



ALONG THE CORRIDOR

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A NEWSLETTER OF THE DELAWARE & LEHIGH NATIONAL & STATE HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Economic Development Update: *River Common in Wilkes-Barre*

Residents of downtown Wilkes-Barre will be able to enjoy the Susquehanna once again, thanks to a \$23 million economic development project called River Common, scheduled for completion in spring 2009. The construction project, sponsored by the Federal government, Luzerne County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, will create two large portals through flood levees built by the Army Corps of Engineers, allowing river access from street level in the heart of downtown.

“This will be the first grand public works project this community has seen in 100 years,” says Jim Brozena, executive director of the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority. Brozena, who served as Luzerne County engineer for 25 years, envisions a re-energized downtown from the Luzerne County courthouse to the Dorothy Dixon Dart Center for the Performing Arts, four blocks that include both King’s and Wilkes colleges.

The new River Common had its origins after Tropical Storm Agnes, which brought more than a foot of rain to Wilkes-Barre in 1972. Even though 530,000 sand-bags were added to the top of the existing levees, the Susquehanna River rose to 40.9 feet that year—18.9 feet above flood stage, and four feet above the levees. Once the floodwaters receded, President Nixon promised to fix the problem so that it would never happen again.

Although a report on repairs to the levees came from the Army Corps of Engineers in 1979, no funding to make those repairs was appropriated by Congress through the 1980s.

Then, in early January 1996, the “Blizzard of the Century” was followed by rapidly warming temperatures and heavy rain. This time, the floodwaters did not top the levees, but came within just 18 inches. As a result, President Clinton called for construction to begin on the Wyoming Valley Levee Raising Project. By January 2003, increased flood protection levels along the entire stretch of the Wyoming Valley were completed. The levees were raised on the west side of the river from Wyoming and Forty Fort through Kingston and on down to Plymouth, and



Part of the River Common in Wilkes-Barre courtesy of Sasaki and Associates.

on the east side from Wilkes-Barre through Hanover Township.

However, with the raising of the levees, residents and county officials began to notice that the riverfront—once bustling with activity—was almost completely obstructed as you drove along River Street. Indeed, a first-time visitor to Wilkes-Barre might spend an entire day and never see the river.

In 1998, Luzerne County partnered with design firm Sasaki and Associates to expand the plan into an economic development initiative that aimed to spur more downtown development. After many public hearings and changes to the plan, construction and funding for the River Common phase of the project all are nearing completion.

The River Common project involves four major components:

1. Northampton Street Portal, near Wilkes University, a walkway through the floodwall that will lead to a 750-seat amphitheater at the water’s edge
2. Millennium Circle, located across from the Irem Temple, which includes a large circle with a fountain that can host theater in the round and leads down a large staircase to the River Landing
3. River Landing, a 1.2 acre area that can host festivals and other events right at the water’s edge
4. A fishing pier for recreational uses

The portals will be faced with sandstone to match the Luzerne County courthouse, pavers to match the colors of King’s College and Wilkes University buildings, and final details to include granite, blue stone, stainless steel, lighting and landscaping, says Brozena. Signage developed in conjunction with the D&L will be installed throughout the park.

“We’ve worked closely with the state to turn Wilkes-Barre into a college town, and we’re hoping that these kind of attractions will give the public reason to stay downtown after five o’clock.”

Partners and Prospects

A noted scholar in the field of leadership studies, Warren G. Bennis, once said, “There are two ways of being creative. One can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers and dances flourish.”

The Conservation Study Institute’s recently completed assessment of the work of the D&L Corridor concluded “The initiative has fostered preservation of the region’s heritage through hundreds of projects and partnerships, broadened awareness of the economic benefits and enhanced quality of life that protecting heritage resources can provide, and leveraged millions of dollars from public and private sources.”

The D&L partnership network appreciates the tremendous support and assistance over the years from our anchoring partners – the National Park Service and the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. But most of all we owe a great deal of appreciation and gratitude to members of the Delaware & Lehigh Commission, both past and present. The Commission created an environment for this multifaceted partnership to grow and even flourish. The Commission gave the partners and staff the opportunity to sing and dance on the national stage.

As we approach the sunset of the Commission, I want to say, on behalf of the many partners and staff, *thank you*. Thank you for the dedication, perseverance and creativity necessary to make this partnership work. The D&L truly has a nationally significant story, and you have offered the vision and helped to empower the partners into action to protect the resources and tell that story.

The Delaware & Lehigh NHC, Inc. now assumes the responsibility as the “keeper of the vision.” I know each and every Commission member wants to assure all the partners that the work of the Commission has been left in the very capable hands of the non-profit to continue to sing and dance on the national stage, and perhaps beyond.

