted territories. French explorer Antoine Laumet de La Mothe, sieur de Cadillac sailed up the Detroit River on July 23, 1701. The next day, he established Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit, which developed as Detroit. The French named the river as *Rivière Détroit*. *Détroit* is French for "strait". The river was known literally as the "River of the Strait".

When Great Britain defeated the French in the Seven Years' War (known as the French and Indian War on the American front), it took over control of the Detroit River, as well as other French territory east of the Mississippi River. The newly formed United States claimed this territory during the American Revolution, but the British did not transfer it until 1796.

During the War of 1812, the Detroit River served as a major barrier between the American Michigan Territory and British Upper Canada, especially during the Battle of Fort Detroit in August 1812. Detroit briefly fell to the British. After the completion of the Erie Canal in 1817, which opened up easier travel to Lake Erie from the East Coast of the United States, connecting the Great Lakes to the Hudson River and the port of New York City, the Detroit River became a route for many migrating settlers traveling to northern Michigan. Detroit rapidly attracted a share of new residents. Following the Patriot War, in which British regulars and Michigan militia nearly came to armed conflict on the ice-covered Detroit River, the United States built Fort Wayne at Detroit to counter Britain's riverside Fort Malden at Amherstburg across the river.



Underground Railroad:

The Detroit River served as a final stop on the Underground Railroad and was the most active entry point along the United States–Canada border for fugitive slaves.

Escaping slaves often chose to cross through the Detroit River rather than flee to Mexico because of the river's location near free states made it less risky than traveling through slaveholding states that border Mexico. The strong Underground Railroad networks in the Canadian border region also assisted Blacks hoping to flee from the U.S. once the Fugitive Slave Act was strengthened in 1850. Canada also granted legal immigration status to Blacks, while Mexico did not for many years.

Individuals and organizations assisted escaping slaves hoping to cross the Detroit River from the United States into Canada. **The Second Baptist Church of Detroit and First Baptist Church of Amherstburg coordinated ferrying thousands of Blacks across the Detroit River into Canada, and Detroit's Colored Vigilant Committee assisted over 1,500 fugitives in crossing into Canada.** Famous abolitionists and Underground Railroad conductors including George DeBaptiste and William Lambert worked individually and with these organizations to assist fleeing slaves and condemn slavery.

There was considerable transnational fluidity between the Canadian and American sides of the river until the middle of the 19th century. The 1833 Blackburn Riots in Detroit, which erupted after slave hunters detained couple Lucie and Thornton Blackburn, marked the end of hundreds of years of a nearly porous border between Canada and the United States on the Detroit River. Detroit's African American population protested and helped the Blackburns escape across the Detroit River to Upper Canada, where the British colonial government in Canada declared former slaves could not be extradited to be returned to their owners. With their freedom in Canada secured, crossing the Detroit River out of the United States became an imperative for escaping slaves.



During / After the Civil War:

During the American Civil War (1861–1865), the Union feared the seceded Confederate States of America (CSA) would plan a northerly attack from Canada, which was controlled by the British Empire and remained neutral in the war. The Union feared the CSA would cross the Detroit River to launch this attack. For that reason, Union forces regularly patrolled the Detroit River and the fortification at Fort Wayne improved, although it was far removed from any major combat. A Confederate plot to capture the U.S. Navy warship, USS *Michigan*, and liberate Confederate prisoners from Johnson Island, in western Lake Erie, was narrowly averted only after the Confederates had captured two passenger steamships.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Detroit's industrialization took off on an unprecedented scale. The Detroit River became the world's busiest commercial river and in 1908 was dubbed "the Greatest Commercial Artery on Earth" by *The Detroit News*. In 1907, the Detroit River carried 67,292,504 tons (61 billion kg) of shipping commerce through Detroit to markets all over the world. By comparison, London shipped 18,727,230 tons (16 billion kg), and New York shipped 20,390,953 tons (18 billion kg).



Prohibition:

Rum-running in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, was a major activity in the early part of the 20th century. In 1916, the State of Michigan, in the United States, banned the sale of alcohol, three years before prohibition became the national law in 1919. From that point forward, the City of Windsor, Ontario was a major site for alcohol smuggling and gang activity.

The Canadian federal government regulated the manufacturing, importation, and exportation of alcoholic beverages in all the provinces. When the Wartime Prohibition Act, which prohibited the manufacturing, sale, or consumption of alcoholic beverages expired on January 1, 1920, new legislation authorized each province to decide whether to continue the enforced bans on alcohol. Like most provinces in Canada, Ontario chose to continue to ban the production and sale of alcohol. This decision led to an upswing in organized crime activity along the Detroit-Windsor borders.

From 1920 to 1933, the United States enforced the Prohibition era. The sale, manufacture, and transportation of alcohol for consumption were nationally banned. Detroit, as the largest city bordering Canada, where alcohol remained legal during Prohibition, became the center of a new industry known as rum-running, smuggling liquor into the US.

