

Hattie Train: This is Hattie Train. I am at the National Working Waterfront Symposium in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Today is May 16th, 2018. Can you please state your name and how to spell it?

Dave Lemberg: Dave Lemberg, D-A-V-E, L-E-M-B-E-R-G.

HT: What is your job, and what town are you from?

DL: I'm a professor of Geography at Western Michigan University in the city of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

HT: Do you need him to point that out on the map, or you're good?

Female Speaker: Can you just repeat the university?

DL: Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan? That would be halfway between Detroit and Chicago. About right here.

HT: [laughter] In the hand. What do you and your community value about working waterfronts?

DL: Well, we don't exactly have a working waterfront now in Kalamazoo although we're redeveloping it. Kalamazoo is one of the largest cities in the country actually that was developed along a river that turns back on the river. The downtown is actually a good half mile from the waterfront. There were a series of paper mills along the river. Historically, they used the river more as a sewer than as a waterway. We actually live in the middle of a fifty-mile-long Superfund site, which is gradually being mitigated. Now we're starting to develop more friendly uses along the river in the city. But certainly, we're only thirty-five miles away from the big lake. We do a lot of our work along Lake Michigan rivers along the way. I've been doing a lot of my research focused on water trails for the past twenty years, all around the state.

HT: So, a common theme at this symposium has been that everyone here has a story.

DL: Yes.

HT: What is your working waterfront story?

DL: Well, I suppose I can look at a number of scales and timeframes. Certainly, over the years, when I came to Michigan, originally, I did my outdoor recreation underground and caves. But there aren't any caves in Michigan. So, when I came here for a university job, I had to find something else to play in. In Michigan, it's water. If you take a map of Michigan and you basically color in blue everything within a mile of a navigable waterway in the state, the entire state turns blue pretty much. In Michigan, a navigable waterway, by definition, going back to the old timber days, is any river that you can float a log. So, it's pretty broad definition. So, got involved in historical water trails initially and coastal water trails for sabbaticals. The first one was developing a heritage water trail program for the state of Michigan. The second one was

developing a linear coastal trail on Lake Michigan from Indiana to Wisconsin by the hundred miles. This is the atlas of the trail way right here. Now, approximately a year and a half ago, I had a stroke. So, that's kind of shifted some of my perceptions and research interests. Right now, I'm looking at access. What I'm presenting at this conference tomorrow is what I discovered getting onto boats, so going on tour boats, water taxis, charter fishing boats and so forth. It's not really easy to get on if you can't walk so well. Unfortunately, I've been recovering, so I've kind of seen what it's like at different levels along the way from using a cane, gimping along and so forth. But getting on a boat usually entails one, two, three steps, maybe a railing, maybe not, and a step across open water onto a moving deck. It's not very easy if you have limited balance or mobility. We have a rather large population in this country. It's actually twenty-nine million people who have issues with mobility beyond the wheelchair: just walking with a cane, with a walker rather, or just limping along. That's approximately the adult population of the state of California, which is a rather large market if you're looking at tourism, which is what I was doing much of my research in. So, the state of Michigan and everybody else is quite interested in how to deal with a rather large market that's getting larger all the time as America's aging.

HT: What are the emerging issues in your waterfront specifically?

DL: Well, I guess I'm trying to think of what is my waterfront? I guess I'm looking more of the broad area in terms of how to get people with limited mobility onto a tourism, recreation-oriented watercraft. I'm looking at everything from medium-sized to say fifty-foot tour boats and ferries, down to even dinghies and canoes.

HT: How can the National Working Waterfront Network support you going forward with this goal?

DL: Well, I think there's a lot of experience spread out around the country in terms of people who actually deal with the problem face to face. They have to get the tourists onto the boats, and they do. It just was very good timing for me in that this conference happened to be in my own backyard immediately after I started this research.

HT: You have been mentioning tourism in regard to access.

DL: Yes.

HT: Do you feel these communities in these waterfronts should first be made accessible to residents? By doing that, would then obviously be accessible to tourists as well.

DL: Well, I guess the whole point is access for everybody. One of the major difficulties with access as a whole on waterfronts is that the American Disabilities Act more or less ends at the water's edge. There's a quite a bit of text in the ADA on exactly how to design a wharf or pier and rather strict requirements of getting people down to that level, ramps, elevators, and so forth. But the regulations and the text really end at the edge of the pier. The reason is that there isn't any standard way that had been developed for making that transition. The reason is changes in water level to a great degree. If we're talking about whether it changes in lake level here or river level, or on a much broader scale, tides on the coast. You can't make one set of regulations when

the tide is two feet or four feet or ten feet, depending on where you are. The more change in water level you have, makes it more and more expensive and less and less easy to get you from the water's edge onto the boat. If the boat is sitting down below the pier at one time and up above at the other, and you're trying to get the angle of one and twelve that you would need to get down to the pier. Getting a ramp with rollers on the bottom attached to a boat is very expensive. The longer the ramp, the more expensive it is because you really need to have that ramp attached to the boat rather than attached to the pier. If you're looking at some sort of rolling ramp on the structure, that gets even more expensive.

