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Blazing trails through the area

• **New path opens at Jefferson County Fairgrounds**

October 17, 2011
For The Times Leader

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SMITHFIELD - The cold wind didn't bother Ken Perkins at all Saturday morning.

The leading advocate for the development of trails throughout Jefferson County was full of excitement and enthusiasm as he helped to announce the opening of the Jefferson County Fairgrounds Trail.

"There are trails in Harrison County to our west and to our east there are trails in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Columbiana County has trails to our north and to our south Belmont County has trails. And soon we will break ground for the first official walking and biking trail in Jefferson County here at the fairgrounds," declared Perkins.

"We will have a multi-use trail here that will also be used for rehabilitation. We have been working on this project for the past two years and I am really excited by this. And thanks to Dr. Ron Runkel of Rehab Plus we will have markers along the trail that will indicate every one sixteenth of a mile," continued Perkins.

"I was very pleased when we met with the Fair Board to ask for their cooperation and the vote was unanimous in favor of adding the trail to the fairgrounds," added Perkins.

According to Debbie Hukill of the Jefferson County Agricultural Society, "it was an easy answer because we are always trying in different ways to bring the public to the fairgrounds year round."

"And I am so impressed that Rehab Plus has agreed to be a part of this. Those of us who are out here around the year know how beautiful this area is. Now we can attract more people to the fairgrounds who may not come here," Hukill said.

"I was impressed when the idea was first brought to me. Now walkers will be able to walk on the trail and know exactly how far they have walked," remarked Runkel who attended the Saturday morning announcement with his wife Mary.

Mike Paprocki, chairman of the Jefferson County Trails & Greenways Task Force admitted he wasn't sure the trails idea would really happen when discussions started two years ago.

"Of my 20-years at the Brooke-Hancock-Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Commission I have probably spent 15-years working on different ideas for trails. But this plan has gone so smooth. This trail system will bring a new quality of life to Jefferson County. It will bring community as people start walking these trails. It will bring conservation, education and economic development to our county," stated Paprocki.

"Just a couple weeks ago we had a cleanup campaign on the Beatty Park walking trail that now allows people to walk from Beatty Park to Union Cemetery. This trail at the fairgrounds will allow school kids who may never come here to explore the trail. This is another positive aspect of Jefferson County," said Paprocki.

Perkins said a grand opening will be held in the spring after the trail markers are posted.



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"And we will need volunteers to dig the post holes because this ground is clay. And we will be looking for more generous donors so we can add benches along the trail and put in a designated parking lot. Our next step will be to improve this trail as well as the Beatty Park trail," Perkins said.

According to Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce President Sue Hershey, "The Jefferson County Trails and Greenways Plan is a direct outcome of the Jefferson County Community Investment Plan completed in 2008 and coordinated through the efforts of the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce and Progress Alliance. Together with the Brooke, Hancock, Jefferson Metropolitan Planning Commission, Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District, National Park Service and Cross Roads Resource Conservation and Development a trails and greenways plan was created and several communities have already begun the process of developing or re-designing recreational opportunities to enhance the quality of community and family life."

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