

Rails-to-trails supporters remain steadfast

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ELLEN O'CONNELL/Staff Photographer A man walks along the Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails path on Friday. Heavy rains caused significant damage to the trail, but businesses and other supporters stepped forward to help with repairs.

The Greater Hazleton Area Rails-to-Trails walking and biking trail would not exist without the support of the community, one of its founders said.

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, the group which has fostered construction and development of the trail, said heavy spring rain caused an unusual amount of damage for which supplies were needed for repair.

But those supplies were provided by a host of donors, Skulsky said.

"Hazleton Materials gave us 22 ton of riprap rock," Skulsky said. "The Hazleton City Authority gave us 12 more ton of

stone. Team Supply donated piping for three areas that needed drainage. Visintainer Nursery gave us 15 yards of mulch.

"Without the support of the business community, we would not be able to maintain the trail, because we have no money."

Even with the donation of all that material, someone had to install it along the trail where it was needed.

"The Youth Services Agency provided seven or eight work sessions," Skulsky said. "They did a lot of work, as did the Rails-to-Trails volunteers."

Those volunteers make up a subcommittee of the civic partnership, and meet the first Monday of each month at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce office at 20 W. Broad St.

The recent National Trails Day event at the trail - a walk, followed by a free picnic - again attracted numerous people on June 11.

"We had about 700 people on the trail, and more in the parking lot," Skulsky said. "We gave out 275 hot dogs, 350 hamburgers, 20 cases of Gatorade and 73 bike helmets. Last year, we gave out 77 helmets, so we had about the same amount of people this year as we did last year."

Ten more memorial trees which were planted were dedicated in honor or memory of someone during the Trails Day event.

"We now have 50 trees, and they are all dedicated," Skulsky said. "We have people on a waiting list. I just got a call yesterday for one."

Mike Bloom, the Office of Surface Mining/Volunteers In Service To America volunteer assisting with development of the trail, said there are other ways to memorialize or honor someone along the trail.

"We have exercise stations, benches and kiosks that can be done with," Bloom said. "And there will be more trees in Phase II (of the trail)."

Bloom said he is also working on a plan to build a picnic area off the parking lot at the trailhead off East Broad Street in Hazleton's Terrace section.

"The picnic area has been part of the plan since the beginning," Skulsky said. "There's a clearing of pines there. It's a good idea."

Bloom said the Rails-to-Trails committee has a number of picnic tables for the area, and said either a grill pit or small, upright grills could be built and installed.

Also, Bloom said he is applying for a grant to install additional signs on the existing trail.

Skulsky said plans for construction of the second phase of the trail - from Ashmore to Hazle Brook in

Hazle Township - are in the hands of the state Department of Transportation, which has a request for proposals package for review.

"We got a \$5,000 donation from the Security Savings Foundation for unanticipated expenses with the Phase II plan," Skulsky said. "If everything goes as planned, we will bid the work in early fall."

Phase II includes building two more miles of trail and a 122-foot pedestrian bridge over an active Norfolk Southern rail line.

Skulsky said he is looking for someone to take down trees on the north side of where the bridge will be built, because there is a hole that has to be filled in.

There is also a hole on the south side; Skulsky has made arrangements to fill that hole.

For more information on how to donate physical or monetary aid for the trail, visit

www.civicpartnership.com.

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