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Vision for Onondaga Creek

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4/22/04:

Onondaga Creek did not earn the name "killer creek" for its entertainment value. For decades, the creek has been the backdoor to Syracuse neighborhoods: fenced off, dumped in and, when possible, forgotten. But now, some people think it's where the city could grow again. In an era when waterfronts and river walks have revitalized cities like Denver and Baltimore and Cleveland, Onondaga Creek is ready to make a splash.

At least, these students at SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry think so. They've waded into the issue, and they've come up with some exciting ideas. They envision a greenway of forests, parks and gardens through some of the city's most interesting places. And they want to link that green space with nearby parks, to carry the revitalization into the neighborhoods of the southwest side.

Emanuel Carter, SUNY ESF Professor: "Unlike many creeks that might be revitalized for bike paths and walking paths and that kind of thing, this creek actually goes to where 30,000 people a day work. It goes right through downtown."

Parts of the puzzle are already coming together. The Inner Harbor is taking shape in dramatic fashion. And the creek through Franklin Square offers just a preview of what it could become, all the way to the Valley.

Steve Kearney, ESF Grad Student: "You know, a lot of smaller and midsize cities are rebounding, and it's projects like this that are really starting to open the city up again."

There are a lot of challenges. Cleaning the water, for one. Dealing with the odor. And paying for the upgrades. Emanuel Carter: "People want to identify with something that's unique and special. We have a unique and special landscape here, but it has to be appreciated in detail, and that's one of the things you can do along a creek corridor. We don't have high mountains or an ocean front."

Let your mind flow for a second. Imagine a creek with the banks clean, green and terraced, with restaurants and boutiques overlooking the water, and condominiums atop the shops. Commuters leaving their cars at home and taking bike paths through parks and botanical gardens to work.

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That vision for Onondaga Creek is one of the main topics for tomorrow's 'Focus Greater Syracuse' luncheon, celebrating central New York waterways. It starts at Noon at the Oncenter. There are a few seats available for \$20 at the door.

