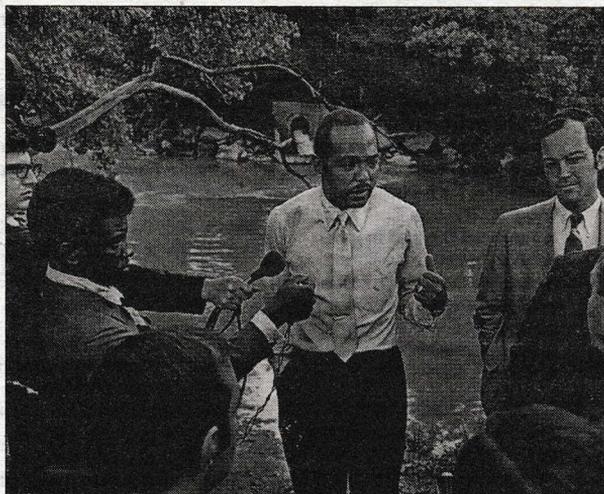


Outdoors



PLAIN DEALER HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Mayor Carl Stokes discusses the problem of water pollution in 1969.



LAURA DEMARCO | THE PLAIN DEALER

Peter Lawson Jones plays Carl Stokes on the new Canal Basin Take a Hike tour.

Meet Carl Stokes, environmentalist

Tour focuses on his relationship with Cuyahoga River, lakefront

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The meteoric rise of Carl Burton Stokes from a high school dropout who grew up in Cleveland's Outhwaite Homes to becoming the first black mayor of a major American city in 1967 is well known. Less well known, but significant in Cleveland history, is Stokes' role as an environmentalist.

Following the historic disaster of the burning river on June 22, 1969, Stokes turned his focus to cleaning up Cleveland's beaches and riverfronts. His environmental significance, as well as personal history, is recounted on a new Take a Hike Canal Basin walking tour, in which the former mayor is played by former Cuyahoga County Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones.

The next free tour is 10

a.m. Sunday. Upcoming tours are July 16, July 30, Aug. 20, and Sept. 10 and 17. All tours meet at 10 a.m. at the Flat Iron Cafe on the west bank of the Flats.

"Cleveland had been the poster boy for environmental disaster," says Jones. But thanks to Stokes, 10 months after the river fire, Cleveland had its first Earth Day. Stokes helped lead the fight for the 1972 Clean Water Act, too.

"As a black politician, you are expected to focus on issues of race and poverty," says Jones. "What many people don't know was what an environmentalist Carl Stokes was, too. He made the city and water better for everyone."

The Canal Basin tour traces the rise of Stokes from the (then new) Outhwaite housing projects to his mayoral win in 1967, defeating Seth Taft. But the

tour focuses on Stokes' relationship with the river and lakefront, too.

A crowd of 20 people gathered in the Flats on a recent Sunday morning for the Take a Hike Canal Basin tour. The 90-minute tour is one of five heritage tourism

efforts of the Gateway District. The others are Gateway District, Warehouse District, Playhouse Square and Civic Center. All of the tours are free. For more information, go to clevelandgatewaydistrict.com/history/heritage-tourism.