

Hamilton closer to cleaning up its image

Ottawa promises \$30m to cap toxins at Randle Reef

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Observers say cleaning up Hamilton's image will be the ultimate benefit of the \$30-million Canadian Environment Minister John Baird is pledging toward the \$90-million cost of cleaning up Randle Reef.

John Shaw is a retired Environment Canada official who, until recently, was in charge of the plan to cap and contain tonnes of toxic mud on the floor of Hamilton Harbour. He reacted to the announcement yesterday by saying the harbour restoration will serve as an international model for pollution cleanup, "but the other important aspect is its potential to change how Hamilton is seen from the outside."

His view is backed by a York University study that says polishing the city's image by cleaning up the harbour is worth at least \$1 billion.

York's computer model predicts the Randle Reef project will generate a direct economic gain of \$126 million for the port, industry and tourism, but the big payoff -- more than \$900 million -- will come when that work leads to the International Joint Commission taking the harbour off its list of Great Lakes pollution hot spots, helping to change the picture of Hamilton as a dirty, polluted place.

Outside his family and maybe his riding association, it's hard to imagine anyone giving Baird a warmer welcome than he received from local politicians, businesspeople and environmental leaders at the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club yesterday afternoon.

The crowd was all smiles, including NDP MPs David Christopherson and Wayne Marston, sitting in the front row, who were among the many Hamilton representatives who lobbied hard for the federal government to match the \$30 million promised by the Ontario government earlier this year.

As the clapping died down after he confirmed the money would flow, Baird glanced down at the audience and said, "I never thought I'd see David Christopherson applauding me."

Christopherson looked around and said with a laugh, "The things you do for your city."

Jim Hudson, executive director of the Bay Area Restoration Council, said the next challenge will be raising another \$30 million from municipalities and other local sources, including in-kind donations from Dofasco, U.S. Steel and other industries.

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