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Riverwalk Sensory Trail unveiled at Hudson Crossing Park for the mobility or visually impaired

Published: Sunday, June 16, 2013 By FRANCINE GRINNELL news@saratogian.com

SCHUYLERVILLE — The culmination of a decade of committed volunteerism was celebrated Saturday afternoon at a ribbon-cutting at Hudson Crossing Park, located just north of Schuylerville at Champlain Canal Lock 5.

The Riverwalk Sensory Trail, one of the longest trails of its kind, and accompanying Alfred Z. Solomon Kayak Launch are situated along a picturesque portion of the Hudson River near the confluence of the Battenkill River.

The trail is designed to provide a riverside experience for individuals who are mobility or visually impaired. The nearest trail of its kind is more than 100 miles away, in the Mohonk Preserve west of New Paltz.



From left, back row, Hudson Crossing V.P. of Grounds & Facilities Darryl Dumas; Northumberland Supervisor Willard Peck; Kevin Millington, Assistant Bureau Chief, Local and Regional Programs, N.Y.S. Department of State; George Hodgson, V.P. of Development; Landscape Architect Bill Sprengnether of Cardinal Direction Landscape Architecture; Sharon Leighton, Director of Community Relations, Canal Corp.; Schuylerville Mayor John J. Sherman. Children in foreground, from left: Hayden, Hudson and Hansen Peck, with Alayna Wian, ribbon-cutter. (FRANCINE GRINNELL photo)

Around 50 people, including officials John Robinson, founder of Our Ability; Joe Finan, superintendent of Saratoga National Historical Park; Kevin Millington, assistant bureau chief of local and regional programs for the New York State Department of State; Sharon Leighton, director of community relations for Canal Corp.; Schuylerville Mayor John Sherman; and Northumberland Supervisor Bill Peck, attended Saturday's ceremony.

While employed with CLA SITE Landscape Architecture, Engineering & Planning P.C. of Saratoga Springs, landscape architect Bill Sprengnether became involved with the project in 2010. He designed the sensory trail along the shore of the Hudson River, conferring with Dick Dretch of the National Park Service's Office of Accessibility and others to ensure appropriate standards were incorporated into his plans.

Sprengnether, now the founder of Cardinal Direction Landscape Architecture PLLC, also provided construction support as the trail and kayak launch were constructed by Cleveland Brothers Landscaping Inc.

“Yesterday I spent the afternoon at the trail, getting it ready for the event, and was consistently coaxed to moments of joy watching the cedar waxwings hunt for bugs or the redstarts guard their territory,” he said. “To have this area universally accessible will be a great gift for the people of our region.”

Robinson, the founder of Our Ability, an online resource for people with disabilities, is particularly enthusiastic about the project.

He was born a congenital amputee and stands at three feet, eight inches tall. Although he has no extension of his arms or legs, he has not been limited in his career or his personal life. A family man with two children, he enjoys golfing and mountain climbing.

June 23, Robinson will embark on a 350-mile trek from Buffalo to the Corning Preserve in Albany, traveling by bike, kayak and canal boat along the New York State Canal System to demonstrate access is no longer restricted along those waterways. His bicycle was specially adapted with guards made by Hanger Prosthetics of Albany to accommodate the shorter length of his arms.

“We want people to get outside again. Whether challenged with handicaps or not, we want to encourage people to get out and enjoy nature,” Robinson said. “If you have a goal, set it and experience it.”

His nonprofit, Disability Education Forum of New York, lines up speakers for schools and produces short documentaries that identify and highlight successful people with disabilities who are achieving above and beyond expectations.

Grants totaling \$297,037 were received from the Department of State through the Environmental Protection Fund Local Waterfront Revitalization Program for the design and construction of the sensory trail and kayak launch.

In addition, Hudson Crossing Park received \$20,000 from the Alfred Z. Solomon Charitable Trust, \$5,000 from the Hudson River Valley Greenway and \$5,000 from the Hudson River Improvement Fund of the Hudson River Foundation. The Schuylerville Lions Club contributed \$1,000 for touchable bird sculptures that will soon be placed at sensory exhibit stations.

Abigail Radliff, 19, of Stillwater also attended the ribbon-cutting, enjoying the trail from her wheelchair.

“They told me it was a trail that people with disabilities can use. The more accessible, the better,” she said.

Mike Bielkiewicz, vice president of communications and outreach for Hudson Crossing Park’s board of directors, said he was proud to see a trail truly accessible to all.

