

YMCA considering walks in downtown

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When spring dawns, people may be walking around Hazleton, looking at historical places or rare architecture.

Chances are they will be out on a walk organized by the Hazleton YMCA/YWCA.

Members of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership heard a proposal this week from Carol Husa, a member of the staff at the Wilkes-Barre YMCA/YWCA. Those two organizations are original members of the KAZ (Keystone Active Zone) program, which provides incentives for people to get outdoors and walk.

The Hazleton "Y" wants to partner with its Wilkes-Barre cousin and the partnership to develop a program for walks in downtown Hazleton.

"We've been in the KAZ program for five years, but just added walking last year," Husa said. "We did nine walks last year as part of 'Y Walk Wednesdays.' We were hugely successful with those walks."

Husa said each walk had a theme, and brought people out.

"We had 114 people on the church walk, which was done on a hot summer night," Husa said. "It had to be 90 degrees that night, but no one left the walk. And we always included scavenger hunt questions with the walks. In all, we had 420 participants in the nine walks."

Some of the other walks were at the new River Commons, Kirby Park, downtown, neighborhoods along the levee of the Susquehanna River, along with a nature walk and one to see Wilkes-Barre's mansions.

Husa said the Wilkes-Barre walks all began at 6 p.m. from the lobby of the "Y."

"They normally took 90 minutes, so we were done by 7:30," she said. "That gave time for the people to go out. Sometimes, they would go to a movie together. So there was a social aspect to" the program.

Sue Farley, executive director of the Hazleton YMCA/YWCA, said a local history route was possible.

Once the routes were defined, Husa said a call was made to volunteers to find a leader for each walk.

For more information on the walks, Husa can be contacted at 823-2191 or carol.husa@wbymca.org.

Trail will be built

The second leg of the Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails, from Ashmore to Hazle Brook, will be built this year.

Tom Ogorzalek, one of trail committee members, said two hurdles to building the two-mile segment have been cleared - getting old mining spoils pushed into a large hole near a pedestrian bridge that will be built over an active Norfolk Southern rail line, and purchasing the airspace over the rail line where the bridge will be.

A few weeks ago, Bob Skulsky, executive director of the civic partnership, said an as-yet unnamed local contractor offered to donate time and equipment to push the spoils - which Cabot Corp. approved, because the spoils are on their land - into the large hole.

Skulsky said he is confident Norfolk Southern will accept an offer for the airspace, clearing the way for

construction to begin in the spring.

Skulsky said the partnership has the money to build the second leg, as well as the 121-foot prefabricated bridge that will cost around \$250,000.

"The bridge will have at least a 10-ton capacity, so that emergency vehicles can use it," Skulsky said. "Hazle Brook is landlocked, so this bridge will provide that access."

Using a portion of an old pedestrian bridge - as had been done along the Black Diamond Trail in White Haven - was rejected, because it would have been more expensive.

"That bridge had asbestos, which would have to be removed," Skulsky said. "It also had lead paint. By the time they did that to the bridge in White Haven, it drove up the cost. Our pre-fab bridge is much cheaper."

Back on the original trail, Skulsky said 30 students from MMI Preparatory School in Freeland helped plant 10 new trees. Skulsky said these trees, as the original 30 that were planted last year, will be memorial trees.

"But all of them are spoken for. We had a waiting list (from the other tree planting)," he said.

Ogorzalek said elevation post signs will be installed. He also reported some rain damage to the trail, but has a remedy.

"I plan a lot of maintenance activity for this year," Ogorzalek said. "I'm going to try my best this winter to rid the trail of some little maintenance headaches. We got one (drainage) pie in before the rain, but we need more."

Skulsky said a heavy rain Dec. 1 produced "some areas of damage, but it held up" well.

Recalling volunteers

Skulsky noted the deaths of Bob Martonik, who he said was a dedicated volunteer on the trail, and Ralph Matyas, treasurer of the Black Creek Township High School Alumni Association.

Betty Hodgson, of the Black Creek group, said the alumni memorial site was decorated for Christmas.

Mike Bloom, the partnership's VISTA volunteer, has revamped its website, www.civicpartnership.com.

"You can now subscribe to our newsletters," Bloom said. "We're on Facebook. We will have updates and new photos and news articles."

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