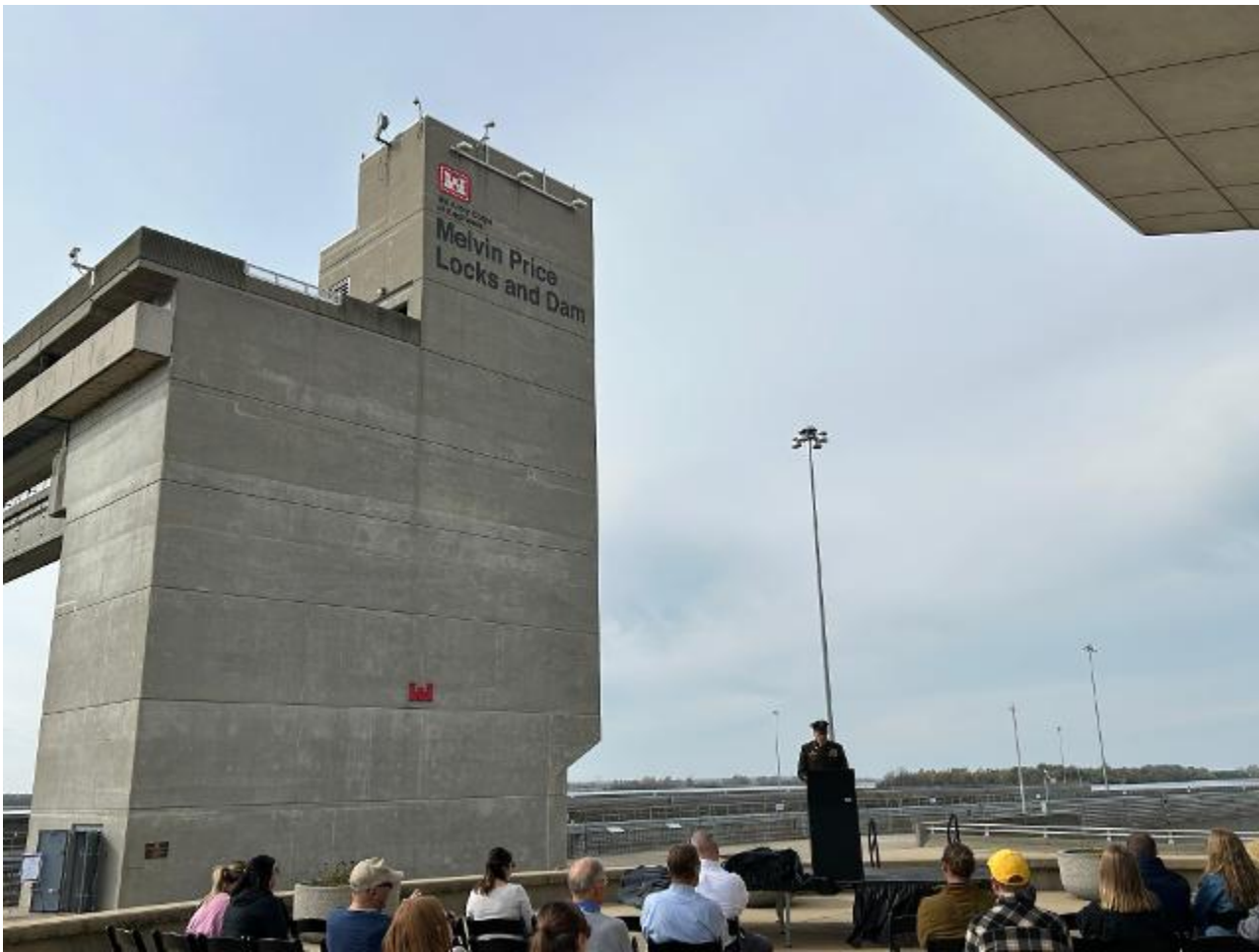


Alton's National Great Rivers Museum Celebrates 20 Years on the Mississippi

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - The National Great Rivers Museum (NGRM) celebrated its 20th anniversary with a commemoration ceremony on Saturday, Nov. 4, 2023.

Attendees could enjoy activity booths, a panel discussion and tours of the Melvin Price Locks and Dam. Throughout the commemoration, members of the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers (USACE) reflected on the museum's history as a visitor center and its role in connecting people to the river.

“My team and our project oversees community outreach for 300 miles of the Mississippi River and the lower 80 of the Illinois,” said Allison Rhanor, Natural Resources Specialist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and NGRM director. “This facility represents a multifaceted approach to river education. So whether your interest is in culture and history, or if you love art, or you're into STEM, science and math — my job here and this facility's job is to take whatever you're interested in and make that connection to the Mississippi River.”

Throughout the day, Rhanor and the speakers shared the museum's history over the past 20 years. Lock and Dam #26 opened in 1938 in Alton; it was replaced by Melvin Price Locks and Dam in 1990. Colonel Andy J. Pannier, USACE Commander of the St. Louis District, explained that the museum was approved ten years later and opened in 2003.

“For 20 years, our National Great Rivers Museum has served as a fundamental resource for communicating the value of the Mississippi River on a regional, national and international level,” Pannier said. “Our National Great Rivers Museum is a key component in reaching the public and providing outreach and education about what the Corps does and why it's important to all of you and the nation.”

He said that NGRM and the connecting Melvin Price Locks and Dam have brought in millions of visitors since the museum opened, which also promotes economic development in Alton and surrounding areas. Alton Mayor David Goins noted that the museum is “a hidden jewel” for many reasons, including those economic and tourism benefits.

“I just wish this facility continued success,” Goins added. “It is an integral part of our city, it is an integral part of our community, and we're just glad to be able to host this wonderful facility and to be able to say that it is in Alton, Illinois. It's such an honor.”

As the [Illinois State Chair for the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative](#), Goins has seen much of the river across the Midwest. Goins and the other speakers all recognized the sheer scope of the Mississippi River, with over 12,000 miles of navigable river that “brings economics and industry into the heart of America,” Pannier said.

On a more personal level, Rhanor works to connect people to the river “in whatever way is meaningful for them.” She acknowledged that most people in this region are used to the river, but she tries to remind them how they would feel if they saw the Nile or the Amazon rivers; as the fourth largest river in the world, the Mississippi is in the same class and carries the same amazement.

Toward the end of the commemoration ceremony, Paul Rohde, representing the [Waterways Council](#), recognized “the vital role this Mississippi River plays in all of our lives.” He encouraged visitors to appreciate it and celebrate the work done by the National Great Rivers Museum over the past 20 years.

“The Mississippi River is the reason people settled here. It’s not just an economic driver, but a driver of our culture and our communities,” Rohde said. “The National Great Rivers Museum is a tremendous institution to illustrate the importance of our rivers, especially the Mississippi River. And not just river navigation, but all the benefits this river provides, from recreation, tourism, habitat to wildlife and countless others.”

For more information about the National Great Rivers Museum, [visit their official website at mtrf.org](http://mtrf.org).