



River as an economic engine

Riverwalk spurs many exciting developments

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

Some very exciting things have happened in the Lackawanna Heritage Valley this spring. With the water sparkling in the background, LHVA celebrated the beginning of construction of the downtown Scranton Riverwalk during the last week of April. This segment of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) runs along the Lackawanna River between West Olive Street and 7th Avenue, and it will serve as the gateway to the 40-mile Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. There is a lot happening along the Riverwalk, and construction is expected to be completed by early to mid summer.

Located on the west bank of the river the Riverwalk traverses properties that are close to the Central City business district, the Scranton High School, the sports facilities located near Providence Road, and the Mt. Pleasant Business Park that is being developed by the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce on W. Linden Street and 7th Avenue. It also will serve as the catalyst for the future Scranton Riverfront District that will transform the areas close to the river into a destination for recreation, culture and commerce. The Riverfront District is expected to encompass the Riverwalk, the Scranton Laceworks and ArtSpace projects, the newly redeveloped 500 block of Lackawanna Avenue and The Commonwealth Medical College.

All four of these significant redevelopment projects not only will be part of the Riverfront District, but also they will be accessible by walking or biking from one to the other by using the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail.

Trails are more than recreational paths for walkers, runners and cyclists. They also provide alternative transportation routes for students and commuters. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation provided funding to the Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority under its "Safe Routes to School" initiative to construct a spur trail to Scranton High School. By the beginning of the next school year, students will be able to walk or ride their bikes via the Riverwalk and the spur trail to and from school from neighborhoods in North, South, East and West Scranton. This will alleviate a dangerous traffic situation that occurs daily when school is dismissed.

When the Riverwalk trail is complete, it also will allow people to ride their bikes to and from work. Bicycle commuters have become common in cities of all sizes. And how nice it will be for people who working Scranton to be able to don their sneakers for a walk at lunch time! Or for

the veterans who live on Mulberry Street to have a place to stroll and socialize outdoors in mild weather.

Experience has proven that trails are engines for economic development. Not only do small businesses crop up near trails, but also large companies are attracted to cities where trails enhance the quality of life for their residents. Since the LRHT will connect to a national trail system, serious hikers will move through this area, often looking for overnight lodging, food and entertainment. Many significant industrial sites existed along the river, and the LRHT will provide interpretive signage to offer a better understanding of the historical and cultural aspects of the area. Also, benches, lighting, directional signage and other amenities will enhance the trail experience for users.

As if the groundbreaking were not enough, a few days later word came from Washington that more than \$8 million dollars had been released to complete the Scranton Flood Control project. This was more good news for many reasons. For one thing, completion of the levees will allow completion of another section of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail. Scheduled for completion in early 2010, the levee trail will connect to the Riverwalk and the CNJ section of the LHRT making it possible to traverse the entire City of Scranton between Dickson City and Taylor, a journey of seven miles.

The release of the funds for the levee project also means that the ambitious, mixed use development project planned at the Scranton Laceworks will start in earnest. The Laceworks will include retail and commercial space as well as hundreds of residential apartments. Laceworks owner, Jody Cordaro, plans to carry the lace industry theme throughout the development. LHVA also will use that venue for interpretation of the Scranton lace and textile industry.

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