

Ship to shore

Local sand man brings a beach to Long Island City

By Dan Avery

The New York Water Taxi has been servicing Hunters Point in Long Island City for 18 months, but despite astonishing views of the East River and the New York skyline, the riverside esplanade off Vernon Boulevard has offered precious little in the way of amenities. Until this month, that is, when Water Taxi CEO Tom Fox and his partner Douglas Durst shipped in 400 tons of sand from the New Jersey shore to create Water Taxi Beach. The riverfront hangout now sports a volleyball net, picnic tables and Harry's Bar & Grill, a snack shanty serving hot dogs, elk burgers and tropical libations.



Photo: Megan Lynch

"There was no *there* there," says Fox, "so we decided to build one." Building a beach is no picnic. Fox originally planned to use Hamptons sand, but a truck-driver strike on Long Island forced him to turn to the Garden State. It wasn't cheap, either. Importing part of the Jersey Shore to Queens cost \$17,000. Fox, who's also a former president of the Hudson River Park Conservancy, sees his oasis as a way of attracting development to the area. Harry Hawk, the chef at Harry's Bar, agrees. "I think the beach is going to boost interest in the neighborhood," he says, "and help people see this as a destination, rather than just a drop-off point." And if it brings Water Taxi more passengers and Harry's some more drinkers, that's cool too.

As for the beach itself, it's surprisingly...beachy. Surrounded by construction sites and a parking lot, the isolated 15,000-square-foot stretch of land is rather tranquil. Preweathered wooden tables, bamboo and a banana-yellow trailer with a corrugated-tin portico give it an *Endless Summer* feel. Water Taxi Beach is open weekend afternoons until midnight through Labor Day; plans are under way for live music, volleyball tournaments and sand-castle-building contests. Given its location, it seems like a natural for Saturday nights after P.S. 1's Warm Up party shuts down around 9pm.

Admission to Water Taxi Beach is free. For information, go to www.watertaxibeach.com.