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**Cover Image: Weber Point**

When the City of Stockton first came to the Mayors Institute of City Design on October 1994 Weber Point was “vacant and unlandscaped, with abandoned parking lots, an occasional tree, and a pervasive sense of neglect.” As previously reported in *Places* (Vol. 10, No. 1, Winter 1996, pp. 32-37), the point had once been the heart of the city’s Gold Rush-era port. Yet the only indicator it had been an important destination for steamers plying the delta channels 65 miles inland from San Francisco was the landmark Hotel Stockton that faced onto it.

According to the case-study material developed for the Institute, a series of failed redevelopment plans had left the city with a dead zone at its heart. And the most recent redevelopment scheme—to locate a convention center, office building, and parking structure there—had failed to inspire the community. At the Institute, held that year in San Antonio, Texas, the resource panel counseled the City, represented by Mayor Joan Darrah, to forgo that scheme. They argued that a community panel should be formed to build public consensus for a more distinctive use of the precious waterfront site.

Darrah returned to Stockton and did just that. Working with the Stockton City Council, which was also eager for a change, she appointed a 28-person task force and hired a consultant team of urban designers,

landscape architects, and economic-development experts. Their eventual recommendation was for a “water square” that would provide a focus for public consciousness and a site for animated family-oriented recreation events.

Darrah is no longer Mayor of Stockton, but she believes the Weber Park Events Center that now occupies the point has turned out to be everything her city could have hoped for.

As she writes, “It is a park to stroll in and look out at the water. Children run in the interactive fountain on warm days, swing or slide on the play structure, or walk on the footprint of the house of our founder, Captain Charles Weber. It has served as the catalyst for major waterfront revitalization that includes a sixteen-screen Cineplex, an arena, a ballpark, and a Sheraton Hotel.

“It is also the location of our city’s largest events, like the Asparagus Festival [pictured here] and the Cinco de Mayo celebration. On the Fourth of July every year thousands of Stocktonians come together to celebrate. The Stockton Symphony plays on an elevated stage under an expansive canopy; they conclude with the Star Spangled Banner, and a fireworks extravaganza begins. “The place of our city’s founder [is now] a place for all Stocktonians.”

Photo courtesy of *The Stockton Record*.