

GATEWAY TO PINE CREEK VALLEY



Ceremony opens another section of Rails-to-Trails

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JERSEY SHORE — State and local officials talked a great deal about “gateways” and “hubs” at Wednesday’s ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Jersey Shore “trail head” at Railroad Street in the borough.

They also talked about the weather. That’s because on a beautifully sunny, cool and breezy day — perhaps a harbinger of autumn — officials gathered to celebrate a connection to the Pine Creek Rail-Trail, one that travels through the Borough of Jersey Shore and to the Susquehanna River.

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JIM RUNKLE/THE EXPRESS
At top, Jersey Shore officials participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony Wednesday opening a new section of the Rails-to-Trails. Above, Jersey Shore Mayor Dennis Buttorff, right, and DCNR Secretary Richard Allan shake hands.



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Dignitaries included Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Richard Allan and Jersey Shore Mayor Dennis Buttorff, who both spoke about the economic benefits to the community, and the recreational opportunities provided by this latest addition to the rail-trail system.

Jersey Shore — today even more than yesterday — is conveniently situated as the “Gateway to the Pine Creek Valley,” according to Buttorff, who acted as master of ceremonies for the event.

The ceremony commemorated the opening of a smaller segment of the “Rails-to-Trails” from the Susquehanna River’s waterways destination through North Main Street.

Buttorff waxed eloquent about the rural splendor that surrounds the borough, and touted Jersey Shore as a designation for hikers, boaters and recreational enthusiasts.

While the length of this particular section was not huge, comprising about 1.5 miles, its importance was not lost to Borough Council, regional agencies and the DCNR, as an economic boon to the community and a crucial link in the state’s efforts to extend its trail system via old-time, abandoned railroad paths.

Those efforts include a multi-year, gradual effort to create hiking hubs and spokes throughout the country, and many agencies list the nearby Pine Creek Valley and watershed as “one of the most unique in the state, falling

within the parameters of Federal Wild and Scenic Rivers.”

This was a continuation of an effort that occurred several years ago, with the help of the state and some nonprofit agencies, when a trail head with parking, Caboose Kiosk and other facilities were created at Jersey Shore.

The hope, then as now, is that eventually, the Williamsport area trails will connect to the Jersey Shore area trails which will connect to the Lock Haven area trails and so on.

Many of those paths are being created out of railroad rights-of-way formerly owned by that industry, but abandoned when those rail interest consolidated and condensed their ownings.

“Trails are about connections,” Allan said, “and in this case the extension will connect one of the best hiking and biking trails in the country to a host of facilities and local businesses in Jersey Shore ... Now travelers along the trail can end their memorable experience viewing dramatic rock outcrops, waterfalls and wildlife with a meal at a local establishment or overnight accommodations in the borough.”

Lycoming County’s study of the situation says the valleys of Pine and Little Pine are rated as “the most scenic landscapes of the county and provide valuable recreation areas for hunters, fishermen, hikers and campers.”

Certainly, Buttorff and those attending didn’t dispute that claim.

“Jersey Shore is a hub and a gateway community, connecting the Pine Creek Valley to the

West Branch Susquehanna River Valley,” Buttorff said.

Others have noted the borough is rich with historic structures, including remnants of a canal, a post office, restaurants, shopping, and lodging.

“This particular extension has been talked about since around 2010, and was started in 2011,” Buttorff said. “The trail connects at the Railroad Street head, goes straight down the switchback beyond the YMCA, leaves the railroad bed to connect to Seminary Street, and continues through Jersey Shore to North Main Street. The distance is between 1.4 and 1.7 miles, and will be connecting Williamsport to the Pine Creek Trail. What we’re working on now is to connect the trail to the public river access pint, which is the beginning of a water trail.

Buttorff said efforts in Clinton County are another part of the picture, and it’s hoped that where the trail ends, a continuation will be made down old Route 220 into South Avis, out across the “silver bridge” and down the River Road, eventually connecting up to another trail head at the former railroad station in Castanea Township.

“Three trails connected when all is said and done,” Buttorff said.

Allan said that for every \$1 spent in investment toward the trail system, \$13 is returned to the local economy.

This particular \$400,000 investment, he said, is part of over \$7 million spent to improve the local hiking-biking systems.

Trish Carothers, Susquehanna

Gateways executive director, also spoke briefly and also emphasized the importance of this “evolving corridor linking people to our important cultural heritage and assets.” She mentioned Jersey Shore was one of the designated communities in the “River Towns” program that encourages the use of the Susquehanna for recreation and nature paths.

Lycoming County Planning Director Bill Kelly also lauded the efforts of this “partnership” of nonprofits, utilities, business and local and state governments, and Joint Rail Authority Chairman Jerry Walls said this effort has created a pattern to follow and a process that will reduce barriers between the authority and efforts to share its active lines.

“This has been a long adventure,” state Rep. Garth Everett, R-Muncy, said. “It’s great to see this type of partnership pull together to make things happen ... In Harrisburg, this trail is famous, so this is a great day top be here in Jersey Shore.”

Buttorff took some time to mention a lengthy list of contributors to the effort, including SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority, the DCNR, PennDOT, Larsen Design Group, HRI Contracting, the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, Borough Council, the Jersey Shore Chamber of Commerce, the Williamsport-Lycoming Community Fund, the Lycoming County planning staff and many others.

“It’s a great opportunity for the borough because it will bring people on the trail into the

town, to partake of the businesses, shops and facilities,” Buttorff said. “It’s good for them and it’s good for us.”

What’s happening in central Pennsylvania with outdoor recreation is part of a much larger initiative involving local efforts and regional and statewide planning.

When central Pennsylvania started to open up to widespread settlement and development in the 19th century, railroads were often the only option for the transport of goods and people.

The era during which railroads were dominant has now passed, leaving central Pennsylvania with many unused rights-of-way. When tracks are abandoned, railroad companies often remove the iron rails and wooden ties to be used elsewhere, leaving behind narrow dirt lanes.

A national rails-to-trails movement has arisen in recent years to promote the acquisition of these old lanes for public use, and their conversion into finished trails for biking, walking, and cross-country skiing.

The Pine Creek Rail-Trail opened in 1996 through the bottom of the Pine Creek Gorge, often called the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania.

The 65-mile, multi-use trail for hiking, bicycling and cross-country skiing runs from Wellsboro to Jersey Shore.

Borough Council members include Mayor Buttorff, Wade Snyder, John Pisarcik, Janet Barnhart, Mary Greene, Ken Scheesley, Sean Simcox, Marguerite Dyroff and Deborah Colocino.