No bridges connected Ontario, Canada and Michigan, US, until the Ambassador Bridge was finished in 1929 and the Detroit–Windsor Tunnel in 1930. Smugglers used boats of varying sizes to transport alcohol across the river during the summer, and during the winter months, rumrunners traveled back and forth across the frozen Detroit River by car. In some cases, overloaded cars fell through the ice. In the 21st century, car parts from this era are occasionally still found on the bottom of the river. Rum-running in Windsor and production of bootleg liquor became common practices. American mobsters such as the Purple Gang of Detroit used violence to control the route known as the "Detroit-Windsor Funnel," and continue to gain lucrative returns from the trade. The name parodied the newly built tunnel between the cities and nations. The Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, and the St. Clair River are estimated to have carried 75% of all liquor smuggled into the United States during Prohibition. Government officials were unable or unwilling to deter the flow.

The rum-running industry died when prohibition was repealed in 1933 by the Twenty-first Amendment.



Submerged Objects:

Because of the booming businesses and long history of Metro Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, the Detroit River has been the site of many artifacts, some lost with sunken ships and others abandoned, such as murder weapons or stolen bronze statues. A DMC DeLorean has also been recovered from the river. The artifacts recovered are well preserved due to the river's fresh water but low visibility makes them difficult to find.

A 1940s-era bronze statue depicting a classical nude woman was originally installed to overlook a reflecting pool in the Grosse Pointe War Memorial. It was nicknamed "The Nude," and, in 2001, was believed to have been successfully stolen for display in some art collector's private cache. During a police diving exercise near a submerged Jeep, the statue was found in 2009, restored, and returned to the memorial.

Anchors from the *SS Greater Detroit*, a luxury steamship that toured the Detroit River from 1924 to 1950, and the famed *SS Edmund Fitzgerald*, a lake freighter that sank in a terrible 1975 storm, have notably both been recovered from the river. The 6,000-pound anchor of the *SS Greater Detroit* was raised in November 2016. It was installed at the Detroit/Wayne County Port Authority Building. The lost anchor of the *SS Edmund Fitzgerald* was recovered during a July 1992 project, and the anchor was installed in the yard of the Dossin Great Lakes Museum on Belle Isle.

Since the 1980s, divers have recovered a total of six 1700s-era cannons from the river. The last was found in 2011 near the Cobo Center. They are believed to have been part of the pre-War of 1812 inventory kept by the British garrison in this area. Historians believe another three cannons may still be in the river. Inventory documents record a total of 17 cannons and 14 have been accounted for. It is believed that the British dragged the cannons onto the frozen river so they would sink with the spring thaw, and be kept from use by the American enemy. Another seven, larger cannons may have fallen off a barge closer to Amherstburg, Ontario, and may yet be found in the river.



Pollution & Conservation Efforts:

Much of the land that surrounds the Detroit River is urbanized and, in some places, has been used for industrial purposes for more than 100 years. There has been excessive water pollution of the river from the long-term, unregulated dumping of chemicals, industrial waste, garbage, and sewage. Much of the Detroit River and its shoreline were polluted and unsafe for recreational use. Thousands of migrating birds died each year because of the oil slicks and contaminated water around the mouth of the Detroit River at Lake Erie. The river's oxygen levels were depleted to the point where fish could not inhabit its waters. Because this pollution often drained into and affected Lake Erie, the lake was considered "dead" and unable to support aquatic life.

In 1961, a congressional order founded the Wyandotte National Wildlife Refuge. That began the government's placing tighter restrictions on industries; substantial government funding at various levels has been allocated to clean up the river. In this early period, opponents believed that such efforts would adversely affect Detroit's industry and economy. In 1970, toxic levels of mercury in the water resulted in the total closing of the fishing industry in the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River, and Lake Erie. Finally, a massive conservation effort was initiated to clean up the Detroit River. For years, the multi-million-dollar cost of removing pollutants from the river and the political influence of nearby industries, hindered conservation efforts.

In 1998, the Detroit River was designated as an American Heritage River by the US Environmental Protection Agency and in 2001 as a Canadian Heritage River. It is the only river in North America to have such dual designations.

In 2001, the Wyandotte National Wildlife Refuge was absorbed into the larger Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, a cooperative effort between the United States & Canada to preserve the area as an ecological refuge. The millions of dollars spent since that time to dredge pollutants out of the Detroit River has led to a remarkable restoration, although problems remain. Today, many species of native animals that had been driven out by human development are returning to the area. The river is home to a growing number of bird species such as eagles (including reintroduced bald eagles), ospreys, & peregrine falcons. Large numbers of lake whitefish, sturgeon, silver bass, black bass, salmon, perch, & walleye are again thriving in the river.

The Detroit River & its recovery efforts were listed as a Michigan State Historic Site in 2007. A historic marker was erected along the river in a park that now serves as the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge visitor center in the city of Trenton.



Economy:

The Detroit River is used for shipping and trading. The earliest use of the river for these economic activities was the shipping of furs for trade as early as the 17th century. By the time the fur trade decreased, Michigan had begun to exploit the lumber-rich areas of Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula. Detroit turned into a major industrial region, largely because of the Detroit River. The only way a ship could travel out of the upper Great Lakes system was to travel down the Detroit River. From there, ships could travel anywhere in the world out of the St. Lawrence Seaway or the Erie Canal to New York City. At the beginning of the 20th century, the automotive industry boomed, and the many manufacturers imported abundant supplies of iron ore, sand, limestone, and wood.