“If you are fortunate and are not physically challenged, you probably take for granted your ability to make your way through rough and wooded terrain. You probably don’t even hear all of

the natural sounds that envelop you,” he said. “This trail, with its wide, smooth pathway, river overlooks and so many other features, offers experiences to everyone that most of us don’t even think about.”

Stationed along the trail are four Tour-Mate Eco-Box audio interpretive units. Here, visitors may listen to short stories relevant to the surrounding area. The Eco-Boxes may be “people-powered” or accessed via a smart device using quick response codes. Turning a hand-crank and selecting one of four buttons will allow visitors to hear stories relating to the Lakes to Locks passage. Saratoga National Historical Park Ranger Joe Craig scripted the stories.

For more information, go to www.hudsoncrossingpark.org.

Additional Photos on the Saratogian website:



John Robinson, the founder of Our Ability, an online resource for people with disabilities, was born a congenital amputee. His bicycle was specially adapted with guards made by Hanger Prosthetics of Albany to accommodate the shorter length of his arms. (FRANCINE GRINNELL photo)



From left, Alex Drohobycky, Alice Voell, both of Schuylerville, and Leyli Johnson of Hebron lounge in the sun at the base of the kayak launch at Hudson Crossing Park. (FRANCINE GRINNELL photo)



Nineteen-year-old Abigail Radliff of Stillwater and her father enjoy a day on the sensory trail. (FRANCINE GRINNELL photo)



Mike Bielkiewicz, vice president of communications and outreach for Hudson Crossing Park's board of directors, uses a hand crank to operate one of four Tour-Mate Eco-Box audio interpretive units. Here, visitors may listen to short stories relevant to the surrounding area. (FRANCINE GRINNELL photo)

The Post Star – Web site

http://poststar.com/riverwalk-sensory-trail/image_c40f3992-d628-11e2-989f-0019bb2963f4.html

June 15, 2013 7:00 pm • [GERALDINE FREEDMAN--Correspondent](#)



GERALDINE FREEDMAN—CORRESPONDENT

Joe Finan, center, in uniform, superintendent of Saratoga National Historical Park, joined those Saturday who attended the official opening of the Riverwalk Sensory Trail along the Hudson River in Northumberland.



GERALDINE FREEDMAN—CORRESPONDENT

June 15, 2013 7:00 pm • [GERALDINE FREEDMAN--Correspondent](#)

NORTHUMBERLAND -- The peaceful Riverwalk Sensory Trail features hidden curves and luscious greenery as it wends its way alongside the rippling waters of the Hudson River. On Saturday afternoon, several dignitaries, volunteers and local residents gathered to officially open the trail and the Kayak Launch.

“This is what can happen when there’s a public and private partnership. It was a team effort,” said Supervisor Bill Peck of Northumberland, before he and several officials and volunteers helped to cut a green ribbon at the entrance of the trail.

The 1,540-foot stone dust trail, which was constructed with various grants totaling about \$370,000, was designed by landscape architect Bill Sprengnether specifically for people who are mobility or visually impaired and is part of the larger Hudson Crossing educational and recreational park. It is also one of 110 sites from Whitehall to New York City that is part of the Lakes to Locks Passage.

Along the trail are four audio interpretative sites that, when they’re hand-cranked, tell stories about the area, as well as rest areas with river views. The Dix Bridge, which is very close to the trail’s entrance, is being refurbished after having been closed in the 1990s. Peck said he anticipates the bridge will be opened by mid-October and will finally allow Saratoga and Washington counties to be linked.

Fifteen years ago, it was only a dream to have an educational park or a scenic byway, said George Hodgson, Hudson Crossing board member. But over the years, the dream took shape as more communities recommended developing a park as part of their masterplan, and many more volunteers and state agencies, such as the state Canal Corp., which owns the land, got involved.

“The real catalyst was the \$250,000 federal grant from then-Representative John Sweeney, which was matched,” Hodgson said.

But the trail and park represent more than just being a collaborative effort, said Sharon Leighton, director of community relations for Canal Corp.

“It was the hearts of the people who built this park. Before there was nothing,” she said. “We’re so delighted by the stewardship of this canal property. This is the premier example across our system of what can work.”

