

# SUBURBAN JOURNALS

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Blazing trails

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There's a famous quote John Donjoian has always remembered: "There's something wrong with a society that drives a car to work out in a gym."

"That's got to strike you as a little funny," he said.

It would, according to a man getting ready to build trails.

That's what Donjoian, founder of Gateway Off-Road Cyclists, did Saturday morning in Klondike Park. He and other members of the nonprofit organization teamed up with area volunteers for a trail workday - one of many the St. Charles County Parks Department organizes each fall and spring. During the workdays, volunteers remove downed limbs, level worn paths and remove barriers throughout the park.

But Donjoian and his crew don't stop there. Since Gateway Off-Road Cyclists was formed in 1998, the club has built more than 15 miles of multi-use trail in St. Charles County. It participates in 15 to 20 workdays a year and labors 500 to 1,000 hours to create one mile of trail. Members cooperate with five different agencies to design, construct and maintain trails.

The hard work of GORC and similar organizations marks the height of an emerging trend in the region for bikeable, walkable and healthier communities.

For the last decade, municipalities have shifted their focus to meet residents' trail needs. Today, dozens of projects are under way to connect communities, survey residents, create trail master plans and develop greenways stretching across St. Charles County.

For Donjoian, that's no surprise.

"The more people get out and appreciate (St. Charles County), the more they have an appreciation for trying to conserve these pretty places, and that's a big part of my push," he said.

Here's a look at some projects getting a push in the area.

Dardenne Greenway

The Great Rivers Greenway District was established in 2000 by the Clean Water, Safe Parks and Community Trails Initiative and is funded by a Missouri voter-approved tenth-of-a-cent sales tax.

Dardenne Greenway at BaratHaven is being developed by the Great Rivers Greenway District.

BaratHaven is a 165-acre residential community in Dardenne Prairie surrounded by parkland and bordered by three miles of trails and a 15-acre lake.

The park will tie into the Great Rivers Greenway District as part of a region-wide system of parks and trails.

"The ultimate goal is an interconnected system of greenways, parks and trails in the region," said Nancy Thompson, project manager for the district.

Hunter Beckham, a spokesman for architectural design firm S.W.T. Design, which is working with the district, said that Thompson sent letters to 250 property owners who might be affected by the proposed Dardenne Greenway at BaratHaven design.

"One of the strongest things about the project was that all those people, whether they were for it or against it, were heard," Beckham said.

When some property owners rejected the plans, the plans were scrapped, shrinking the Dardenne Greenway project by more than a third.

"We feel really good about it because wherever there was dissention during the project, we felt we alleviated the concerns of the people with them, which you know helps me sleep at night," Beckham said.

Thompson said SEED projects, like BaratHaven, demonstrate to the community exactly what to expect from the district. Thompson said SEED stands for a fledgling project, but also means social, environmental, economic development.

Despite anxiety from many homeowners at the onset of the Dardenne Greenway project, Thompson was confident that after living with the results, homeowners' fears would be allayed.

"When the Katy trail went through rural Missouri, there was lots of opposition," Thompson said. Instead, the trail brought developments such as bed and breakfasts, cafes and bike shops, Thompson said.

"I think in a similar vein the trail will create more economic development opportunities than any problems for homeowners," Thompson said.

## Trailnet

By early 2008, parks departments in O'Fallon, Lake Saint Louis and Wentzville will get a look at the finishing touches of "Bikeable-Walkable" master plans that are being drafted for their communities.

The cities entered into a grant agreement last January for Trailnet Inc. to draft the plans, which eventually could connect bike routes and trails inside and outside the three municipalities.

The nonprofit organization was awarded a transportation enhancement grant in 2006 from the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, which will cover the majority of the plan's \$90,000 price. Each city will be responsible for 10 percent, or about \$3,000, of its portion.

Trailnet officials scheduled several informational public meetings to gather residents' input about the plans. They hope to identify and plan connections between key destinations, such as schools, shopping

areas and parks, and the recommended trail, bike and pedestrian facilities that residents desire.

Most residents expressed a strong interest in establishing connectivity between their communities, Dardenne Creek and the Katy Trail. They also wanted trails that allowed a way to cross Highway 40, said Dan Cross, Trailnet project manager.

The departments are planning a second set of informational meetings after 90 percent of the plan is finished. The entire process should be complete by early 2008. Then each city will decide how to move forward.

### St. Charles County

Trails are no joke to the St. Charles County Parks Department. Park Director Bettie Yahn-Kramer said residents have been listing trail systems and usage as their No. 1 priority for more than five years.

The department offers paved, multi-use and hiking and biking trails at six of its parks.

In the works are a three-mile trail at Bangert Island, a two- to three-mile trail at Town Park near Wentzville and Foristell and the layout and design for a trail at Matson Hill Park. The department also just completed several miles of trail at Indian Camp Creek Park and Broemmelsiek Park.

### St. Charles

The St. Charles Parks Department has trails. It just needs to connect them.

The department plans to do just that with the help of a Pathway Concept Plan it completed in 2004, said Park Director Maralee Britton.

Current projects include the Boschert Greenway, which stretches from New Town Boulevard to Boschert Town Road, connecting Fox Hill Park and Fountain Lakes Trail.

The department hopes to extend that connection to Little Hills expressway, Fifth Street and, eventually, the Katy Trail.

Opening soon is Ecopark, containing five miles of rock and sand trails along the Missouri riverfront.

### St. Peters

St. Peters has the most developed trail systems in St. Charles County. The St. Peters Parks Department lists 9.7 miles of paved trail and more than 1,000 acres of land dedicated to parks.

"We think parks and trails add a lot to the quality of life," St. Peters spokeswoman Lisa Bedian said.

A recreational trail soon will connect Rabbit Run and Woodlands parks. The department soon will add the largest park to its system, at Lakeside 370 between Truman and Spencer roads.

It will have trails for biking and hiking, a 148-acre stocked lake and wetlands.

### Cottleville

Cottleville is working to create a new SEED project that will run along Dardenne Creek. The proposed

project will extend from the city limits of Cottleville to Mid Rivers Mall Drive.

City spokesman Rob Mosbey said Cottleville will have trail systems connecting Vantage Park and the new Cottleville Park.

#### O'Fallon

A 2006 survey showed residents are interested in creating a trail system across O'Fallon, Parks Director Cindy Springer said.

In response, the city is working with Trailnet to create a master plan to be finalized in spring 2008. The city owns a swath of land north of Highway DD that could be designated as a park.

There also are plans to connect BaratHaven to WingHaven along the Dardenne Creek corridor.

"Fitness is key," Springer said, explaining that encouraging residents to walk more is a win-win for everyone by reducing traffic and strengthening the health of the community.

#### Lake Saint Louis

Under consideration in Lake Saint Louis is a multi-use trail that would extend from Harbor Bend Court, around SSM St. Joseph Hospital West, through the city's downtown to Edgewater Point, where a new condominium building has been proposed.

City officials also discussed a trail along Peruque Creek that eventually would connect to The Meadows, a shopping center slated to open in fall 2008.

Tim Vanatta, the city's new parks director, is expected to begin work later this month. One of his first priorities will be developing a Parks Master Plan, which will focus on potential trail systems in more detail.

#### Wentzville

Wentzville is looking forward to expanding its trail system. Currently, it only has one trail in Rotary Park.

Parks Director Mary Jo Dessieux said the department is applying for grants and considering a trail in Peruque Valley Park.

Dessieux will be working with a city planner next year to identify parcels for future trails. The department also plans to host a public meeting in February to collect residents' input.