The Detroit River provides substantial revenue for the local economies. A 1991 study showed \$20.1 million came from sales related to waterfowl hunting along the Detroit River. The same year, bird watching, photography, and other non-consumptive uses of waterfowl contributed another \$192.8 million to Michigan's economy. Local economies benefit through boating registrations and fishing licenses. It is estimated walleye fishing alone brings in \$1 million to the economy of communities along the lower Detroit River each spring. Other fish caught by recreational fishermen include white bass, bluegill, crappie, freshwater drum, smallmouth bass, northern pike and muskie. There are over 800,000 recreation boats in Michigan, and more than half of them are regularly used on or near the Detroit River. Popular river destinations in Detroit include the Detroit International Riverfront and Belle Isle Park—both of which host events throughout the year. Several restaurants on the river have docks for boaters. Tour boats and dinner cruises travel through the sights of Detroit and the undeveloped islands downriver. Cruise ships support tourism on the Great Lakes and dock at the Port Detroit passenger terminal downtown. The iconic Renaissance Center is on the banks of the Detroit River.



Bridges & Crossings:

According to a 2004 study, 150,000 jobs and \$13 billion in annual production depend on the river crossings connecting Detroit to Windsor. In 2004, the American trade with Ontario alone was \$407 billion, in which 28% (\$113.3 billion) crossed the Detroit River.

There are two automobile traffic routes that completely cross the river: the Detroit–Windsor tunnel and the privately owned Ambassador Bridge, both of which connect Detroit, Michigan, to Windsor, Ontario. A railway tunnel and a commercial truck ferry service also travel between Detroit and Windsor. In Michigan, there are two bridges connecting the mainland to Grosse Ile, as well as the MacArthur Bridge that connects the mainland Detroit to Belle Isle. All ports of entry on the American side are secured by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the Canadian side is secured by the Canada Border Services Agency; all areas between the American ports of entry and on the American side of the river are secured by the United States Border Patrol.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge is a new bridge project which began construction in 2019; it will directly connect Highway 401 in Canada to Interstate 75 in the United States.



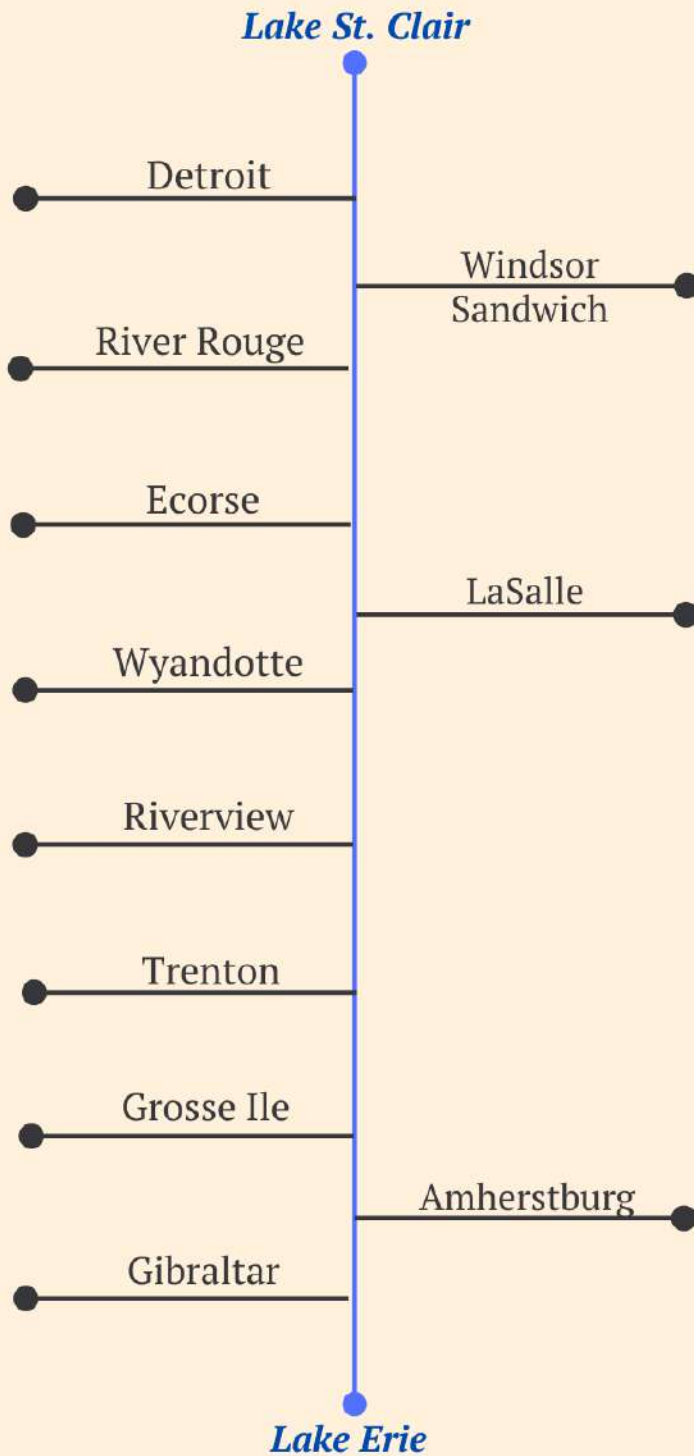
Fun Facts about the Detroit River:

