

Rails-To-Trails Committee to sponsor annual Hike-and-Bike

By **JIM DINO** 9 Feb 2014
jimdino@standardspeaker.com

The committee building a biking and hiking trail around the Hazleton area will be showing off part of the trail during a hike and bike ride.

The Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership's Rails-To-Trails Committee is sponsoring its second annual Hike-and-Bike Picnic at Lehigh Gorge State Park on May 18.

Bob Skulsky, the Partnership's executive director, said those who want to walk will make a four-mile round-trip hike from north of White Haven to the Lehigh Tannery.

Those riding bikes will take a 15-mile roundtrip bike ride from Rockport to the Lehigh Tannery.

The group will arrive at Tannery at noon for a picnic.

Meanwhile, Sue Nasrani, a member of the Rails-To-Trails committee, told Partnership members this week the committee had to cancel its last monthly walk Jan. 26 because of bad weather.

The group will try again on Feb. 22. The group always walks at least a part of the trail on Sundays once a month.

Nasrani said the committee is eagerly anticipating construction beginning on the first quarter of the trail this spring.

Alfred Benesch and Co. of Pottsville is continuing to work on the plan for the rest of the 16-mile trail from Hazleton to Rockport.

The committee applied for two state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) grants, one for trail development and the other for signage along the trail.

Skulsky said the grant for development of the trail was rejected for this round of funding, because the Partnership does not have ownership of the entire path of the trail.

He also said the Partnership is going for another Blazing New Trails grant.

These grants, from Pennsylvania's "Growing Greener" program, teach high school

students skills as they produce materials for a project.

Last year, the Partnership got the grant, and used it for students to make picnic tables for the trail's beginning off East Broad Street in Hazleton.

This year, the grant will be used to help students make signs for the trail.

Skulsky said the Rails-To-Trails committee has actually broken up into two subcommittees – one for fund-raising, and the other for construction, operation and maintenance of the trail.

The committee has held various events during its existence to help develop and build the trail.

For instance, Nasrani said the committee has adopted its own logo, which has been placed on baseball caps the committee is selling for \$10 each.

Meanwhile, the Partnership's Gateway committee is continuing its work to beautify gateways to the community.

Elaine Judd, the committee's co-chair, said the last piece of information on a project to beautify the median of Route 924 between the PENNDOT shed and Interstate 81 has been delivered to architect Art Sweeney.

Judd said the committee is hoping to get the plans to PENNDOT for review, and back in time to advertise for bids for spring planting in the medial.

Skulsky said the Partnership's Red White and Blue committee is also gearing up its work for spring.