



BOB CASE/THE TIMES LEADER

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership, the parent organization of Greater Hazleton RAILS to Trails, stands at the trailhead in Hazle Township.

Hiking and hoagies

Sandwich sales to help make up for waning financial support for network.

By STEVE MOCARSKY
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HAZLE TWP. – With warm spring weather enticing health-conscious nature lovers outside, trail traffic in Greater Hazleton and throughout the region is starting to pick up.

Members of Greater Hazleton RAILS to Trails are preparing for a summer filled with activity, the highlight occurring on June 25, National Trails Day, when about 1,000 people are expected to converge at the trailhead off East Broad Street near Arthur Gardner Highway.

About 700 people participated in last year's event, which included a hike or bike ride followed by a free picnic with



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plenty of giveaways. An increase in participants is expected this year, given that general trail traffic spiked 40 percent over the past year.

Unfortunately, while more and more hikers and bikers are taking advantage of the free recreational amenities, financial support for the behind-the-scenes activities that ensure the trails stay maintained and continue to grow and interconnect with a trail network is waning.

"The biggest struggle we have right now is operating funds," said Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership – the parent organization of Greater Hazleton Rails to Trails.

"We have a low operating cost – less than \$50,000 a year, which covers things like liability insurance, office supplies, copying, income tax preparation and the salary of a part-time director. ... But it's actually easier to get \$500,000 in project funding for a state or federal grant," Skulsky said.

Skulsky said people might get confused when they hear pleas for financial help from an organization that was awarded \$600,000 in grants to extend the trail by 2 miles. What they don't realize is that all of the funding is dedicated to the project and can't be used toward the organization's overhead costs.

He's hoping that those who use the 4-mile trail and civic-minded business leaders in the community will consider making donations to the operating fund.

One delicious way that the public can help out this week is by participating in the organization's annual hoagie sale, which is in progress now through Saturday.

HOW TO HELP

• To donate to the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership's Operating Fund, place Third Base Hoagie orders, or for information on becoming an event sponsor, call Bob Skulsky at 455-1509.

ON THE NET

• Learn more at www.civicpartnership.com.

The owners of Third Base Hoagies – a local favorite in the Hazleton area – are providing cold cut hoagies to the partnership at cost, and the partnership is offering free delivery to area businesses for orders of 20 or more.

Or, folks can call Skulsky or stop by the partnership office to buy tickets for individual hoagies. Then they can stop by the Third Base Luncheonette at East 10th Street and Garibaldi Court – across the street from Hazleton Elementary-Middle School – anytime during regular business hours and pay for their hoagie with a partnership ticket.

The partnership is also in need of more business sponsors for the National Trails Day picnic, given the economy, Skulsky said.

Businesses such as Gould's ShurSave in Conyngham, Quaker Oats Co. in Mountain Top and Pennant Foods in Hazle Township have been faithful event sponsors, donating free food for the past several years.

And organizations such as the Greater Hazleton Health Alliance have provided free gifts such as pedometers, healthy snacks and month-long fitness center passes.

But additional help with making sure that participants are fed and entertained certainly would be welcome, Skulsky said.

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