

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Biketoberfest focuses on Steel Valley Trail

By Eric Slagle
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You may have noticed there are a lot of bicyclists pedaling their way along a recently opened portion of the Steel Valley Trail between the Waterfront shopping center and the Riverton bridge crossing the Monongahela River from Duquesne into McKeesport.

Organizers of the upcoming Biketoberfest 2011 on Oct. 1 have noticed the increase in two-wheel traffic and are hoping their event will serve as celebration of the trail and its recreational and economic potentials.

"You're getting to see a part of this region that is a real gem," said Maury Burgwin, president of the Mon Yough Area Chamber of Commerce, referring to cyclists who travel a newly opened section of the Great Allegheny Passage trail which runs from the Historic Pump House on Waterfront Drive in Munhall to the RIDC City Center of Duquesne industrial park. Tours of that trail section as well as a leg that continues across the river into McKeesport and on to the Boston trail head in Elizabeth Township in part or in whole, will be a feature of Biketoberfest, as will live music, food, crafts and family-friendly activities.

The MYAC and the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area are hosts for this event, which goes from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Rivers of Steel pump house will serve as the starting and end points for 5-, 10-, 20- and 30-mile tours. Proceeds generated by the event will benefit the Chamber of Commerce.

"The more people that are aware the trail is here, the better," said Burgwin, adding he sees the trail as a means of "promoting the Mon Valley big time" to local trail users and tourists from all over the world.

Mark Urbassik, chairman of the MYAC board of directors, developed the idea for the bicycle tour as a way to reach out to the communities along the trail and bring outdoor activities into the Mon Valley. In addition to showcasing the present trail and its potential for future development, Urbassik said organizers are also "trying to highlight the industrial and steel heritage of the region. There's a lot of history there for sure."

The new part of the trail provides cross river views of the U.S. Steel Edgar Thomson Plant in Braddock and the Westinghouse Bridge between East Pittsburgh and North Versailles Township. It passes below Kennywood Park, offering a view of its roller coasters, and has two bridge crossings of active railroad lines.

Sherris Moreira, director of marketing and tourism development for the Rivers of Steel, said docents from her organization will be providing tours of the pump house that day. The pump house will also play host to its last Community

Heritage Market of the season that day.

The weekly market, which got under way this summer, regularly features food, crafts, local artists, businesses and farmers, as well as entertainment and demonstrations.

Moreira said the new section of trail which officially opened June 17 has meant a big increase in interest in the pump house because of its proximity to the Waterfront trail head. Before the trail opened, between five and 10 cars a day would park in the pump house lot. After the trail leg opened, she said as many as 50 to 100 cars a day are being parked in the lot.

"We decided let's make it as bike-friendly as possible," Moreira said. She said there is now a vending machine at the pump house stocked largely with sports drinks favored by bicyclists, and bike racks where cyclists can secure their machines.

Rivers of Steel was happy to partner with the chamber for the upcoming ride and Moreira said the heritage group is looking at hosting its own bike event in the spring, probably with help from the chamber. She said the two groups working together is "a natural pairing."

"We have this great historical site and the trail helps promote and revitalize" the local economy, she said. Moreira sees the trail as an avenue for spreading throughout the Mon Valley the prosperity presently enjoyed by businesses at the Waterfront.

Biketoberfest will be rain or shine. Registration runs from 8-11 a.m. The cost is \$20 for adults, \$10 for children under 18 and \$50 for families for those who register before Sept. 16. The cost for those who register Sept. 17 or later is \$25 for adults, \$15 for children and \$60 for families.

Participants will receive a T-shirt commemorating the event; shirts are not guaranteed for late registrants.

There are other ways to support the event including water station sponsorships for a donation of \$50; bronze sponsorships for \$150; silver sponsorships for \$250; and gold sponsorships for \$350 donations.

The event is meant to accommodate riders of varying physical abilities with a 5-mile family ride around the Waterfront; a 10-mile ride to Duquesne and back; a 20-mile ride to McKeesport and back, and a 30-mile ride to Boston and back.

For more information or to register, call 412-678-2450 or go online to www.active.com or www.monyoughchamber.com.

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