- The river stretches from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie and operates as a strait in the Great Lakes system.
- The river is only about 0.5 to 2.5 miles wide, making the division between Michigan and Canada very narrow.
- Belle Isle lies in the northern section of the Detroit River and remains a popular destination for residents and visitors of the city. Belle Isle is a Michigan State Park and is open to the public for all kinds of activities like kayaking, swimming, and fishing.
- The Detroit River was once used by the Iroquois who traveled these waters to trade fur with Dutch colonists.
- In 1908, the *Detroit News* declared the Detroit River the “Greatest Commercial Artery on Earth.”
- In 1997, the Detroit River was named as one of 14 American Heritage Rivers by President Bill Clinton due to the local community of Detroit that utilized the river to revitalize the economy, preserve the history and restore the environment.
- The river is the only international wildlife refuge in North America. From having some of the best walleye fishing in the world, to housing an abundance of bald eagles, this river is full of wildlife!
- The word “Detroit” is French for “strait” and the French invented this name for the river to describe the “Strait of Lake Erie” or “le détroit du Lac Érié.” This has been a major shipping channel since the 1700’s with traders navigating the waters for trade.
- There are 28 islands located within the Detroit River. One of the islands is Belle Isle, which exists as the largest urban island park in the United States. The entire island is listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places, and the also encompasses the oldest rowing club in North America.

DETROIT RIVER



Representation of the cities located along the Detroit River in the United States and Canada.





LETTERS OF SUPPORT



Visionalist
Entertainment Productions



Feb. 7th, 2024

Keith Famie
Filmmaker
Visionalist Entertainment Productions
28345 Beck Road
Suite 404
Wixom, MI 48393

Dear Keith,

Thanks for the conversation today regarding the production of a documentary special exploring the historical and economic significance of the Detroit River.

As we discussed, we are excited by the prospect of creating and engaging content that reveals new perspectives on how our diverse populations have been impacted socially, culturally and historically by the straits of Detroit!

Detroit PBS is committed to covering issues in the public interest, including the ways in which our natural resources can catalyze commerce, equity and environmental stewardship – in the past, present and future.

And finally, for fans of history, this program is a unique way of telling the Detroit story from the banks of the river that creates its natural border. We are so pleased to include it in our broadcast plans for Spring/Summer 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fred".

Fred Nahhat
Senior VP, Production
Detroit Public TV



2024 March 13

Mr. Keith Famie
Visionalist Entertainment Productions
28345 Beck Road, Suite 404
Wixom, MI 48393

Dear Keith,

As Consul General of Canada in Detroit, it is my pleasure to support the upcoming film "Detroit the City by the River," celebrating the iconic Detroit River. This waterway holds historical, cultural, and economic significance for both Canada and the United States.

From the establishment of Fort Pontchartrain du Détroit in the 18th century, the Detroit River has been a strategic artery of prosperity. Over 100 years ago, our cross border region modernized how we move. The nascent automobile industry relied on the water to bring materials from afar in creating the vehicles that would transform the world. The river continues to facilitate trade and commerce, supporting industries ranging from shipping and manufacturing to tourism, recreation and agriculture.

During the 19th century, the river served as both an important physical barrier and a symbol of hope, representing the divide between slavery and freedom. The new settlers, following Indigenous, French, and British founders, brought with them traditions that contributed to the rich culture of the region. The river continues to serve as the backdrop for cultural events in both Windsor and Detroit, like the International Freedom Festival in June. Windsor, Ontario, on the Canadian bank, has emerged as a hub of opportunity and innovation, attracting new Canadians from around the world to its shores.

The revitalized waterfronts of Windsor and Detroit stand as testaments to the river's importance as an engine of prosperity. A natural boundary and point of connection between our two nations, its waters have witnessed centuries of shared heritage, from Indigenous trade routes to early Francophone development of its ports and the ongoing revival of North American manufacturing. The river's banks reflect the tapestry of our intertwined histories. By capturing its complexity on screen, you can inspire audiences to appreciate its significance and foster an understanding of the shared heritage that binds us together.

I commend your efforts in shedding light on this iconic waterway and look forward to its completion. Thank you for your commitment to celebrating the Detroit River and its profound impact on our region.

Bon Courage!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Colin Bird".

Colin Bird

Consul General of Canada-Detroit



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, DETROIT DISTRICT
477 MICHIGAN AVENUE
DETROIT MI 48226-2550**

Dear Keith,

Thank you for meeting with us and providing us with the vision for your film, Detroit: The City by the River.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Detroit District, comprises a diverse group of professionals from various disciplines and expertise working together as one team. We pride ourselves on delivering vital engineering solutions in collaboration with our partners to secure our Nation, energize our economy, and reduce disaster risk.

The Detroit River is among our oldest and most important responsibilities. We began maintaining the Detroit River in 1902 and continue facilitating the navigation channel from Lake St. Clair to Lake Erie.

Our engineers, biologists, and other specialists have played an important historic and current role in managing Congressionally authorized water resource projects, from navigation to flood control to erosion. These and other activities support both the environment and economy of the nation.

We look forward to telling you more about our different missions in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. W. Hitchcock, II", is positioned above the typed name.

