

BOB

Touching up the trail

Trees, environmental education garden among planned improvements

By **JIM DINO**
 Staff Writer

Some new features are going to be added to the Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails hiking and biking trail this year, possibly a second leg.

In the first stretch of the trail between Hazleton and the Ashmore section of Hazle Township, 20 trees have been planted and an environmental education garden is being built by members of the Leadership Hazleton Class of 2009.

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, said the trees and garden will be dedicated on National Trails Day, June 5.

Skulsky said the committee spearheading the construction and development of the trail will be planning an outdoor picnic in the trail parking lot off East Broad Street in Hazleton.

Skulsky said the garden will be used to educate area students on botany, biology and other environmental issues.

"The environmental edu-

cation area will have grass plantings and a butterfly garden," Skulsky said.

"Each year, students will plant seedlings of different annuals. There will be warm-season grasses planted there, too. The garden will be an extension of the classroom."

Skulsky also said the garden will also contain two pedestrian bridges and two benches.

The partnership received a grant to purchase 20 trees - 10 flowering crab apples and 10 red maples - which have been reserved for \$100 each by local residents in memory of loved ones.

"There is one tree left," said Skulsky, who can be contacted at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, 20 W. Broad St., Hazleton, or by calling 455-1509.

Skulsky said two state departments - the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources - have given the go-ahead to combine three governmental grants to build the second leg of the trail.

from Ashmore to Hazlebrook.

"We have some work to complete," Skulsky said. "Once that work is done, we will submit it to PennDOT, which will advertise for bids a design-and-build contract. Hopefully, this work can be done in six months and we can build it this year. This is a major breakthrough on the second leg of the trail."

The additional two more miles to the trail will include a pedestrian bridge that will span an active rail line.

Skulsky said the trail has become popular, even in the winter. During winter, it is used by cross-country skiers and by snowshoe enthusiasts.

The parking lot on East Broad Street has been plowed, and Skulsky said the trail is open for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

"The conditions for cross-country skiing are good," Skulsky said. "And it is a great time for some winter photography along the trail."

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JAMIE PESOTINE/Staff Photographer
 A row of trees reserved for residents in memory of loved ones were planted along the Rails-to-Trails path off Route 93.