

KAZ Passports available online starting today

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A passport provides travelers with a means of exploring unknown places - right near their homes in Luzerne County. Using a Keystone Active Zone Passport that becomes available online on today, families and friends can select places that they would like to check out this spring and summer.

The passports available at kazpassport.org designate 10 parks, 10 trails and 10 events throughout Luzerne County where people can walk, bike, paddle or picnic while enjoying the outdoors for free.

"Everybody knows they are supposed to get more exercise. That's boring. If you tell people it's fun and adventure, they're more apt to do it," Carol Husa, a co-coordinator of the program, said.

A question about each site on the passport turns every visit into a scavenger hunt. As people answer questions, their chances of winning prizes increases.

The real reward, Husa said, is sharing fun with families.

"You can watch TV (or) play video games, but that's not what you're going to remember as a family. Outdoors - those are the memories that you make," she said.

Lisa Vistad toted her 7-year-old son, nieces, who are 9 and 14, and her mother-in-law to destinations on the passport last year.

The went to the Earth Day celebration at Bear Creek Camp, tried kayaking for the first time and saw places that they didn't know about within 20 minutes of their home.

"All these resources we have right in this area," exclaimed Vistad.

She is primed to obtain this year's passport and attend some events that her family missed last year.

"We didn't make it to the family fishing days. We're hoping to," Vistad said.

Fishing days, where families can borrow tackle and bait from the state Fish and Boat Commission, are scheduled on May 14 and PPL's Susquehanna Riverlands and Frances Slocum State Park and on July 9 and Aug. 20 at the Wilkes-Barre River Common, all places listed on the passport.

Fishing was popular among 24 percent of state residents surveyed for the 2009-2013 Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan.

The people surveyed listed walking as the most common outdoor activity at 87 percent, followed by picnicking at 57 percent and visiting historic sites at 54 percent.

Passport holders can combine two of the top three favorites on June 8 at 6 p.m. during the Hazleton Houses of Worship Walk.

"I think it's a great way to couple fitness, which is so important, with something interesting in the area," Ann Vinatieri Bauder, the tour guide, said.

The houses of worship walk and a walk that John Probert will lead through the Vine Street Cemetery in Hazleton on Aug. 3. are part of a series of Wednesday evening strolls, which include Wilkes-Barre tours, in the passport program.

Before children register for a group hike later this summer at the Nescopeck State Park, a passport destination, they can consult new field guides at the Hazleton Area Public Library.

Michele Kushmeder said the Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society purchased 24 guides for the library in Hazleton, where she is the children's librarian. The guide is also available at 16 other libraries in Luzerne County.

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