



Officials hold ribbon cutting for new bike trail in Wood River Township

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COTTAGE HILLS — Officials held a ribbon cutting ceremony Tuesday to commemorate the opening of its new \$450,000 bike trail.

Wood River Township officials, along with Madison County, Bethalto and Madison County Transit District representatives attended the event. The bike trail is located off Center Street, between Cottage Hills and Rosewood Heights.

“We built this trail in an area that doesn’t get a lot of attention,” Wood River Township Supervisor Mike Babcock said. “This is something that the residents of Cottage Hills deserve.”

The trail starts at Kutter Park in Cottage Hills and goes north for about 1/10 of a mile along Center Street where it intersects the former railroad tracks. The trail then extends east for about a mile ending just west of Illinois 255.

Both private and public monies funded the project. Phillips 66 donated \$100,000, which then allowed the township to leverage grants from the Madison County Park Enhancement Program (PEP) and the Metro East Park and Recreation District.

MEPRD provided more than \$200,000 for the project and the county’s two PEP grants totaled more than \$66,000. The county also provided an additional \$15,000 environmental grant and the township’s parks budget covered the remainder of the project.

Babcock said it was the vision of County Board member Tom McRae of Bethalto, who while serving as a Wood River Township trustee, to develop the abandoned railroad tracks as a part of a rails-to-trails program.

“We’ve worked incredibly hard on this project for years,” McRae said. “Our hope is that this is just the start of bike trails in this part of the county.”

McRae said he and former Bethalto Mayor Steve Bryant visited MCT Executive Director Jerry Kane at the start of the project to find out how they could turn the Bethalto owned right-of-ways, or former rails, into trails.

McRae said while the new trail has no affiliation with the MCT trails, which owns and maintains 130 miles of trails in the county on abandoned railroad lines. Officials hope that future projects will form a connection to the Confluence Trail, something that would allow cyclists coming up from Edwardsville easier access to the area.

“The possibilities are endless,” McRae said. “We will be able to connect from the west, the east and the north here. And the city of Bethalto has expressed an interest in connecting to this trail as well.”

Kane said the township was able to lay the foundation for what will become a wonderful bike trail system.

“It took cooperation of local government to improve the quality of life for the residents of Madison County,” Kane said. “It’s a public-private partnership that works.”

McRae said Bethalto Mayor Alan Winslow and Madison County Chairman Kurt Prenzler were also encouraging of the project.

Prenzler said one of the biggest assets in the county is the hiking and biking trails developed by Madison County Transit.

“People come to visit the county just to use the trail system,” Prenzler said. “This new trail is just another reason that Madison County is one of the best places to live, work and play.”