

# Finishing touch

## Eagle Scout's project completes trail's garden

By **JIM DINO**  
Staff Writer

The Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails hiking and biking trail needed a fence and a flood control system.

Gage Shaffer of Sugarloaf Township needed an Eagle Scout project.

A perfect match.

Beginning in July, Shaffer built the fence around the front, back and one side of the environmental education garden at the trail off East Broad Street.

Earlier, members of the Leadership Hazleton Class of 2010 built the garden, planting warm-season grasses and other plants native to the area to teach school students about the local environment.

"However, they only had so much time to finish it, and they didn't get it done," Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, the organization spearheading development of the trail, said. "Gage approached me in May about doing an Eagle Scout project on the trail."

Shaffer, a student in the Hazleton Area Ninth Grade Center, also dug a trench parallel to the 100-plus-foot split-rail fence to assist with flood control at the garden.

"I started in July and finished in late September," Shaffer said. "It took me 123 hours."

The project did not go off without at least one hitch.

"I was trying to dig a hole for a fence post, and I hit this rock," Shaffer said, pointing to a large rock about 1 foot wide and 2½ feet long. "We had to get a backhoe in to get it out."

All of the materials for the fence were donated by Leadership class members.

Skulsky said while the fence beautifies and outlines the garden, the trench is more important.

"(The trench) was a godsend," Skulsky said. "I'm sure there would have been a washout without this (trench) being widened and deepened."

In the short history of the trail, large rainstorms have washed out portions of the trail. In addition to the environmental education area, there are memorial trees planted along the trail.

The first four miles of the trail is complete, from the trail head off East Broad Street to the Ashmore section of Hazle Township, near the former Beryllium plant.

Next spring, it is anticipated the next two miles — from Ashmore to Hazle Brook — will be built. That section will include construction of a 122-foot pedestrian bridge over an active Norfolk Southern rail line.

The fourth and final leg of the trail — from the Weatherly-White Haven Highway to Lehigh Gorge State Park, where it will meet the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor trail — may also be built. The partnership has received funding for that section of the trail.

The final path of the third leg — another six miles between Hazle Brook and the highway — still has not been finally determined, due to problems with obtaining rights-of-way.

Shaffer is a member of Boy Scout Troop 207 of Conyngham.

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**A trench** moves water away from the Environmental Education Area at the Rails-to-Trails.

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# GREATER HAZLETON



ELLEN F. O'CONNELL/Staff Photographer

**For his Eagle Scout project**, Gage Shaffer, right, a member of Boy Scout Troop 207, Conyngham, installed a split rail fence and dug a trench to control runoff water around an Environmental Education Area at the Rails To Trails. Pictured with Shaffer are from left: Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civil Partnership; Mike Bloom of the Office of Surface Mining and Americorps VISTA (Volunteer InService To America); Paul Oswald, Anthracite District executive and Tom Book, Eagle Advancement chairman for the Anthracite District.