

Vancouver's waterfront fountain opens to public

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Adaline Sokol, 2, left, and Gage Marshall splash in the new Columbia River water feature Friday afternoon at the Waterfront Vancouver development. The piece opened to the public Friday morning, just in time for passersby to cool their feet in the late-summer heat. Photos by Nathan Howard/The Columbian

The Columbia River water feature at the Waterfront Vancouver development is open to the public, just in time for passersby to cool their feet in the late-summer heat.

The piece, which mimics the topography of the Columbia River Basin, appeared mostly complete in June but remained cordoned off from the public behind a fence. That fence finally came down Friday morning.

By 1 p.m., a few little kids were splashing around in the water as pedestrians sat to examine the installation — a molded riverbed bordered by stacks of granite and culminating in a massive stone and bronze monolith.

“Think of the thousands of people that will enjoy this for years and years,” said Vancouver Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle, who visited the newly opened site with Vancouver City Councilor Linda Glover and two officers from the Vancouver Police Department’s bicycle unit.

“That’s an incredible gift,” McEnery-Ogle said.

The full installation is valued at \$3.5 million. It was donated to Vancouver by Columbia Waterfront, LLC and formally transferred to the city on Monday. The Parks and Recreation Department will maintain the feature and the water that flows through it, which is chlorinated.

At the easternmost side of the feature, which runs parallel to the Columbia River, is a 12-by-16-foot monolith. On the east side is a bas-relief map of the Columbia River Basin in cast bronze, including the Rocky Mountains, Cascades and Coast mountain ranges and valleys. The opposite side features an engraved stone map depicting the origins of the Columbia River.

From the bottom of the monolith, water flows an inch deep for 150 feet west on a concrete bed stamped with a river pattern. Granite slabs line the riverbed, each representing a different tributary of the Columbia River and engraved with information and literary quotes.

“No water, no life. No blue, no green,” one says, quoting marine biologist and author Sylvia Earle.

The piece was designed by Larry Kirkland, the same artist and architect who designed the nearby Grant Street Pier.

“I believe that carefully conceived environments can create places of meaning within communities,” Kirkland said in a media release. “The best of public art can challenge, delight, educate and illuminate. But above all, it can celebrate the qualities that make each place unique and can create a sense of civic ownership. This pride of place is a building block for the future of these communities.”

