

## Richmond, Va., Business, Community Leaders Dub New Downtown District.

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Nov. 6--Richmond has the Fan District, Carytown and many other neighborhood designations.

Now a section of the city has a new identity -- the River District.

The area encompasses Shockoe Slip, Shockoe Bottom, the Canal, the Turning Basin, Tobacco Row, Mayo Island and the 17th Street Farmers Market areas.

A group of businesses in those areas, along with the city government and other groups, have formed an organization to promote the River District to residents and visitors. They plan to reveal a marketing campaign, along with a new logo, at a news conference this morning.

The hope is that the name recognition of the River District will become as strong as it is for the Fan District or Carytown, organizers said.

"This is a far more encompassing name for that area," said Jack Berry, executive director of Richmond Renaissance, a public-private group promoting downtown Richmond.

"People don't know where Shockoe Slip ends and Shockoe Bottom begins," Berry said. "This is an effort to pull all of those areas together and help liven the area with events and promotions."

The new designation does not mean that the Shockoe Slip or Shockoe Bottom names will go by the wayside.

Rather, it is an effort to link the neighborhoods together for marketing purposes, said Mark Merhige, president of Shockoe Properties Inc. His real estate development company manages 450 apartments, buildings housing eight restaurants and about 250,000 square feet of commercial space in the River District.

"The number of diverse neighborhoods in this area is one of the greatest assets to have," said Merhige, co-chairman of the River District Alliance. "But what we have found is that the neighborhoods were acting in a vacuum when it came to events and marketing. There are some great economies of scale and connections between them."

Andrew Thornton, who with his wife, Sarah Paxton, owns LaDifference contemporary home-furnishings store, said residents and visitors may not know how encompassing the River District is.

"A lot of it is a mind shift," said Thornton, the other co-chairman of the River District Alliance. "You don't want to be locked into one area. This opens up the entire area."

About 18 months ago, businesses, retailers and restaurant owners in the area began meeting with the idea of marketing the area as a destination. It hired an executive director to coordinate efforts.

About 60 percent of the funding for the River District Alliance comes from businesses. The city has given the group \$75,000 and Richmond Renaissance has kicked in \$25,000.

The group hired Elevation, a local ad agency, to conduct brand research and create a logo. The logo will be used in local marketing at first, including stickers for storefront windows and banners.

"The average tourist or the average person doesn't give a darn if they are in the Shockoe Slip or Shockoe Bottom. To them it is all one area so let's market it all under one umbrella organization," Thornton said.

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