G. W. Hitchcock, II (he,his,him)
Public Affairs Chief, Detroit District
Great Lakes and Ohio River Division
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge
5437 West Jefferson Ave.
Trenton, MI 48183



In Reply Refer To:
R3-DRIWR

April 12, 2024

Keith Famie
Visionalist Entertainment Productions
28345 Beck Rd., Ste. 404
Wixom, MI 48393

Re: Biological Summary of Humbug Marsh for Detroit: The City by the River Film

The wetlands within Humbug Marsh are classified as Great Lakes Marsh, a natural community that has been ranked as a globally imperiled community by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (Kost et al. 2007). As the shorelines of the Great Lakes were developed for industrial, commercial, residential, and recreational use, the marsh habitat essential for many Great Lakes species rapidly declined. While vast seas of emergent vegetation once controlled flooding, aided in groundwater recharge, and provided habitat, today most of this once common ecological community has been dredged, filled, or otherwise altered by humans. Each remaining portion of Great Lakes coastal wetland is important to maintaining the integrity of the lakes as a whole, but the wetlands within Humbug Marsh are particularly important due to the extensive loss of native habitat that has occurred within the southeast Michigan. This region lies in one of the most industrialized areas of the Midwest, and thus, has lost the majority of its original coastal wetlands. In the Detroit River, 97% of pre-settlement wetlands have been lost (Manny 2007).

Because Humbug Marsh represents a significant portion of the last remaining wetlands in the Detroit River corridor and the last mile of natural shoreline on the river's U.S. mainland, it serves as vital habitat for a large variety of endemic fish, birds, and plants that are regionally rare and may otherwise be extirpated from the area. As the only Ramsar designated Wetland of International Importance in the state of Michigan, Humbug Marsh provides habitat for 51 species of fish, 154 species of birds, seven species of reptiles and amphibians, and 37 species of dragonflies and damselflies. Over 90 native plant species are known to occur within the Humbug Marsh complex, which means the area has maintained some of its pre-settlement character, despite the pressures of development, influx of invasive plants, and other ecosystem alterations (Reznicek et al. 2005). Humbug Marsh and the lower Detroit River are located at the intersection of two highly important migratory bird flyways (Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways), making it a prime location for waterbird stopover during fall and spring migration periods. In winter

months, Humbug Marsh and the adjacent open water of the Detroit River provide critical resting, staging, and feeding habitat for hundreds of thousands of waterfowl. The area is considered essential for the preservation of migrating raptor species such as *Buteo platypterus* (Broad-winged Hawk) and *Accipiter striatus* (Sharp-shinned Hawk) by the Audubon Society, and thus, was designated as an Important Bird Area in September of 2007 (National Audubon Society 2009).

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Sincerely,



Dan Kennedy
Refuge Manager



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February 2, 2023

Keith Famie,

Thank you for reaching out about potentially including our research team and the Freshwater Restoration Ecology Centre (FREC - hosted at the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research at the University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada) in the filming, "Detroit: The City by the River". I believe this effort is very timely and will appear to a diversity of the public and stakeholders of the Detroit River, which is so vital to the city of Windsor, Canada. As I mentioned on the phone our research center is directly on the Detroit River and is to my knowledge the only research facility on the Canadian side of this historic river. FREC focuses on the restoration of biodiversity, management of invasive species and water quality issues in the Detroit River and adjacent watershed. Specifically, the research centre is the home for captive breeding of species in the Detroit River including Lake Sturgeon as well as imperilled species such as pugnose minnows and spotted gar (among others).

We look forward to hearing back from you when the time comes in order to facilitate a visit to the facility as needed.

Sincerely,

Trevor E. Pitcher, PhD
Professor & Director, FREC
Email: tpitcher@uwindsor.ca
Phone: 519-253-3000 ext. 2710



University
of Windsor



18435 Ohio St.,
Detroit, MI 48221
313-510-9348
detroitriverproject@gmail.com
TheDetroitRiverProject.com

January 5, 2023

Dear friend of the Detroit River:

The Detroit River Project is a Detroit-Windsor based non-profit collaborative that is dedicated to education, research, and celebration of heritage, culture and heroics surrounding the Detroit River's Underground Railroad legacy. Due to its role and the role of the peoples of Southeast Michigan and Southwestern Ontario in the journey to freedom of enslaved persons of African descent, our ultimate goal is establishing UNESCO World Heritage Designation of the Detroit River.

This preparation requires compelling documentation that provides "exceptional testimony" to the outstanding human interaction that merits universal significance. For this reason, The Detroit River Project supports the initiative of Visonalist Entertainment in producing a documentary special that focuses on the cultural, historical and economic significance of the Detroit River.

The Detroit River Project has 15 years of research and dedication to bring us to the 2027 nomination year. We have attained Federal and State government support through Resolutions; partnered with the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission and Wayne State University Press to publish *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Freedom and the Underground Railroad* (2016) and successfully developed elementary and secondary school curricula that is used by school boards on both sides of the river. This has compelled post secondary academic courses examining the historical significance of the Detroit River. We have orchestrated summer camps focusing on the Underground Railroad and the conceptual development of twin monuments in Windsor and Detroit showcasing the Journey to Freedom.

The Detroit River Project is diligently amassing the required demonstrated exceptional testimony worthy of World Heritage Designation and we believe a documentary that celebrates the Detroit River's significant stories is vital to our cause. We hope you see the merits of this project and take this opportunity to bring it to fruition.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Simmons
Executive Director
The Detroit River Project

Cheryl Hardcastle
Associate Director
The Detroit River Project-Canada



Biology Department and Institute for Great Lakes Research
Mount Pleasant, MI 48859
wooln1d@cmich.edu
989-774-2985

January 12, 2023

Keith Famie and team,

Thank you for reaching out about potentially including my research team in the filming, "Detroit: The City by the River". This film, including a learning opportunity for diverse students, as well as the outreach it will bring about the importance of the Detroit River is so very important to the river and the City of Detroit.

