

News

from the

Making Hazleton a better
place to live, learn, work,
worship and play.

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"Rails to Trails: Honoring the Past, Imagining the Future."

This was the theme of an international Rails to Trails conference held in Pittsburgh last week. The conference provided an opportunity for Rail-Trail groups from throughout the nation and around the world to get together and learn about the many aspects of acquiring, building and maintaining this valuable community resource.

Lena Kotansky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, attended the event to learn from the experts and from other Rail-Trail groups about the process which the partnership will officially begin this month.

During the conference, Pennsylvania's 100th Rail-Trail was opened, making our state the leader in the number of open trails in the country.

Eighteen foreign countries sent representatives to the conference. In addition, Secretary Slater of the U.S. Department of Transportation was the keynote speaker at the closing session, which also included videotaped comments from first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Therefore, in addition to being a valuable local community resource, the Rail-Trail that will be created by the partnership links Greater Hazleton in a real way to a growing national and international movement.

Sessions at the conference dealt with a myriad of issues, such as fund-raising strategies, acquiring land, working with volunteers, surfacing materials and long-term maintenance. The benefits of Rail-Trails were dealt with in different sessions. These benefits touch on nearly all

aspects of community life, including economic development, health care, and recreation.

Rail-Trails preserve history, protect the environment, and provide transportation options. All members of the community, regardless of age, socio-economic background or physical condition, can enjoy Rail-Trails. Each of these benefits alone is significant. Together, they make a Rail-Trail one of the most valuable resources a community can create.

Already, nearly 70 people from throughout Greater Hazleton have expressed an interest in becoming involved in the partnership's Rails to Trails project. Of these, nearly half are presently active in participating in hikes and attending planning meetings.

As with all civic partnership initiatives, members of the public are invited to become involved with this project. The next scheduled hike will take place July 10. Anyone who would like to participate should call the partnership office for more information.