

Civic partnership extends deadline for RTT hike-bike

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The deadline for registration has been extended for those who want to participate in the Greater Hazleton Civic Partnership Rails-To-Trails Committee's annual Hike and Bike activity.

The event will be held at Lehigh Gorge State Park Sunday. The deadline for registration is Wednesday.

Bob Skulsky, the Partnership's executive director, said environmental educators will usher hikers on one of two hikes: a six-mile roundtrip starting north of White Haven at Port Jenkins to Lehigh Tannery, or a two-mile roundtrip hike from White Haven.

"This is a great way to experience a rail trail, and to learn more about greater Hazleton's future rail trail," Skulsky said.

Those participating in the four-mile hike are asked to meet at the Ice Lake parking lot at 9:30 a.m.

Kelly Pollock, an environmental education specialist with the Lehigh Gorge State Park, will provide interpretive explanation of historical sites along the hike.

The two-mile hike will start at 11 a.m. at the White Haven Shopping Center.

There, the four-mile hike and Pollock will pick up the rest of the hikers.

Bike riders will be led on a 15-mile roundtrip bike ride from Rockport to Lehigh Tannery. Bike rentals will be available. Those renting bikes should report at 9 a.m. to be fitted with a bike. The bike ride will begin at 9:30.

Hikers and bikers will all go to Lehigh Tannery at noon for the picnic, along with an opportunity to visit several historical exhibits before retracing the route.

"Last year, we had 90 people participate," Skulsky said. "Anyone who is interested should call the Chamber office as soon as possible."

Skulsky said some donations of food and beverages have been received, but more are welcome. He also said tables and chairs are direly needed for the event.

Anyone interested in participating or donating items should call Julie at the Chamber at 455-1508.

Meanwhile, the Rails-To-Trails Committee is also continuing to develop the 16-mile trail that will stretch from East Broad Street in Hazleton to Rockport.

The first four miles, or first quarter, of the trail to the Ashmore section of Hazle Township - where the former Beryllium was located - will be built this year.

Skulsky said some small issues have to be finalized before the group advertises a Request for Proposals to build the first four miles.

"If everything goes right, we will start construction at the end of July or early in August," Skulsky said. "If not then, it will begin in late August."

Skulsky said he received a letter from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) giving permission for the trail to go over the property of the former Beryllium plant, which had been polluted.

Also, an application for a highway occupancy permit for the beginning of the trail on East Broad Street has been submitted to the state Department of Transportation. Skulsky said he anticipates the permit being issued in May.