Thank you,

Allen

Independence Gateway Ribbon Cutting

Allen Sachse of the D&L National Heritage Corridor joined Kurt Zwinkl of the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area for a ribbon cutting at Independence Visitor Center in Philadelphia on August 29. The Center, the gateway for Independence National Historic Park including Independence Hall (and the Liberty Bell), now features a multimedia exhibit of the two heritage areas.

Large maps of the heritage areas hang as part of the display, designating sites of historical, cultural and recreational importance—including the 165-mile D&L Trail that winds its way from Wilkes-Barre to Bristol on former beds of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and towpaths of the Lehigh and Delaware canals. The exhibit also features continuous video presentations that introduce the story of anthracite coal and its importance in local, state and national growth; and pays tribute to the canals and railroads that grew up along the rivers to transport the coal to market.

The exhibit was made possible thanks to the combined efforts of the Delaware & Lehigh National and State Heritage Corridor, the Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area and the National Park Service.



Invitation

Stay informed about D&L progress and adventures via our **NEW** email newsletter. Simply send an email to info@delawareandlehigh.org with the word “SUBSCRIBE” in the subject line, and we’ll add you to our email list.

“Remember, Respect, Revitalize”

Bethlehem Steel Conference

In order to gain public input on the redevelopment of the former Bethlehem Steel site, the Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition (LVIHC) and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH) co-hosted a conference June 14 and 15 called, “Remember, Respect, Revitalize.” The Bethlehem-area conference gave interested parties an opportunity to voice their hopes and dreams for the site with local and visiting scholars and professionals.

“The conference was an enormous success that produced valuable thoughts and ideas,” says Amey Senape, historic resource specialist for the D&L. “Now, we are in the process of creating an interpretive plan that will provide a framework that can create and sustain vitality for Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley.”

At the conference, local knowledge and enthusiasm united with nationally recognized industrial historians, scholars and experts. The proceedings produced valuable input for an interpretation plan that will help illuminate the stories relevant



H. Scott Everett of the D&L records notes as Tom Smith, NCM, leads one of the public discussions on use and interpretation of the historic transportation corridors.



Public participation ensues as experts and the LVIHC Coalition lead distinct topical discussions.



Bethlehem’s Mayor John Callahan kicks off the event.

to understanding the Steel. In recognition of the Steel site’s enormous importance, the conference was funded through a grant MARCH secured from the National Endowment for the Humanities and additional support was provided by the City of Bethlehem.

The Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition (LVIHC) is co-chaired by the D&L and the Historic Bethlehem Partnership and was formed at the request of the property owner to facilitate interaction among groups dedicated to preserving and interpreting the region’s industrial heritage. Their mission is not only to create a unique heritage tourism destination, but also to renew the economic vitality of the Lehigh Valley.

“We believe that the Steel site can become a model of national significance for effective collabora-

tion among public history, municipal government and private investment,” says Senape. “To accomplish this, our interpretive planning must work together with development and municipal objectives.”

The draft interpretation plan will be discussed with the public at a follow-up conference on November 15, 2007.



Forging Ahead at Bethlehem Steel

On Thursday, November 15, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH) at Rutgers University-Camden held a conference in collaboration with the Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition at the Fowler Family Southside Center (formerly the Discovery Center) in Bethlehem. Participants discussed the Bethlehem Steel draft interpretation plan.

Guest speaker Bob Rathburn, Executive Director of Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, discussed findings from the June 2007 conference and explained from his experience what an interpretation plan can do for a community.

For more information see:

- Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities: www.march.rutgers.edu
 - The *Morning Call* “Bethlehem Daily Star” Blog: www.mcall.com
 - Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark: www.slossfurnaces.com
- Save Our Steel: www.saveoursteel.org

This event was organized by The Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH) at Rutgers University-Camden in collaboration with the Lehigh Valley Industrial Heritage Coalition (LVIHC) through a grant secured by MARCH from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

D&L Trail Tenders Clean Up!

Summer 2007 was extremely busy for the D&L Trail Tenders. Twelve cleanups were conducted between mid-May and the end of August at sites in White Haven, Weissport, Walnutport, Allentown, Bethlehem and Freemansburg. Here's a recap of the statistics:

Trail Tenders: 191
Volunteer hours: 693
Cleanups: 12

The boost in cleanups and new volunteers happened thanks to the formation of four regional Trail Tenders groups – Lehigh Gorge, Carbon County, Northern Lehigh and Lehigh Valley – who took it upon themselves to organize cleanup sites and work dates in their home locales.

Lehigh Gorge Trail Tenders have adopted an area around Lock 29 in White Haven and are creating a small community historic park and adjacent nature trail along the upper Lehigh River. The White Haven Chamber of Commerce is donating six sitting benches for the park and the D&L Trail in Lehigh Gorge.

