

NEWSMAKER OF THE YEAR



Edsel Ford II said after his speech that Belle Isle is "a little bit of a stepchild."

Ford calls for effort to restore Belle Isle's glory

Group raising money hopes notice will bring support

BY JENNETTE SMITH

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Efforts to revitalize ailing Belle Isle received a boost from Edsel Ford II during his Newsmaker of the Year speech last week.

Ford, who was named *Crain's* Newsmaker largely for his efforts with the **Detroit 300 Conservancy** and the recently opened Campus Martius Park, said he'd like to see Belle Isle returned to its former glory. He even suggested bringing back Grand Prix-style auto racing to the island as an idea to consider.

"I want my grandchildren to have the experience that I have

had with my children, enjoying the tranquility of a weekday and the excitement of race day at Belle Isle," he said.

READ THE SPEECH

The full text of Edsel Ford II's Newsmaker speech is available at www.craainsdetroit.com.

Edsel Ford II's suggestion probably wasn't realistic, but said it's possible he would consider investing time in new volunteer efforts to renovate the

Detroit park.

"I've got to clean up my dance card," said Ford, who is known for his multiple nonprofit commitments.

Anthony and Sarah Earley said they were pleased at the positive audience reaction to Ford's comments about Belle Isle. Anthony Earley Jr. is chairman and CEO of **DTE Energy Co.** The Earleys said Ford's comments illustrate the deep feelings many people have about Belle Isle. Sarah Earley founded a new group called the **Belle Isle Women's Committee** that seeks to raise money for improvements on the island. Sarah Earley said the group's initial goal is \$100,000. The group, an arm of nonprofit **Friends of Belle Isle**, has not yet identified its priorities for reno-

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ventions, she said.

"There is no one championing Belle Isle," she said. "I am just interested."

A fund-raiser is planned for June 7 at the park, which will include honoring a Belle Isle legacy award recipient, Earley said.

A previous master plan for the 982-acre island prepared in 2000 by Detroit-based **Hamilton Anderson Associates** for the city estimates that \$180 million is needed for park improvements. Because that is unrealistic right now, likely priorities include the island's aquarium and maintenance of attractions that are still open, said David Sanders, vice president of the **Metropolitan Affairs Coalition**. The coalition is assisting many improvement efforts along the Detroit River through its Greater Detroit American Heritage River Initiative.

Peter Malcolmson, treasurer of the Friends of Belle Isle, said the new women's committee is a good addition and said his priorities for renovation would include lighting, the **Detroit Boat Club** building, the zoo (closed in 2002) and the island's conservatory. The city recreation department has done a good job recently on picnic shelter maintenance and road repaving, he said.

The main message of Ford's Newsmaker speech was to urge more time and money investment by business leaders in Detroit. He said Campus Martius Park's early success as a people magnet shows the success possible when many civic leaders stand up for the city.

Ford said it took a group of conservancy members, corporate leaders and a partnership with the city to complete the Campus Martius project. As chairman of the Detroit 300 Conservancy, Ford ensured the park was funded and built on schedule. The park, which cost \$20 million and opened in November, is one of the conservancy's legacy projects from Detroit's 300th birthday cele-

bration in 2001.

"So many foundations, businesspeople and so many businesses gave so willingly of their time and their finances to underwrite something truly thrilling ... a union of private and public interests to create a green gathering space in the heart of our hometown," Ford told the crowd of 1,000-plus at **Cobo Center**. The Wednesday Newsmaker luncheon was sponsored by the **Women's Economic Club** and the **Detroit Economic Club**.

Business leaders who care about Detroit can do some simple things to keep the momentum of Campus Martius Park rolling, Ford said. Bring friends downtown for a dinner on the weekend. Go skating at the new park's ice rink, he urged.

"I think of the recent (Motown Winter Blast) celebrations; and I think of seeing Roger Penske there, both days, bundled up at Campus Martius Park with every item from the L.L. Bean catalog — and then some — and loving every minute of it," he said. "If we really want Detroit to be *the* place to be, then first we have to be in Detroit."

Penske is chairman of **Penske Corp.** and the **Super Bowl XL Host Committee**.

In the early portion of his remarks, Ford harkened back to his family history. He is the great-grandson of **Ford Motor Co.** founder Henry Ford and the son of Henry Ford II, president of the company from 1945 to 1960 and chairman from 1960 to 1980.

Edsel Ford is a retired vice president of Ford and former president and COO of **Ford Motor Credit**. He remains a member of the Ford board of directors and a consultant to the company, active in company affairs and corporate-dealer relations. He also owns **Pentastar Aviation L.L.C.** in Waterford Township

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