

Civic Partnership honors executive director on 10th anniversary

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The Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership honored its executive director on his 10th anniversary during its annual reorganization meeting Wednesday.

The partnership also welcomed a new chairman for its scholarship committee and two new steering committee members Wednesday morning at the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, where the group is based.

Chamber President Donna Palermo, who was re-elected chairwoman, and Hazleton Mayor Joe Yannuzzi, who was re-elected vice chairman, presented Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director, with a certificate of appreciation.



"This organization has come so far under Bob's leadership," Palermo said. "He brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants for improvements to the (Rails-to-Trails) trail. This community has improved under his leadership."

Ray Youngblood, a member of the Rails-to-Trails Committee, said Skulsky is responsible for the trail's existence.

"If not for Bob Skulsky, the trail would be a few grassy paths in the woods," Youngblood said.

Meanwhile, Dr. John Madden is the new scholarship committee chairman, replacing Jack St. Pierre, the only chairman the committee has had.

"Jack has contributed to the scholarship program, not only through his leadership but also through funding from his family's foundation," Palermo said. "Your time and commitment made this program work."

Skulsky said St. Pierre is responsible for the success of the scholarship program.

"Jack created the scholarship program, more or less," Skulsky said. "He made the first contribution. We would not have given out 18 scholarships without him."

St. Pierre said the program has provided 18 \$6,000 scholarships over a two-year period for people in two- and four-year degree programs in technical careers, as well as the medical field, and for training that led to jobs offered by Tobyhanna Army Depot.

"We don't get a lot of applicants because students are required to sign a contract in which they promise to come back here to work for three years," St. Pierre said.

Skulsky said students who have not been able to fulfill the requirement have been given time to pay back the scholarships, but most have launched successful careers based on the training.

New volunteers

Paul Oswald, the local representative for the Boy Scouts of America, was appointed one of the new members of the partnership's steering committee, along with Pastor Jim DeRamus of Apostolic Faith Church in West Hazleton. Bob Krizansky of the Hazleton Area School District was reappointed treasurer.

Oswald is forming a Boy Scout Venturing program for the trail, in which young men and women will help maintain the trail while enjoying its benefits.

"I feel the partnership's greatest asset is the trail," Oswald said. "We need to bring younger people to the trail."

Oswald said young people who volunteer for the program become Scouts but do not get traditional Scout training.

He is now accepting applicants, and those interested can contact Skulsky at 570-455-1509.

Youngblood said some Scouts already have done work at the trail for Eagle Scout projects.

"A Scout built the picturesque, split-rail fence around the perimeter of the Leadership Hazleton environmental education garden," Youngblood said.

Mike Bloom, the Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) volunteer assigned to the trail, said he has updated the trail's website, which is linked to Facebook, and expects to add more interactive content.

Bloom said he is helping prepare for the 2011 National Trails Day celebration June 11.

"We are looking for someone to help get the bicycle helmets" that will be handed out during the event, Bloom said.

Skulsky said the second phase of the trail's construction - the next two miles, from Ashmore to Hazlebrook in Foster Township - is progressing on time toward construction beginning later this year.

"We are finalizing land negotiations with Norfolk Southern (Railroad) and Cabot Corp. (owner of the former Beryllium plant, which the trail abuts)," he said. "It looks good for this year."

Black Creek project

Betty Hodgson, chairwoman of the Black Creek Township Alumni Association, said her organization's goal is to acquire more land near its monument, on the site of the former Black Creek Township High School in Rock Glen, to build a pavilion.

The association was successful in raising the funds to build the memorial, and became a part of the civic partnership a few years ago to take advantage of the partnership's 501(c)3 nonprofit status, to help get some of the funding.

"We have used all of the land the township originally gave us, which is about 100 feet by 150 feet," Hodgson said.

"There is no place to sit. We would like to build a pavilion."

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