

# Memphis riverfront's Tom Lee Park earns spot on ULI's prestigious list of top 10 developments in North and South America

MEMPHIS, TN, UNITED STATES, June 24, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Tom Lee Park](#) has earned a coveted [ULI Americas Award for Excellence](#) from the Urban Land Institute.

Tom Lee Park was selected from 94 projects submitted from North and South America. A 15-member jury composed of development, finance, planning, urban design, architecture and landscape architecture experts selected 18 finalists then narrowed the list to 10 winners.

The redesigned Tom Lee Park on the Memphis riverfront was named for a Black river worker who saved 32 prestigious white people when their sternwheeler capsized in the Mississippi River in 1925 – even though he couldn't swim. Tom Lee Park, whose design reflects Tom Lee's legacy of courage, generosity and humanity, has been visited more than 2.4 million times since it reopened Labor Day 2023. Tom Lee Park is managed by the nonprofit [Memphis River Parks Partnership](#).

“

[Tom Lee Park transforms] a significant piece of the riverfront into a signature park where community life can flourish along the water's edge and attracts 1,000,000 visitors annually.”  
*Urban Land Institute*



A Monument to Listening in Tom Lee Park honors Tom Lee's courageous sacrifice in 1925 when he rescued 32 people from the Mississippi River, even though he couldn't swim.

ULI said, “Tom Lee Park signifies a turning point in the city's relationship with its riverfront with an emphasis on inclusivity, restorative ecology, equity and opportunity. It catalyzes the reunification of river and city by transforming a significant piece of the riverfront into a signature park where community life can flourish along the water's edge and attracts 1,000,000 visitors annually.”

Paul Chandler, president and CEO of Memphis River Parks Partnership, said, "The Memphis riverfront is fast gaining recognition as one of the most intriguing public spaces in the world. Top honors from highly respected organizations like ULI and others bring national and international seals of approval to what we already know in Memphis: Our riverfront is a very special place where everyone is welcome, exciting programming creates joyful activity and a variety of spaces let people experience the awesome wonder of the Mississippi River in their own way – all centered on a park named for a Black man who couldn't swim but risked his life to save 32 white people who were drowning in a raging, powerful river 100 years ago."

The mission of ULI, the oldest and largest network of real estate and land use experts in the world, is to "shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide."

ULI has presented the ULI Americas Awards for Excellence annually since 1979 to projects that "represent the highest standards of achievement in the development industry." The program evaluates submissions on overall excellence, including achievements in marketplace acceptance, design, planning, technology, amenities, economic impact, management, community engagement, innovation and sustainability, among others.

The ULI program evaluated submissions on overall excellence including equity, relevance, stewardship, accessibility, programming, design, community engagement, innovation and sustainability and serving as a model for others. It also included a site visit by ULI jurors.

In today's news release announcing the winners, awards jury chair Jackie Knight, president of The Ackerberg Group, said, "There was an incredible swath of nominees from North America, Central America and South America this year, which made selecting winners from an



Under construction on the Memphis riverfront: The Memphis Flyway will become the premier place to experience the Mississippi River



The Life on the River playground in Tom Lee Park was named one of the 11 Most Unique Playgrounds in the U.S.



outstanding pool of finalists a challenge. The jury was impressed by the diversity of entries, especially the number of developments that focused on creating spaces that build and connect communities in unique ways. It is not an 'easy' time to develop, and these award-winning developments found creative ways to build partnerships and execute critical work, enhancing the built environment for us today as well as for generations to come."

Tom Lee Park has brought a slew of national and international honors and attention to Memphis. Earlier this month, the park won a 2025 Regional and Urban Design Award from the American Institute of Architects. That award recognizes Tom Lee Park for revitalizing the Memphis riverfront, reconnecting the city to the Mississippi River "through inclusive design and accessible amenities."

Tom Lee Park has also won a design honor award from the American Society of Landscape Architecture, the highest honor award for urban design from the American Institute of Architects New York, a spot among the 100 top projects in the world in 2024 from Bilbao Metropoli 30 and honors as one of the top three urban design World Changing Ideas from Fast Company magazine. The Life on the River playground in Tom Lee Park was named one of the 11 Most Unique Playgrounds in the U.S. by Mental Floss, and the park has also earned SITES certification for sustainable urban design.



More than 10,000 students have visited Tom Lee Park as part of Memphis River Parks Partnership's educational outreach



The redesigned Tom Lee Park on the Memphis riverfront has earned a spot on the Urban Land Institute's list of the top 10 developments in North and South America

## About Memphis River Parks Partnership

Memphis River Parks Partnership is a nonprofit that works with and for the people of Memphis to trigger the transformative power of the Mississippi River. The Partnership manages nine parks along five miles of the Memphis riverfront and has raised \$80 million for public parks and assets along the Mississippi River. These include 31-acre Tom Lee Park, named in honor of Memphian Tom Lee who couldn't swim but rescued 32 people when a sternwheeler capsized in the Mississippi River in 1925. His character traits are infused into the park's programming and design, which reflects input from thousands of Memphians. Tom Lee Park has been visited more than two million times since it opened Labor Day 2023. It has won national and international awards, including being named one of the World Changing Ideas by Fast Company magazine. More information about Memphis River Parks Partnership is available at [memphisriverparks.org](https://memphisriverparks.org).

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