The Carbon County Trail Tenders are cleaning the Weissport Trailhead and Lock 8 just north of the trailhead. East Penn Township graciously donated the use of a large chipper and the time of a township employee at the group's August 25 cleanup.

Northern Lehigh Trail Tenders have been busy clearing invasive plants at Lock 22 north of Walnutport. This historic structure and many others like it are in jeopardy because of invasive plants that grow in their walls. In time, the root systems of these plants spread large rocks apart and cause many of them to tumble into the canal.

The annual Trail Tenders picnic was held on September 29 in Walnutport.



The Forgotten Mountain Boys entertained the Trail Tender groups, who were honored for their many volunteer hours at the picnic.

The Lehigh Valley Trail Tenders have taken the cleanup initiative a step further and are creating a model site just east of Sand Island in Bethlehem. Invasive plants are so dense there, they have literally formed a green wall between the trail and the Lehigh River. The Tenders are cutting them out and recording their efforts for others to learn.

The group received a boost when Rick Cantelmi, owner of Cantelmi's Hardware in Bethlehem, donated a large selection of tools for cutting and pruning. Doug Walter, owner of Northampton County Seed Company in Nazareth, donated 45 pounds of perennial ryegrass to seed sections of the site once the invasives are taken out. The City of Bethlehem has promised to provide heavy machinery to help clear some large dead trees, and the Northampton County Conservation District is helping with the selection of native plant species to replace the invasives that overran the site. The end result will be a section of trail with lovely vistas of the Lehigh River and Bethlehem Steel.

A handbook based on the work done at Sand Island will be produced and made available to groups such as Boy and Girl Scout troops who are interested in adopting a section of the trail and reestablishing native plant species.

Trail Update

Lehigh Gap Nature Center:

- East Penn Township honored their commitment and cleaned out the blocked culverts from the County Line up to the Bobolink Trail (Please see photo). The result of these efforts will be to eliminate the standing water on long stretches of the trail after a rain. The culverts were clogged with four to six feet of debris and sediment. A volunteer effort will begin shortly to dress them up and make them safe through a recently secured Rails to Trails Conservancy grant.
- The initial construction of the D&L trail through East Penn Township has been completed, thanks to a DCNR grant. Work consisted of removing rail ties and vegetation, leveling the ballast and rolling the surface. This section will connect the northern entrance to the Lehigh Gap Nature Center through to the Carbon – Lehigh County line, a distance of approximately three miles. The section will also connect to the almost completed boat launch, a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission / East Penn Township project.
- We are working with Lehigh County, Washington Township, the Lehigh Gap Nature Center and the Lehigh Valley Greenway Initiative to complete the section of trail from the end of the finished Slatington section to the Lehigh-Carbon County line, a distance of approximately six tenths of a mile. We are currently working on the design and hope to start construction in the Spring of 2008.



Trail section in East Penn Township



Lehigh Gap Nature Center just south of the north gate



The D&L donated 45 Miles of Mules t-shirts to the South Bethlehem Neighborhood Center for children and families in need. D&L staff member Amey Senape (center) delivered the shirts to Jose Leon and Javier Toro of the Center.

D&L Trail Summit

The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor held a D&L Trail Summit on Friday, November 16. The Summit featured: examples of and discussion on sustainable trail alliances, updates on the status of D&L Trail projects and immediate plans to raise the visibility and usability of the D&L Trail in 2008.

Next year marks the 20th anniversary of the Corridor's designation by Congress as the nation's third national heritage area. This important milestone supports the significant positive impact the Corridor has enhancing the quality of life within the region. We continually work to upgrade and enhance the D&L Trail as a destination. Most of the 165 miles of trail are actively used by residents and visitors as the trails offer an array of recreational outdoor experiences. Once again, the D&L Corridor will reach out to its constituents to ask their thoughts and hear their concerns and suggestions.

Those who attended the Trail Summit will receive a report on the outcome and strategies as we continue to move forward.

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The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor and State Heritage Park is a joint effort of private groups and interested citizens, county and municipal governments, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the federal government to conserve cultural and natural resources and provide appropriate development opportunities for a sustainable future.

Future issues of *Along the Corridor* will be available online and via email. If you would prefer to receive the newsletter electronically, please write to the above address or send your email to info@delawareandlehigh.org.

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The D&L's second annual "Float Your Boat" community event was held on September 23 in conjunction with the Metro Wilderness Race, sponsored by the Wildlands Conservancy and L.L. Bean. The D&L's popular event, in which participants of all ages design, build and float their own boat, took winners in many divisions—including the fastest, most original and unique, and most persistent.

