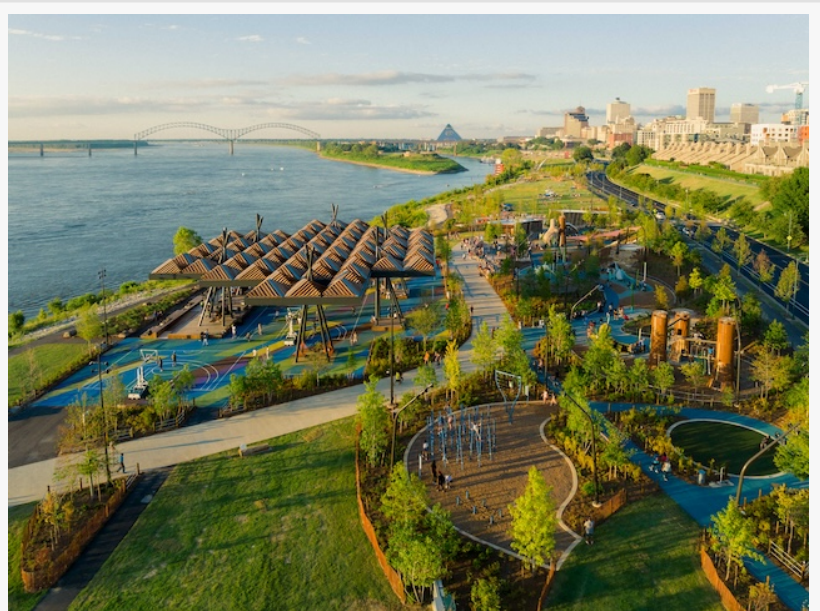


# 2025 marks 100th anniversary of Tom Lee's dramatic rescue of 32 from the Mississippi River at Memphis

*Nonprofit Memphis River Parks Partnership plans year-long celebration to honor 1925 heroic rescue of 32 white engineers and their families by Black river worker*

MEMPHIS, TN, UNITED STATES, January 14, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- 2025 is the year of the 100th anniversary of Memphian Tom Lee's dramatic rescue of 32 people when the sternwheeler M.E. Norman capsized in the Mississippi River. Memphian Tom Lee carried out the rescue in his small skiff boat, the Zev, even though he couldn't swim. Tom Lee was Black; those he rescued – engineers and their family members – were white.



The 31-acre, \$61 million Tom Lee Park honors the memory of Tom Lee's heroic river rescue of 32 engineers and their families in 1925

The story of the May 8, 1925, rescue may have been lost over time, as stories from history sometimes are, but it was brought back to the forefront of the public's consciousness with the internationally praised renovation of Tom Lee Park on the Memphis riverfront a little more than a year ago.

Tom Lee Park is surrounded by racially and economically stratified neighborhoods, presenting Tom Lee Park with the rare opportunity to create public space to bring together people from all walks of life.

"This park was designed to reflect the values Tom Lee brought to life that fateful day on the Mississippi," said Carol Coletta, president and CEO of Memphis River Parks Partnership. "It is so rare to have a public space that builds on the values of its namesake, but that's exactly what Memphis has on its riverfront. Every day our rangers intentionally call on park visitors to embrace Tom Lee's spirit where his rescue made history."

Tom Lee Park is home to A Monument to Listening, a permanent public installation work by Theaster Gates. Commissioned by the Memphis River Parks Partnership with support from the Mellon Foundation, A Monument to Listening features 32 functional sculptures made from honed basalt, one for each of the lives Tom Lee saved. Tom Lee's courageous sacrifice is represented by another towering sculpture made from polished basalt. A Monument to Listening encourages intentional discussions about the truths of race. Tom Lee Park also features a bronze sculpture, the Tom Lee Memorial, by David Alan Clark, which shows Tom Lee committing his historic river rescue.

