

Allegheny River Trail part of the big picture

By Karamagi Rujumba, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: A look at plans for a 32 mile trail connecting towns along the Allegheny River.

September 13, 2008

Allegheny County Chief Executive Dan Onorato and a coalition of municipalities and riverfront development groups yesterday unveiled plans for a 32-mile trail connecting 17 towns along the Allegheny River from Harrison to Millvale.

The trail, which will be known as the Allegheny Valley Trail, is expected to meander through Tarentum, Springdale, Aspinwall and O'Hara, touching parts of the Rachel Carson trail before connecting with the Pittsburgh-Harrisburg Mainline Canal Greenway, which follows 320 miles along the historic Pennsylvania Mainline Canal.

"Through successful partnerships with businesses, foundations and trail groups, we're close to completing the Great Allegheny Passage along the Monongahela River. Now, we are turning our efforts to the Allegheny River," Mr. Onorato said at a meeting of municipality officials in O'Hara yesterday.

He commended the St. Margaret Foundation, which presented a \$25,000 check to the Fox Chapel District Association, which, together with O'Hara, recently completed a five-mile section of the riverfront trail.

Matthew Hughes, executive director of the St. Margaret Foundation, said the money will be used to extend the Squaw Valley section and eventually connect it to the rest of the Allegheny Valley Trail, sections of which have been completed in Millvale and O'Hara.

"Our mission is to invest in health and wellness initiatives like this, which we hope will get people actively involved in improving their health. One of our biggest concerns is the increasing rate of obesity, and funding projects like this trail, we hope, is one way of tackling it," said Mr. Hughes, adding that the St. Margaret Foundation has invested about \$60,000 in the Squaw Valley Trail over the last three years.

The entire trail is being planned and funded by a number of organizations, which have partnered with the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development, including groups like Friends of the Riverfront and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.

Thomas Baxter, executive director of Friends of the Riverfront, said much of the Allegheny Valley Trail is still on paper.

"We are about to start a study, which will guide us in getting the project off the ground," Mr. Baxter said, adding that a timetable has not been established so far for when work might start on building the trail, and how much the entire project is expected to cost.

Noting that parts of the trail are already under construction in Sharpsburg and Harrison, Mr. Onorato said the trail will eventually connect with the trails at Boyce Park.