

Partnership trails program earns state group's award

By JIM DINO
Staff Writer

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership has won an award for getting people to use trails like its own Rails-to-Trails project.

The award, presented recently by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council at the Woodlands Inn and Resort in Wilkes-Barre, recognizes the partnership's Rails-to-Trails committee joining with the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership and Live Well Luzerne County to develop Luzerne County to develop

a Keystone Active Zone.

Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director, said the whole idea behind the program "is to get people on the trail," walking or riding their bikes, making for a healthier lifestyle.

"The whole purpose of any trail is to get people into the outdoors," Skulsky said. "They learn about the outdoor recreational opportunities that exist in parks, trails and green areas in Luzerne County."

Skulsky said the Keystone Active Zone program provided participants with a "passport," which they had to get validated each time they visited a different outdoor recreational venue.

The validation was made by participants recognizing a symbol displayed somewhere at the venue.

"When we started, the focus was on school students K to 12," Skulsky said. "Then, we changed the scope to include everybody.

"And now, everything is on the computer," he said. "Every student in the Hazleton Area School District and other districts were afforded the chance to join."

A lot of people participated in the program, said Carol Husa, coordinator of the Live Well Luzerne County program.

"In the last year alone, we had more than 600 people," she said. "Over the four years of the program, we had a few thousand participants."

She said the program taught people of the many outdoor recreational opportunities available in Luzerne County.

"The program helped build the public's knowledge of the wonderful places we have right here in our backyards to enjoy — free," she said.

Michele Schasberger, spokeswoman for the Wyoming Valley Wellness Trails Partnership, said the KAZ program called attention to all recreational opportunities instead of just one.

"The program offered the opportunity for all sorts of partners to work together to cross-promote all parks and trails in the county," she said. "Rather than promoting one trail, we put out information on all trails together, so that people increase their understanding of local trails. We want people to know they don't have to go to Colorado to experience their outdoors. They can do it right here."

New brochures

The civic partnership is having 5,150 new brochures about the rail-trail printed. They were developed by the partnership's VISTA worker, Mike Moore.

"It has an updated map that shows the entire trail," Moore said. "I'm looking for feedback on it."

Skulsky said the partnership had the new brochures printed on a thicker

card stock than the last series of brochures.

"We solicited three bids, and Globe Printing was the low bidder," he said. "The Luzerne County Convention and Visitors Bureau paid for it, as they did in the past."

Moore also said a donation box has been fabricated, and will be installed at the trail soon.

"Marty's Welding on Route 309 fabricated the box, which will be buried in the ground at the trail," Moore said.

Scholarship panel

Jack St. Pierre informed the partnership he is



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resigning as chairman of the scholarship committee.

"After 12 years, we need new blood," said St. Pierre, who indicated he would stay in the position until early 2011 unless a replacement is found sooner.

"We're sorry to see you leave, Jack," said Donna Palermo, the partnership's chairman, who is also president of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce.

"We thank you for all you have done for the scholarship program. If the committee had not done what it did, a lot of people would not have had the educational opportuni-

ties they did."

Black Creek alumni

Betty Hodgson, chairman of the Black Creek Township High School alumni committee, told the partnership her group is trying to find a way to perpetuate its memorial at the site of the former school.

"We're trying to come up with a plan for perpetual care," she said. "Our best bet is the township. We are trying to work something out with them. What will happen to it in 10 to 15 years, when we're all gone? It's better to have things planned."