On May 8, 1925, Tom Lee made trip after trip to bring more survivors to shore, then he built them a fire and notified authorities. Newspaper journalists heard about Tom Lee's bravery from those who had witnessed the event, but they had to search Lee out to report on the story because he didn't seek attention for the miraculous thing he'd done.

Newspapers reported that some of the white people in the river drowned after refusing help from the Black man.

“

It is so rare to have a public space that builds on the values of its namesake, but that's exactly what Memphis has on its riverfront.”

*Carol Coletta, president and CEO, Memphis River Parks Partnership*

In honor of the 100th anniversary, Memphians are being encouraged to “Keep it Tom Lee” by drawing inspiration from Tom Lee's example of unity, selflessness and unwavering commitment to helping others. Memphis Mayor Paul Young proclaimed 2025 as Tom Lee 100 in Memphis.

The Memphis River Parks Partnership, which manages Tom Lee Park and the rest of the Memphis riverfront, wants to raise awareness of the remarkable story of Tom Lee even

further with a year-long 100th anniversary celebration to honor his memory. The Partnership plans a series of activities to encourage people to embrace the values Tom Lee exhibited: courage, generosity and humanity. The events will include:



Tom Lee's gumption was praised in a May 9, 1925, article in The Commercial Appeal with the subheadline "Motor boat manned by Tom Lee performs wonders, and was responsible for saving many lives."

- Community all-sings starting this spring will bring Memphians together to raise their voices in songs that echo the values of Tom Lee.
- Visitors will be able to take an interactive walking tour of the Tom Lee story on the winding path through Tom Lee Park.
- A commissioned poem by Ed Mabrey, the “GOAT of poetry slam,” will honor Tom Lee 100. Mabrey has won 500 poetry slam competitions, four world championships and six regional competitions.
- A new short film by Last Bite Films will offer an artistic take on Tom Lee’s rescue.
- A parade unlike anything Memphis has ever seen is planned for 901 Day. 901 Day is a day Memphians use to celebrate their city, which has a 901 area code.
- Memphians can snag an exclusive Tom Lee 100 T-shirt by sharing their ideas about what Memphis would look like if everyone were just 1 percent more like Tom Lee, exhibiting courage, generosity and humanity. Beginning Feb. 18 – what would have been Tom Lee’s 140th birthday – the first 100 people to share their ideas on a special board at the riverfront and post about it on social media will receive the free T-shirt.
- High school students are invited to create original works of spoken word or poetry for the fourth annual Tom Lee Poetry Content, which opens for submissions Feb. 1.
- A partnership with the Memphis Room at the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library will encourage research on Tom Lee’s story.
- On Thursday, May 8, Memphians are encouraged to honor the memory of Tom Lee with a day of service.



Hero and Memphian Tom Lee



A Monument to Listening by Theaster Gates features 32 functional sculptures, one for each of the 32 lives Tom Lee saved. Tom Lee’s courageous sacrifice is represented by another towering sculpture.

- Memphis River Parks Partnership will honor Tom Lee 100 with a family-friendly celebration this summer.

### About Memphis River Parks Partnership

Memphis River Parks Partnership is a nonprofit public-private partnership that works with and for the people of Memphis to trigger the transformative power of their river. The Partnership manages five park districts along six miles and has raised \$80 million for public parks and assets along the Memphis riverfront over the past seven years.

The Partnership's properties include Tom Lee Park, a 31-acre park named in honor of Memphian Tom Lee, who couldn't swim but saved 32 people when a sternwheeler capsized in the Mississippi River in 1925. Tom Lee Park was named one of the top three urban design [World Changing Ideas](#) by Fast Company magazine. Since its opening Labor Day 2023, the new Tom Lee Park has drawn 1.6 million visitors.

More information about Memphis River Parks Partnerships is available at [memphisriverparks.org](http://memphisriverparks.org).

Kim Cherry

Cherry and Company Public Relations

+1 901-230-8121

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[X](#)

[Instagram](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/776914693>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2025 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.