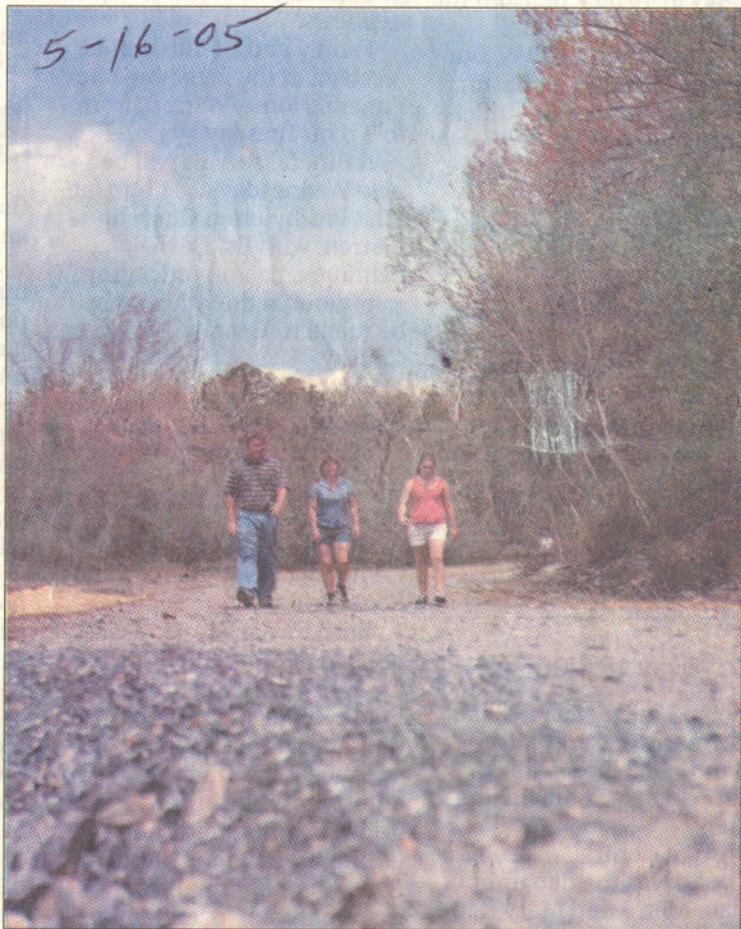


5-16-05



JOSIAH E. CARTWRIGHT/Standard-Speaker

From left, Paul Dagenhart, his sister, Monica Chulock, and her daughter, Laura, walk on a path where a ribbon-cutting ceremony was being held for the Rails-to-Trails project.

From rails to reality

Ribbon-cutting held for Rails-To-Trails path

By JIM DINO

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Hikers and bikers now have a formal place to enjoy the outdoors.

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership Rails-To-Trails committee saw five years of hard work rewarded Sunday with the opening of the first quarter of the trail.

The effort to build a trail between Route 93, East Broad Street, in Hazleton to the Lehigh River at Rockport began in 1999, when the Rails-To-Trails committee was formed by the partnership.

Sue Nasrani, Karl Bergamo and Jack Goulstone started the committee and remain its driving force. The committee is now made up of 150 members, with an active core of 30.

Aside from holding various fund-raisers such as food and garage sales, the committee has been successful in obtaining — with the help of the Civic Partnership Executive Director Bob Skulsky — over \$250,000 in fed-

eral transportation funds and a local match to begin construction of the first leg of the trail and to plan the rest of it.

The first leg that was built and opened Sunday runs from East Broad Street to the Ashmore section of Hazle Township, near the former Beryllium plant.

The second leg will run from Ashmore to the Village of Eckley. It will eventually be a 16-mile trail built using abandoned railroad beds, for the most part. Its estimated cost is \$1.5 million.

Future plans include beginning the second phase of the trail, paving the parking lot off Route 93, finishing the first four miles of the trail with No.-10 limestone and interpretive signs, building exercise stations in the first ¾-mile, developing a local walking program to promote physical fitness and conducting environmental educational walks.

The trail is a spur of the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor and connects Greater Hazleton with the corridor.