My lab ([link](#)) as well as Dr. Dave Zanatta's Lab ([link](#)) have been working in the Great Lakes and their watersheds for > 25 years and we recognize the importance of not just clear water but clean water; which has been the focus of our molluscan research. We currently have a PhD student, here at CMU, Shay Keretz ([link](#)) that is wrapping up her graduate work this semester that focused on the Detroit River with a focus on the invasive and native mussels that would be excellent to highlight because of their importance to the sustainability of Detroit River. Shay and our labs' team has created a large international team of biologists and have sampled the river thoroughly, we have published on this for the scientific community but would be happy to help you incorporate this for your audience. What we study is understudied and nearly unknown to the common layperson; but we find it exciting, important, and would highlight some great Michigan research that scientists internationally are interested in.

As mentioned, when we talked, we would be happy to have your team visit us at CMU and if time and funds exist to meet out on the river (our study concluded this year otherwise we would have been happy to have hosted you out on the river!). I have also cc'd you on emails with our collaborators with the Michigan DNR and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Stay in touch with any information I can help you with as this project moves along.

Sincerely,

Daelyn Woolnough, Ph.D.
Associate Research Professor



January 16, 2023

Dear Keith,

The Belle Isle Conservancy has a mission to protect, preserve, restore and enhance the natural environment, historic structures, and unique character of Belle Isle as a public park for the enjoyment of all - now and forever.

The Conservancy works in partnership with the City of Detroit, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to fulfill its mission, which also includes operation of the historic Belle Isle Aquarium.

Belle Isle is an important part of the Detroit Riverfront and has a rich story that dates back to the indigenous people, and it must be told.

We are excited to have the rich history of Belle Isle featured in the upcoming documentary film, *Detroit: The City by the River*.

Sincerely,

Michele Hodges
President and CEO
Belle Isle Conservancy

DETROIT
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY



January 27, 2023

Keith Famie
Visionalist Entertainment
28345 Beck Road
Wixom, MI 48393

Dear Keith,

The Detroit Historical Society is pleased to offer its support of your production of the documentary project, "Detroit: The City by the River."

As the operator of the Dossin Great Lakes Museum, which is located on the shores of the Detroit River on Belle Isle Park, the Society has long championed opportunities to share the history and importance of the river. Visitors of all ages have explored Detroit's role in national and regional maritime history through our signature exhibitions, temporary installations, guided tours and engaging, educational programs for students and adults. Tracing hundreds of years of Great Lakes maritime history, award-winning exhibitions at the Dossin include *Built by the River*; *Outdoor Treasures* featuring the bow anchor from the legendary *S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald*; the *William Clay Ford Pilot House*; and *Miss Pepsi*, the first hydroplane to qualify for a race at 100 mph. Following the completion of the first phase of a \$2.4 million outdoor enhancement project, museum visitors now have direct access to the Detroit River, providing new opportunities to instill a deeper appreciation for the historical, cultural, ecological and commercial value of the river.

We enthusiastically endorse your project, and look forward to working with you to build a greater understanding of the ways in which the Detroit River has shaped the city and the region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Elana Rugh'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Elana Rugh
CEO and President



GROSSE ILE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 131, GROSSE ILE, MICHIGAN 48138 • (734) 675-1250

April 13, 2024

Keith Famie – Producer/Director, Visionalist Entertainment Productions
Matt Prested – Director of Business Relations, Visionalist Entertainment Productions

RE: PBS Documentary “Detroit—The City by the River”

Dear Keith and Matt,

Thank you for contacting me! The Grosse Ile Historical Society is thrilled to provide contributions to the PBS documentary “Detroit—The City by the River” as the rich history of our community (located 20 miles south of Detroit) and surrounding areas contributed to this region’s growth and interesting past.

Grosse Ile has an amazing history dating back hundreds of years, but officially on July 6, 1776 when a treaty was signed between the Potawatomi Tribe and the Macomb brothers, William and Alexander—granting them the group of 12 islands that make up Grosse Ile.

Founded in 1959, the Grosse Ile Historical Society is in the process of creating new, interactive exhibits that tell stories of the people and events that occurred on our island and nearby. The goal is to have an updated “Re-Imagined” museum ready for the 250-year celebration in 2026, which coincides with our nation’s Semiquincentennial anniversary.

There are so many stories to share! Following are several topics that we can discuss in more detail when it is convenient for your schedule:

- Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac considered establishing a colony on Grosse Ile when he sailed past on July 23, 1701. A shortage of timber and perceived security of an island location influenced his decision to build at present-day Detroit (Fort Detroit).
- Established on July 6, 1776, *Westcroft Gardens & Farm* is the oldest family-owned and operated farm in Michigan, currently managed by 8th generation descendants of the Macomb family.
- Since the 1820s, several lighthouses on and around Grosse Ile provided navigational assistance and helped make the Detroit River a vital international shipping route.
- Beginning in 1873, the Canada Southern Railway carried people and freight between the U.S. and Canada with a stop on Grosse Ile. Before service stopped in 1929, Michigan Central ran an “accommodation train” from Grosse Ile to Detroit, serving businessmen going to work in the city and students attending high school there.
- In 1882, Edward W. Voigt purchased his father’s Detroit-based brewery—his product soon became the most popular in the city and had the largest brewery production in the state at that time. Voigt owned 400 acres of land on Grosse Ile; his *Island Home Stock Farm* raised the Percheron horses used to pull his beer wagons in Detroit. In 1886, Voigt was one of the founders of the *Edison Illuminating Company of Detroit* (forerunner to Detroit Edison), where he

