



LHVA on 'green' redevelopment *Area's legacy of wealth and destruction is confronted*

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

What a pleasure it is to enjoy the wonderful spring weather that has finally arrived in Northeastern Pennsylvania. There is no better time to enjoy the beauty of the hills and mountains that surround our cities and towns. As residents, we often take the beauty of our landscape for granted, focusing instead on the dreariness of a rainy day or the potholes that a rough winter leaves behind.

This month, take a drive and notice how the scarred remnants of an industrial past are being replaced with new growth, natural as well as man-made, that is emerging to reclaim the landscape. As more of the artifacts of coal-mining operations disappear, as dilapidated structures are being removed, the efforts to reclaim, restore and refurbish the earth as well as the built environment are beginning to dominate the view. We just have to make the effort to take a new look, not through rose colored glasses, but with open minds, to recognize that our corner of the world is changing and that there is a renaissance taking place in our own backyards.

At the Lackawanna Heritage Valley (LHVA), we work everyday to foster an appreciation of our present as well as our past. The very attributes that made this place rich also contributed to the devastation of our natural resources. Coal made us wealthy, but we paid a steep price. Now, more than a hundred years later, conservation and preservation of the environment are finally recognized as a priority, not only morally but also as a necessity for survival. Today, the worlds of business and government are joining environmentalists in understanding that being "green" is not only essential to the human race and to the planet, but it also is economically rewarding. A healthy, attractive and sustainable environment enhances quality of life. And that is a factor that attracts people to visit, live and work in a community.

As part of its mission, the Lackawanna Heritage Valley works to educate the public about every aspect of our heritage, not the least of which are our natural resources. There is a great deal to celebrate in that regard. The anthracite coal under the ground sustained us for many years, but there is much above ground that continues to provide a wonderful quality of life to this region. We have beautiful public parks, built and maintained by the state and local counties, as well as by the cities and smaller municipalities of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The Lackawanna River, the defining feature of LHVA's geographic designation as an area "significant in the history of the nation," has been restored to its original pristine

condition. Instead of being the repository of industrial and municipal waste, the river now hosts fishermen who can catch trophy trout in the Mid-Valley section, as well as canoeists, kayakers and others pursuing recreational enjoyments. It serves as a living classroom for students learning about the native plants, insects and fish that reside there. LHVA's annual Environmental Fair for sixth graders uses the Lackawanna River as an educational tool, not only for biology, but also to enhance students' understanding of water management and other issues that challenge our society.

Currently, development of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail along the forty miles of the Lackawanna River from Forest City to Duryea is a top priority of LHVA. At Forest City, the trail will connect with the D&H Rail-Trail to New York State. At Duryea, it will link with the D&L Trail going south. On May 11, LHVA broke ground on a new one-mile section of trail in Mayfield and Carbondale. This section will be completed by early fall 2007.

We anticipate with great excitement the construction of the Downtown Scranton Heritage Greenway, now in the final stages of development. We look forward to a groundbreaking for the Greenway by 2008, with completion by the end of that year. The Greenway will serve as a gateway to the trail both up and down stream, with links to the neighborhoods for students at Scranton High School, opportunities for walking, hiking and biking for visitors and residents, and as a recreational respite for people who live and work in Downtown Scranton. LHVA is working with the City of Scranton and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to have trails constructed atop the flood protection levees from Olive Street through the Plot Section. Section by section the trail is coming together, just as the people of this region connect with each other in so many ways.

There is a lot to work with and a lot of work to be done as LHVA continues its environmental activities. In the meantime, enjoy the landscape, the river, the lakes, parks and recreational activities as summer approaches!

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