

Rails-to-Trails Committee announces Sunday hike

By **JIM DINO**

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The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership Rails-to-Trails Committee is planning a hike for Sunday.

Hikers will meet at Dubatto's Restaurant on East Broad Street in Hazleton at 1 p.m.

The public is invited to join the hike and learn first hand about the project.

Initially, the hikes were scheduled to investigate possible routes for the Rails-to-Trails project but this hike is strictly for enjoying the beauty of northeastern Pennsylvania.

Rails-to-Trails is an initiative through which abandoned railroad beds can be converted to trails for hiking, biking, jogging, cross-country skiing and a variety of other outdoor recreation activities.

The Civic Partnership, through a Grant provided by the Pennsylvania Dept of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and administered by the Delaware Lehigh National Heritage Corridor has identified the proposed route for the Greater Hazleton Area Rails-to-Trails project.

The trail will start near the intersection of Routes 93 and 424, continue to Eckley Miners Village and eventually connect with the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor near Rockport.

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Civic Partnership and the Mountain Council of Governments, said the \$35,000 DCNR grant – which is a 50-50 matching grant – will be used to plan what will eventually be a 16.4-mile trail.

"We need a detailed site plan before we can go for a grant for bricks and mortar" to actually build the trail, Skulsky said. "The first phase of the trail will be between Route 93 and Ashmore (section of Hazle Township, where the old Beryllium plant is located).

We want to move on that as soon as possible. We're in good shape with landowner agreements, but we need that detailed site plan."

The remainder of the grant will be used for any landowner agreements that are necessary, as well as planning the rest of the trail.

Skulsky said the Partnership is matching the grant with \$20,000 from the Luzerne County Commissioners, a contribution from the Luzerne Foundation, in-kind legal services provided by attorney Pasco Schiavo, and the Rails-To-Trails Committee's own fundraising efforts.

The Rails-to-Trails Committee is a grassroots committee dedicated to making this project a reality.

Hikers are suggested to wear comfortable clothes and hiking boots or sneakers. Walks are usually not more than five miles round trip but participants can walk only as much as they desire and then can return to their starting point.

Anyone who is interested in participating in this hike should contact Skulsky at 455-1508, or via e-mail, civic@hazletonchamber.org.