

Bike rodeo, picnic planned for Rails-to-Trails site

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The Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails will be the scene of at least two events this summer - a bike rodeo and a community picnic.

The bike rodeo will be held May 12 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the trail's parking lot off East Broad Street in Hazleton.

The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, the organization developing the trail, is sponsoring the event, which is open to children ages 4 and up.

Kids will navigate their way through an obstacle course to improve their riding skills.

But before they ride, they will need a helmet. The first 25 children who come out for the rodeo will get one free.

Children will learn the rules of the road, effective signaling, and how to share the road with vehicles. Volunteers will also conduct a safety inspection of each child's bike.

On June 9, National Trails Day will be observed at the trail with a free community picnic. The event will begin with a walk and conclude with the picnic.

Mike Bloom, a volunteer working at the trail, said while one donor has come up with the helmets for the bike rodeo, donations are still being accepted so helmets can be given out on National Trails Day.

"A lot of (bicycling injuries) are attributed, not to just the lack of a helmet, but to the helmet not fitting properly," Bloom said.

"For the last four years, the Boy Scouts have helped size and fit the helmets to the kids," said Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director. "A lot of disadvantaged kids come up to ride and they can't ride without head protection."

Trail damage

Damage to the trail will be repaired soon, according to officials.

Heavy rains last year from the remnants of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee exposed some serious drainage problems along the first leg of the trail.

Trail volunteer Tom Ogorzalek said fellow volunteers succeeded in getting donations of materials and equipment to make the needed improvements.

"Next week, (the services of) a backhoe being donated by the Hazleton City Authority will install pipe donated by CAN DO," he said. "We will put in the first of what will be four or five pipes. We will put the largest pipe in the worst places."

Pipes installed in the first leg have proven to be too small, so they will be replaced with the larger pipes. The smaller pipes will be reused in areas where there are no pipes yet.

Trail signs

Soon, those visiting Lehigh Gorge State Park near Weatherly will see signs that the Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails is nearby.

Ogorzalek said the trail's volunteer committee will erect the signs near where Blue Ridge Realty Co. donated land for a right-of-way for the fourth and final leg of the trail from the Weatherly-White Haven Highway to Lehigh Gorge.

"Blue Ridge Realty donated 6.8 acres of land for well over a mile of right-of-way that is about two-thirds of the (section of the) trail," Ogorzalek said. "We want to put the sign at Lehigh Gorge so that those biking and walking there can see it."

Trail entrance

Bloom said trees near the trail's entrance at East Broad Street, like trees along the existing trail, can be adopted.

The trees along the trail were adopted for \$125, but those in front will be \$250. Bloom said 50 trees have been adopted along the trail.

"The trees in the front will be definitely seen by the 30,000 people who visit the trail every year," Skulsky said.

The beginning of the trail may also be the place where a train caboose is parked. A local Boy Scout, for his Eagle Scout project, is working on securing and transporting a caboose to the trailhead.

Two other Eagle Scout projects are proposed for the trail's entrance.

One Scout is hoping to erect a flagpole that will be lighted in the parking lot. The plan is to have the flagpole there in time for the National Trails Day celebration.

The other project would remove an unsightly embankment from near the parking lot, Bloom said.

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