

Heritage Trail One of Area's Best Treasures - News, Sports, Jobs - The Intelligencer / Wheeling News-Register

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WHEELING - One of the area's best treasures is Wheeling's Heritage Trail.

The trail, which stretches 11.3 miles along the Ohio River to Brooke County and also another five miles from downtown Wheeling to Elm Grove, has become a focus for local leaders, including Robert "Scat" Scatterday, manager and project engineer for Wheeling-Ohio County Rails to Trails, and project scientist Ben Stout.

Last October, the city received a \$409,000 grant that represents 80 percent of the total cost of two projects designed to make the trail safer and more convenient for its patrons.

The first award consists of \$40,000 in the form of a Recreational Trails grant for a project known as "Peninsula Loop." Total projected cost of that initiative is \$50,000, requiring a local match of \$10,000.

The second grant comes from the Transportation Enhancement Program in the amount of \$369,806. Those funds are earmarked for restoration of Chapline Hill Tunnel, which runs beneath Ohio Valley Medical Center and W.Va. 2. That work is expected to cost \$462,258 and will include lighting in the tunnel's interior that will come on 50 feet ahead of users and go off 50 feet behind them.

The trail developments being planned, Scatterday said, will connect the existing Ohio River trail at the Interstate 470 bridge with the west portal of Tunnel Green via the vacated trails parallel to 33rd Street. It will then proceed north in front of the LaBelle Nail Co. plant, cross 29th Street and continue north through the Chapline Hill Tunnel to the Ogden Newspapers Printing and Technology Center. It will continue along the south bank of Wheeling Creek, upstream to Tunnel Green.

Scatterday said he isn't concerned about finding the required \$102,194 in matching funds. He intends to cash in 6,300 old railroad ties and 101,000 pounds of salvaged rails to fill the gap.

"This money represents the last grants needed to connect the Tunnel Green west portal and the river trail," Scatterday said this month. "Once completed, trail users can connect the river trail and Wheeling Creek trail with complete safety. There will be no streets or roads to use, and where they have to cross it will be done with appropriate traffic controls.

"When we finish these projects, Wheeling will have the most exciting trail system east of the Mississippi, if not the whole country," Scatterday added, citing plans for the trail to feature repelling cliffs, waterfalls, an operating railroad handcar, a rock quarry with fossils for children to explore and a "waving overlook" along Interstate 70 near the Wheeling Tunnel.

Trail users also are hoping to cash in on a new connection in Brooke County, which now allows a rider to get on the trail in Wheeling and ride to Wellsburg without leaving the paved surface. The ultimate goal is to connect the local trails to Pittsburgh, where the system can become part of the Greater Allegheny Passage, a trail system that runs through Pennsylvania's Laurel Highlands to Cumberland, Md., where it connects with the C&O Canal Towpath trail.

Scatterday said the new Brooke County connection now gives riders about 20 consecutive miles of trail from the trail head in South Wheeling to Wellsburg.

The trail system, which is nearing 20 years old, is part of city leader's effort to develop Wheeling into a "Healthy Lifestyle Community." Several dozen trail and government officials from across West Virginia got to see the trail first-hand last year during the state Rails to Trails meeting in Wheeling.

