

Community fund backs Ohio River Trail Council effort to extend Ohio River Trail

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February 20, 2015 GLEN OSBORNE, PA — Glen Osborne resident John Orndorff wants to make Beaver Road in Sewickley more bicycle-friendly. Memories of bicycling through Sewickley as a teenager on his way to tennis lessons motivated him to become involved with the Ohio River Trail Council, a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to establishing a new, multi-use trail through Beaver County. He is now a director of the council.

“Being able to cycle through my own little community was wonderful,” he said, adding, “it should still be part of our community today.”

The Ohio River Trail Council is proposing a 41-mile trail that will pass through 26 communities along the Ohio River in Beaver County to the Ohio-Pennsylvania border. The trail will connect with several others, including the Three Rivers Heritage Trail that connects to the Great Allegheny Passage, and the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail. It will also join the Montour Trail to the east with the rail trail in Lisbon, Ohio, to the west.

Mr. Orndorff has been working with Ohio River Trail Council to make the Ohio River Greenway trail a reality. His recent efforts include fundraising, educating the public, and gaining local government support, particularly concentrating on a section of the route that will link to the rest of the trail via the Ambridge and Sewickley bridges. The Ohio River Trail Phase II will pass through Ambridge, Leetsdale, Edgeworth, Sewickley, and Glen Osborne, and terminate at the Beaver County Jail in Center.

Mr. Orndorff raised funds for an upcoming engineering study that will focus on this section of the trail. He collected individual donations and garnered the support of Sewickley Valley Community Fund, which agreed to match any money raised up to \$2,000. Mr. Orndorff also gained the assistance of local municipalities, raising \$200 for the study from each municipality along the proposed route. These donations, along with funds from the Ohio River Trail Council, will make the study possible.

Mr. Orndorff stressed the importance of involving the local municipalities from the get-go. “Being involved in the ground floor in things like this is critical,” he said. “This is something worth working on,” he added. “It will be an improvement for our area.”

The study, which will be performed this summer by Mackin Engineering Co., will provide a field review by professional engineers and landscape architects experienced in bikeway, trail, and disability act compliance projects. Along with investigating routes to find the safest and most direct connection for cyclists, the study will result in a report that will include a map of the proposed cycling route, location of signage, safety recommendations for improvements to intersections and shoulders, and an estimate of the cost for materials and installation. Mr. Orndorff said the report will be suitable to forward to Penn DOT for its consideration.

After the study is completed, Mr. Orndorff said the next step is expected to include more dialogue with the municipalities affected. “We have to convince them that these ideas are worth implementing,” he said. “I’m sure they will be very interested in what the studies are proposing.”

He said the big question will be whether or not all of the municipalities will want to support the project. "The point will be," he said, "here is this study, and we think that we can get money to fund it, but you have to be on board," he said. "That is going to be the real challenge."

In addition to raising funds for the study, Mr. Orndorff also worked to involve and educate community members. With a grant from Sewickley Valley Community Fund, he purchased bicycle helmets and LED safety lights. He then led a bicycle safety course for almost 25 participants. He donated the helmets and safety lights to some of the children who participated in the course. He led a second bicycle safety course at the Sewickley Harvest Festival.

Mr. Orndorff said he hopes to organize more bicycle safety programs in order to obtain more backing from the community. "The challenge is getting enough commitment from residents to convince the borough councils that this is something their constituents will support," he said.

There will be a kickoff meeting for further planning of the project at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the Old Economy Village Visitor Center on 16th Street in Ambridge. Mr. Orndorff said a goal of the meeting is to involve as many residents, officials, and businesses as possible in the planning stages of the bike route.

To learn more about the Ohio River Trail Council and its programs, visit www.ohiorivertrail.org.

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