HT: Have there been any successes you found with your work that can be implemented other places?

DL: Well, it's an interesting thing. When I first got into this condition of limited mobility, I've done a lot of traveling in the past year and a half. That's involved going on a number of tour boats both in the U.S. and New Zealand. What I found was that there wasn't any good design out there. I looked online after I got back and tried to find something that was working and really didn't find an awful lot. I've talked to the people in charge of the ADA in Washington. I've talked to operators. I tried to figure out what I would want. I'm more or less working on inventing my own solution. When I got back from whale watching in Hawaii, I looked for a manufacturer here in Michigan who made a lot of the components that I thought I would need for the design. It turns out there's one right nearby in Jackson. So, I visited the manufacturer. I saw what they had in the warehouse. They had almost everything that I wanted for my own design of a method I thought might work. So, we're moving forward with that. I'm about to hire an engineering student at my university to help me with the CAD design, to look at manufacturing designs for making prototype. I'm working with the Pacific Whale Foundation in Maui to see if the design might actually work. If there isn't something that works out there, you sometimes have to invent your own.

HT: Obviously, it is still in the processes. But do you feel you are able to partner with the National Working Waterfront Network and trying to get this, if it works locally, to try and get it to work nationally?

DL: I really don't know at this point. I'm just really learning about the organization. But I figure if I can get something that will work, there will be a lot of people interested. Hopefully, I can use this network to help to get the word out.

HT: Is there anything else you feel like you would like to add?

DL: Well, not on that. Is there anything you want to talk about water trails?

HT: Do you feel that water trails are accessible to people with disabilities? Or do you still feel there is a barrier between those activities?

DL: Well, it's interesting because the state of Michigan is making concerted efforts to make them more accessible. There's a manufacturer of a type of dock that you can roll a kayak or a canoe into, to get on and get off. I believe they cost about \$20,000, \$30,000. The state has been

working with some people to put together grants to install them at the origins of some of our new water trails. So, we're trying to make the water trails more accessible. I've actually been thinking about a design for something that'll cost a whole lot less for canoes. I haven't come up with anything cheap to get people to do a kayak yet, but we'll think about it.

HT: You had said before we started that you did not know if we wanted old or new stories. A lot of what you are telling is very new. Are there any old stories of what got you involved with this type of stuff in the first place that you feel you would like to share or...

DL: Yes, actually, would be one that might be of interest of how it all got started. I guess we go back twenty years when I first arrived in Michigan. A few months after I arrived, I attended the inaugural Michigan Trails Conference. I sat through a session from a fellow named Dean Sandell, who was a member of the Michigan – the Department of Natural Resources at the time. He was kind of the lone voice in the wilderness for water trails in Michigan. Michigan at the time was one of the few states without any state water trail program, going back in the late [19]90s. Dean had been trying for a good fifteen years to develop a state water trail program, but funds were limited. The DNR was focused on rail trails and land trails, didn't have any resources for him. So, we hit it off, brainstormed for a little while. He had been working with the 4-H here in Michigan in a kind of legislative intern program where they're trying to put together a bill to get through the legislature. He convinced them to do a bill focusing on developing a state water trail. So, he put it through the 4-H, I think in 2001, and it hung up in committee and died. We brainstormed after I met him and came up with a different way of marketing it. He had done it as a recreation program. I was more of an academic and planner. We came up with something we called the Heritage Watershed Program. A heritage water trail is something that focused on history, art and culture, education, and economic development. Where we would put interpretive signs on bridge crossings on the route, and you would learn about things as you paddled down the river. We marketed this thing when we put together a bill the next year with the 4-H kids as something based on history, culture, environment, education, and especially economic development, creating tourism and businesses along the rivers. It passed unanimously. I had an unfunded mandate for a water trail program and spent the next fifteen years working at it. I got a few grants. We did some trails on the river. We did the first trail on the Lake Huron coastline, up on the Thumb. Got funding for a full year to work on a trail on the entire Michigan Shore, Lake Michigan. But recently, I'm not really up to doing a massive of amount of kayaking. I can't get my arm that high. Just getting my canoe stroke back, so letting other people work on it.

HT: Do you think that is it?

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