The mission of the Grosse Ile Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and interpret historical information and materials relative to Grosse Ile, Michigan, and to teach, to promote study and research, and to generate interest in Grosse Ile history.

served as vice president for 15 years. He helped found the Detroit Art Museum, now the internationally-known *Detroit Institute of Arts*. Voigt was one of several prominent citizens who developed the *Boston-Edison Historic District*. In addition, he donated a large parcel of land to the city of Detroit, now known as *Voigt Park*—a tree-filled park located near Woodward Avenue.

- Cameron Waterman, who grew up on Grosse Ile, invented the gasoline-powered outboard motor and successfully tested his invention in the ice-filled Detroit River in February 1905. Cameron formed the *Waterman Marine Motor Company*, which made about 1,000 “Porto-Motors” per year.
- Completed in 1912, William Livingstone was instrumental in the construction of the *Livingstone Channel* in the Detroit River to accommodate new, larger steel freighters. Considered an engineering marvel, the world’s largest coffer dam was built to enable workers to excavate a 6,000-foot stretch of riverbed, 300 feet wide. The addition of the Livingstone Channel to accommodate downbound vessels substantially increased the opportunities for industry in Detroit and the Great Lakes.
- From 1927 to 1969, there was a U.S. Naval Air Station on Grosse Ile. During World War II, this small military base trained pilots of both the United States Air Force and the Royal Air Force. Several famous people were stationed on Grosse Ile, such as our 41st President of the United States, George H. W. Bush, and game show host Bob Barker. In 1928, Amelia Earhart set three speed records at the National Air Races on Grosse Ile. Celebrities who provided entertainment to the troops included Tommy Dorsey, Ed Sullivan and skating superstar Sonja Henie.

And there’s so much more to talk about! A luxury hotel on par with the Grand Hotel utilized by Detroiters, a “summer home” estate built by Ransom E. Olds that was utilized by the USO during WWII, the only successful metal-skinned airship ever built—the ZMC-2 (Zeppelin Metal Clad), and so on! Sharing multiple stories to provide insight on topics that could be of interest to viewers.

With advance notice, I should be able to obtain access to the North Channel Lighthouse, where you would get an amazing view of the Detroit River and Lake Erie and can learn more about the area’s history from one of our local experts. A portion of the Naval Base is now our Township offices, where we have a museum focusing on military history. And our History Museum (the former train depot) warrants a visit to see our exhibits and learn more about the amazing history of Grosse Ile.

Do you have an estimated timeline as to when you would possibly be visiting Grosse Ile? The Grosse Ile Historical Society is a volunteer, non-profit organization with a small (but mighty!) group of dedicated people who would want to ensure we are ready for such a wonderful opportunity!

Thank you,



Karin Cozzi, President
Grosse Ile Historical Society

Karin.cozzi@yahoo.com

734.775.8221 cell

Website: www.gihistsoc.org

EMMY AWARD-WINNING VISIONALIST ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTIONS

WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1997 BY PRODUCER / DIRECTOR KEITH FAMIE. SINCE THESE EARLY YEARS, FAMIE AND HIS TEAM HAVE PRODUCED A WIDE RANGE OF PRIMETIME PROGRAMS.

DOCUMENTARIES

- Ice Warriors (2005)** An action-packed journey with the Detroit Red Wings' Alumni team through Russia.
- Our Italian Story (2006)** Progress, passion and promise – Detroit's Italian heritage.
- Our Arab American Story (2007)** Reverence, resourcefulness and respect- Detroit's Arab American Heritage.
- Our Greek Story (2007)** Antiquity, modernity, and destiny- Detroit's Greek Heritage.
- Our Polish Story (2007)** Family, faith and fortitude- Detroit's Polish Heritage.
- Our India Story (2008)** Amity, diversity and sovereignty- Detroit's Indian Heritage.
- Detroit: Our Greatest Generation (2009)** A tribute to our Michigan WWII veterans, both men and women, who fought for the freedom of our families and our country.
- Our Vietnam Generation (2011)** A long overdue welcome home to the men and women who served during Vietnam.
- Can You See How I See? (2011)** An inspiring look into the life of those who are without sight.
- One Soldier's Story (2011)** the profound story of Sgt. Michael Ingram, Jr. and his legacy.
- The Embrace of Aging: Men's Series (2012)** 13-part series on men and 7-part series on women.
- The Embrace of Aging: Women's Series (2014)** 13-part series on women and 7-part series on men.
- The Embrace of Dying (2015)** 8-part series on how we deal with the end of life.
- Maire's Journey (2016)** Follow Maire Kent as she sets sail on an epic journey to fulfill her dying wish.
- Death is NOT the Answer (2016)** A deep look into the complex world of depression and suicide.
- Enlisted (2017)** Choice. Adventure. Growth. Why would one enlist in the military?
- Those on the Front Lines of Alzheimer's & Dementia (2018)** What can be done to stop this truly devastating disease?
- Those on the Front Lines of Cancer (2019)** Can the uncommon journey that cancer patients undergo result in anything positive?
- Blessed Solanus Casey's Journey to Sainthood (2019)** How does a humble boy from Irish immigrant parents rise to the rare and distinguished honor of beautification?
- Shoah Ambassadors (2021)** Bridging the chasm of the younger generation of today with that of the Holocaust generation through the exploration journey that two young non-Jewish individuals go on.
- Hospice Care in America Today (2022)** Where did Hospice originate? Why is this service so important for end of life care?
- Chromosomally Enhanced: What's Your Superpower? (2022)**
A story of those living and thriving with Down Syndrome.
- Detroit: The City of Churches (2022)** The significance the many Detroit churches played on some of the most iconic moments in Detroit's history.

