

SAVANNAH INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND CONVENTION CENTER / FACILITY'S WALKWAY CRUMBLING - COLLAPSE COULDN'T HAVE COME AT A WORSE TIME: OPENING IS THREE WEEKS AWAY.

By Pamela E. Walck Savannah Morning News April 13, 2000 Publication: Savannah Morning News (GA) Page: 1A Word Count: 589

What started with a handful of bricks tumbling out of place has turned into a collapsed 30-foot portion of the riverwalk between the Savannah International Trade and Convention Center and the Westin Savannah Harbor Resort.

The riverwalk, which runs along the north bank of the Savannah River, cost \$6 million to build. Repair costs are unknown at this time.

"It just sunk," said Paul O'Connell, director of operations for SMG, a company hired by the county to run the trade center. "Walking by, you could watch the bricks going down."

O'Connell said it started around St. Patrick's Day and climaxed three weeks ago.

"There was some unusual settling," said Patrick Monahan, Chatham County's assistant county manager. "This indicates a much more severe problem."

According to Monahan, eight cables, driven 50 to 65 feet into the ground to support the riverwalk, broke. With the supports gone, the walkway crumbled.

Maritime Trade Center Builders, which is in charge of construction for the county, hired a team of engineers from Whitaker Laboratory Inc. to investigate the collapse.

Because this portion of the riverwalk hasn't been completed, MTCB is responsible for repairing the sunken walk.

"It's a situation we're reviewing," said David Simpson, project manager for MTCB. "It will be ongoing for some time."

Until Whitaker Laboratory completes the investigation, Simpson didn't want to speculate on the possibility of additional problems elsewhere along the riverwalk.

Some early indications are soil conditions which could have played a part.

Commonly called Slip 2, this same area cost the county millions in the late-90s in an attempt to fill it in.

In February 1997, MTCB approached the county seeking \$3.3 million for piling installation, building pad installation and additional costs at Slip 2. Nine months later, the builders sought more funding, this time \$3.8 million, for among other things, added costs along Slip 2.

Part of that money paid for 200,000 cubic yards of good fill to replace the poor-quality soil.

"From my understanding, that area that broke had soil conditions that were at an absolute worst," O'Connell said, adding that soil along the front of the trade center is much better.

But with the opening of the trade center just three weeks away, O'Connell said the crumbling riverwalk couldn't have come at a worse time.

"It's a problem, but the attitude is let's get it fixed and go on with it," O'Connell said.

In a worst-case scenario, the trade center will create a temporary walking path during the grand opening celebration for visitors arriving on Hutchinson Island via water taxis, O'Connell said.

"If worst comes to worst, we'll have people walk up and around it," he said.

Until then, the barricades will remain in place.

And when it comes to the trade center itself, O'Connell remains confident the building will remain unaffected by the fallen riverwalk.

"There's way too many pilings (underneath)," O'Connell said. "The island could wash away and this building would still be standing."

Chatham County government/political issues reporter Pamela E. Walck can be reached at 652-0363 or pwalck@savannahnow.com.

John Carrington/Savannah Morning News A section of the riverwalk on the east side of the trade center began caving in due to the failure of support rods attached to the retaining wall and anchored in the ground. Paving bricks have been removed to accommodate repairs. GRAPHIC: Vita Salvemini, photo by John Carrington/Savannah Morning News RIVERWALK EXTENSION PROBLEM AREA Soil bordering the riverwalk extension west of the Westin may be settling, causing the brick walkway and the steel bars that support it to shift and sink SOURCE: Chatham County, Maritime Trade Center Builders

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