

Eagle Scout to enhance rail-trail area

By JIM DINO
Staff Writer

An environmental education area built along the Greater Hazleton rail-trail by members of the 2010 Leadership Hazleton class will be improved by Gage Shaffer of Hazleton as his Eagle Scout project.

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, which is developing the trail, said Shaffer will build an irrigation system for the plantings there, and expects to start his work in about three weeks.

"He will enhance what was originally planted there," Skulsky said. "A ditch has to be dug, and weeds along the walkway have to be managed. He will also install a split-rail fence around the entire garden. Leadership intended to do that, but they ran out of time."

The environmental education area, which is located near the trail's beginning, includes warm-season grasses found in the Hazleton area and other native plantings which are explained on message boards.

Next phase

Construction on the second phase of the trail could begin in the fall, Skulsky said. The two-mile stretch from Ashmore to Hazlebrook includes the construction of a pedestrian bridge over an active Norfolk Southern rail line.

"We have four grants totaling \$630,000," Skulsky said. "The bridge will be a 122-foot span that will be over two existing abutments built in about 1910, but engineers say are better than anything we could build today."

The partnership approved entering into a contract with Norfolk Southern for engineering services related to the trail and bridge.

Once that is done, Skulsky said the state Department of Transportation could advertise a request

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Other significant sponsors of the trail's recent hike and bike event included Terrana Law, Zola Law Offices, Mountain Area Health Care, Thomas Family Market, Walmart, WAZL, WYLN, Local News 13, Standard-Speaker, Eye Care Specialists, Save-A-Lot, Weis Markets, Giant Foods, Degenhart Chiropractic Health Center, Goulds Supermarket, Hazle Township Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company, DJ Tony Pacelli and The Wire Guys.

for proposals to design and build the structure, as well as the trail.

"Maybe we will start moving earth this year," he said. "The contract is not to exceed \$7,500. It will be for the easement, engineering and inspection."

The third phase of the trail, picking up in Hazlebrook and going to the Weatherly-White Haven Highway, will be the longest and toughest. The route has not been finalized because of right-of-way problems.

Skulsky actually has started working on the trail's final leg, from the Weatherly-White Haven Highway to the Lehigh River.

A "loop" trail is also being discussed that would connect the trail to Weatherly where the Rotary Foundation is pursuing a project to turn the old Weatherly Steel Co. into a tourist attraction, including retail shops.

Then the loop and Greater Hazleton trail would be connected to the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor trail, a 165-mile trail from Bristol, Bucks County to Wilkes-Barre, via Weatherly and White Haven.

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