MICHIGAN EMMY AWARD WINNERS

- Taste of Taiwan (2006)**
On-Camera Talent – Keith Famie
- Our Italian Story (2006)**
Best Human Interest Special, Best Director
- Our Polish Story (2007)**
Best Director: Post-Production
- Our Greek Story (2007)**
Best Cultural Documentary,
Best Human Interest Program Special
- Our Arab American Story (2007)**
Societal Concerns Program Special
- Our India Story (2008)**
Best Documentary Cultural
- Detroit: Our Greatest Generation (2009)**
Best Editor
- Our Vietnam Generation (2011)**
Best Documentary Historical
- The Embrace of Aging: The Female Perspective of Growing Old (2014)**
Best Director: Post-Production
- Shoah Ambassadors (2021)**
Best Director, Best Lighting, Best Editing

PRODUCTIONS IN 2023 / 2024

- Detroit: The City of Hot Rods & Muscle Cars -**
A celebration of the unique Detroit hot rod & muscle car community and how Motor City iron has circumnavigated the globe and shaped world culture.
- Detroit: The City by The River -** A journey up and down our beloved Detroit River, to uncover the richness of the past and gain a better understanding of where the river's meandering course will take us in the future.
- Fork in the Road -** Step into the lives of children who are thrust into the world of foster care through a series of life circumstances they had nothing to do with.
- The Razor's Edge -** A day in the lives of those that live on the razor's edge of society who face poverty and survival every day with many calling the streets their home.

AWARDS & HONORS

2016 - Maire's Journey-

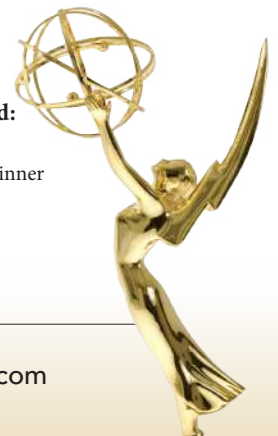
- DOCUTAH 2016 – International Documentary Film Festival – Winner

2021 - Shoah Ambassadors-

- Toronto Indie Filmmakers Festival - Best Feature Documentary - Winner
- SR Socially Relevant Film Festival NY – Honorable Mention
- Tokyo International Short Film Festival – Honorable Mention
- Austin Lift-Off Film Festival – Official Selection
- LA Documentary Film Festival – Official Selection
- Miami Jewish Festival – Official Selection
- Santa Monica Film Festival – Official Selection
- Malibu Film Festival – Official Selection

2022 - Chromosomally Enhanced: What's Your Superpower? -

- Grand Rapids Film Festival - Award Winner





Keith Famie **Director/Producer/Author**

Director/Producer Keith Famie was, for many years, known as a celebrity chef and a metro Detroit restaurateur. He was selected as one of America's "Best New Chefs" in 1989 by Food and Wine magazine; Esquire Magazine chose his restaurants as "Best New Restaurant" in America on two separate occasions. Famie was also a finalist on the 2001 reality television series, "Survivor, the Australian Outback."

Keith hosted his own Food Network series, "Keith Famie's Adventures," traveling the world documenting cooking styles from the plains of Africa to monk monasteries of Taiwan, to the lifestyle of Key West. In 2004, the Adventure Chef embarked on a new journey - documentary filmmaking. "I didn't want to be the 'Adventure Chef' guy anymore. I wanted to help people tell their stories."

Since that life-changing decision, Famie has been awarded twelve Michigan Emmys and been nominated several other times for his rich, human-interest storytelling, from ethnic documentaries to military tribute films. He and his team at Visionalist Entertainment Productions create informative, entertaining films that touch a wide audience.

Along with documentary filmmaking, Famie has released several books throughout his career, *Famie's Adventures in Cooking* (2001), *You Really Haven't Been There Until You've Eaten the Food* (2003), *Living Through the Lens* (2019), and *Papa's Rules for Life* (2021).

Outside of documentary production, Keith is involved in charitable projects. In 2003, Keith finished the 25th anniversary Ironman Triathlon World Championship in Kona with Team In Training for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. In 2015, he was awarded the 2015 Diamond Award by the Association for Women in Communications Detroit Chapter. In 2017, Keith was presented the Media Award by the Gilda's Club of Metro Detroit, and in 2023, Keith was awarded a Dove Award from The Arc of Oakland County for Media Distinction. Over the years, Keith has been actively involved in several well-respected, Michigan-based 501(c)(3) organizations that support everything from children with cancer and hunger relief to veterans' issues.

Visionalist Entertainment Productions | www.v-prod.com