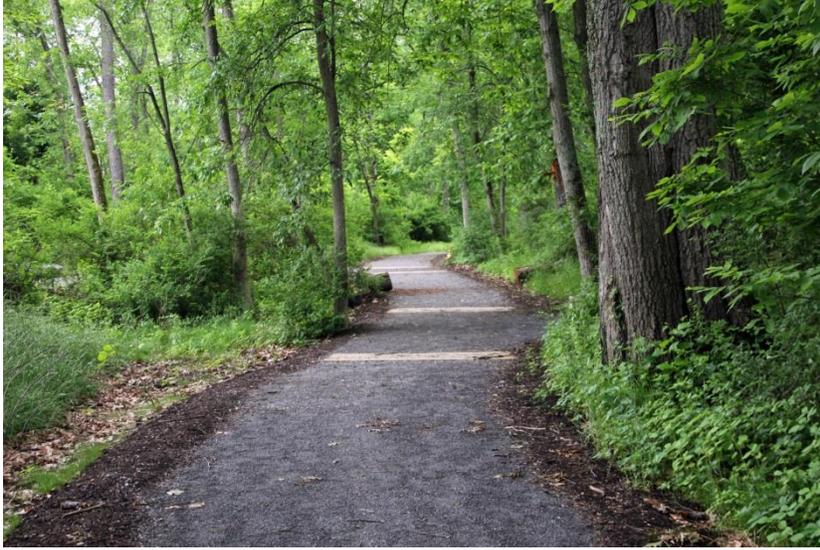
Marlene Bissell, who spearheaded many of the early efforts, said the trail and park link the environment to economic revitalization.

“It’s a model for other waterfront communities as to what they can do,” she said. “We’ve brought in \$4 million to this area since its inception. When I’m visiting Oswego and I hear them talk about our park, I think that’s so cool.”

Schuylerville Mayor John Sherman said he was equally impressed.

“This used to be an old fishing trail. Now, this is good for everyone,” he said.

The Daily Gazette June 12, 2013 (Text was scanned from the paper, photo by Mike Bielkiewicz that was used in the article)



SCHUYLERVILLE

New trail has features for people with visual, mobility limitations

BY ALEXIS WILLEY

For The Daily Gazette

A new accessible and sensory-aided trail and kayak launch will be unveiled at the Hudson Crossing Park in Schuylerville at a 2 p.m. ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday.

The River Walk Sensory Trail was developed to provide an opportunity for visually and mobility-impaired visitors to experience the beauty of the area.

The project is part of a bigger, ongoing initiative to develop the Lakes to Locks Passage between Saratoga and Washington counties into the Hudson Crossing educational and recreational park.

The 1,540-foot trail is widely paved for ease of access and features river overlook decks, an outdoor "open classroom," a retreat site that mimics the feel of a tree house without climbing a tree, and hand crank-powered listening stations that provide area histories along the riverfront in Schuylerville.

All along the path, corduroy-textured wooden inlays indicate points of interest for the visually impaired, and the Tour-Mate Eco-Box listening stations tell stories about the history of the Lakes to Locks Passage. Hikers can hear about the "four lives," or the four historical themes of the area: Natural Forces and Native Peoples, Conflict and Settlement, Corridor of Commerce, and Magnet for Tourism.

Those adjustments provide an amplification of the senses that will generate a deeper understanding of the area's natural history for all visitors, and is one of the longest trails of its kind in the United States.

"The trail was designed to let people with a variety of limitations experience nature in a way they might not otherwise be able to," said Mike Bielkiewicz, vice president of commerce and outreach for Hudson Crossing Park.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

The park is a collaborative effort, according to Bielkiewicz. The development of and funding for the nearly \$370,000 River Walk Sensory Trail project was aided greatly by the state Department of State and its Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan, as well as the National Park Service, the Schuylerville Lions Club, local volunteers, organizations and restoration groups.

The sensory trail and canoe and kayak launch were priority projects in the "Old Saratoga on the Hudson Waterfront Revitalization Plan," an off-shoot of the Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan.

"The plan identified a number of projects for enhancing public access and water-based recreation, promoting heritage tourism, revitalizing downtown areas, and developing efficient pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly transportation access," according to Laz Benitez, speaking on behalf of the Department of State.

Development of the Alfred Z. Solomon Kayak Launch was aided by local paddlers in an attempt to find the safest and easiest point of entry to the longest stretch of the Champlain Canal between Locks C4 and CS. There are plans to increase accessibility of the canoe and kayak launch in the future, but for now it is accessible by a "short-cut" trail from the Lock 5 office and parking lot.

Upon completion of the Dix Bridge restoration, the sensory trail and adjacent launch will complete a nearly circular hiking path around the Lakes to Locks Passage.