

Rails-to-Trails project garners award from NEPA environmental council

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The project to build a hiking and biking trail around Hazleton has attracted regional attention.

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Environmental Council has given the trail the NEPA Environmental Award.

The Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce nominated the project, which is being undertaken by a special committee of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership (GHACP).

Bob Skulsky, the Partnership's executive director, said Joe DeMarco of the Environmental Council telephoned him to deliver the good news.

"He asked me to pass on to all of the volunteers of the GHACP the environmental council's congratulations for the work everyone is doing in not only developing a great recre-

ational trail, but also cleaning up our environment from past abuses and the preservation of our beautiful area," Skulsky said.

The award will be presented during a banquet at the Woodlands in Wilkes-Barre Oct. 20.

Meanwhile, Skulsky said more federal money is on the way to build the trail.

Another \$46,000 in federal transportation funds have been earmarked for the construction of the first four miles of the trail, from its beginning off East Broad Street in the Terrace section of the city, to the Ashmore section of Hazle Township, near the former Beryllium plant.

Skulsky said the Partnership had originally obtained \$160,000 in federal transportation funds for the project, but the lowest bid to build the trail — from the Don E. Bower Construction Co. of Berwick, came in at \$206,000.

So Skulsky said he was noti-

fied another \$46,000 was on the way to make up the difference.

The trail is getting more money, from another, unexpected source.

Skulsky said the Action All group, which formed several years ago to prevent out-of-state waste from coming into the area, is dissolving, and still had \$450 in its treasury.

"They wanted to give it to a non-profit group, and selected the Rails-To-Trails project," Skulsky said.

Meanwhile, Skulsky said the first leg of the trail will be built before winter.

The Bower firm will begin this month, and take about two months to finish the four-mile stretch.

"We will have a full-time inspector on the project," Skulsky said. "The (Alfred) Benesch (engineering and architectural) firm (which designed the trail) will provide an inspector."

Skulsky said he and others

recently walked the trail with personnel from the Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor.

"Go with people who know the environment," Skulsky said. "They had us eating everything along that trail. There are more unique and endangered plants along the first four miles of the trail than I thought. They plan to do one interpretive walk per year."

Another of the Partnership's programs, the annual Paint the Town Red White and Blue campaign, is concluding for the year with the Funfest celebration.

"We needed 70 more bows, to fill requests we had," Skulsky said. "Over the winter, there will be classes on how to make the bows."

The Partnership also stewards the gateway beautification project. Skulsky said a meeting to decide on the scope of work for that committee for the fall will be held Tuesday.