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West Newton summit searches for right bike trail mix



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Larry Brock of GAP Rides, Sara Petyk of Bike-The-GAP.com and David Runco of Seven Springs Mountain Resort discuss business along the trail during a Trail Town Summit Tuesday in West Newton as Trail Town program manager William Prince looks on.

By [Tim Karan](#)

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Business owners, community leaders and others affected by bicycle traffic along the Great Allegheny Passage assembled in West Newton on Tuesday morning for a Trail Town Summit to discuss marketing strategies and build relationships between organizations invested in the trail that stretches from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Md.

About 50 people were in attendance at Le Grande Catering for the biannual event conducted by the Trail Town Program, a project of the Greensburg-based Progress Fund.

Program manager William Prince stressed the importance of businesses in trail towns catering specifically to riders using the 150-mile trail and said more cooperation between potential bike-friendly stops along the route would go a long way.

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“Over the last year, we’ve been working with some communities in Allegheny County, particularly the South Side and Homestead area around McKeesport and Boston,” Prince said. “Over the next year, we hope to work more with communities in that area to improve those connections and have more consistency from Pittsburgh to Cumberland.” Part of the summit was dedicated to trip planning and long-distance packages offered by businesses. Sarah Petyk of Pittsburgh-based Bike-the-GAP.com and Larry Brock of Cumberland-based GAP Rides have led rides along the expanse. Primarily older riders and those with expendable income use such packages as part of a planned group trip, they said.

“On our last trip (with 70 people), the average age was 61,” Brock said. “All but one person in the group had a college degree and 80 percent had advanced degrees. By far, the majority of the through-riders are fairly well-off and, though price is a concern (to them), it’s not a major restriction.”

Brock said the majority of those who travel long distances along the GAP typically aren’t from the area.

“Of the 70 people I had on the last trip, eight of them lived within 100 miles of the GAP and everybody else lived between Juneau, Alaska, and Tanzania, Africa,” he said. “They’re from everywhere but here.”

That’s why Petyk said businesses along the trail would do well to embrace their regional heritage and context within the area.

“Don’t discount the locale,” she said. “You’re in rural Western Pennsylvania, so show them rural Western Pennsylvania. It’s why they’re here.”

As for what types of businesses they believe would flourish along the trail, Brock and Petyk said there’s a constant need for the essentials.

“In some places it’s more beds; in some places it’s more restaurants,” Petyk said.

Brock said a dedicated trail campground just outside the city could prove popular.

“Sitting a day out of Pittsburgh and being able to ride in is important,” he said, adding that there always is demand for quality bed-and-breakfasts and food at all hours.

Brock said riders from out of the area usually look for one luxury in particular.

“One thing that is very popular is adult beverages,” he said. “Bike and beer both start with ‘b’ for a reason.”

Rod Darby, owner of the Trailside restaurant and pub, which opened along W. Main Street in West Newton in 2006, said he’s seen first-hand that connection and the fiscal potential of the GAP.

“Business is up 20 percent each year,” Darby said. “The trick to owning a trail business is in how you transition from a local business serving local customers to a trail business serving people riding through. You’ve got to pay attention to who your customers are and what you can do for them. That’s what will bring them riding back.”

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