



501(c)(3) Corporation
www.bikethebend.com

January 16, 2014

2 trails connect with grant help

Bike the Bend gives matching support to regional trail construction

Now preparing for its 5th annual ride on Sunday, June 8, Bike the Bend has awarded matching grants for Indiana and Michigan segments of the 34-mile Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail, extending from Niles, Mich. to Mishawaka, Ind.

Bike the Bend has awarded matching grants of \$5,000 to the St. Joseph County Parks Foundation to support extension of the LaSalle Trail north of Darden Road and \$3,500 to the Niles Charter Township Board to help Phase I construction of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail from the state line to Niles, Mich.

“When revenues exceed ride expenses, Bike the Bend’s goal has always been to return excess revenues to the community in a way that supports our vision,” said Jeanne Blad, executive director of Bike the Bend. “In 2013, through strong support and trimming of expenses, we are able to re-invest in these community projects that will benefit more than just cyclists – multi-use paths that are available for everyone to enjoy.”

“These grants will help us stay true to Louise Addicott’s vision of bringing the community together,” said Glenda Lamont, president of Bike the Bend Inc. “The Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail will absolutely do that by providing a way for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy each other and their community, regardless of their mobility. We expect to see pedestrians, joggers, bicyclists, inline skaters, wheelchair users and more on the Trail, all experiencing the amenities of our area.”

A 0.5-mile segment of the LaSalle Trail from Cleveland Road to Darden Road is planned for construction in 2015 with 80 percent of the project supported by federal funding. The Bike the Bend grant would help support the next segment which will go from Darden Road to the state line.

“St. Joseph County Parks has been working on the LaSalle Trail over 15 years with the original acquisition of a portion of the abandoned rail corridor,” said Evie Kirkwood, director of the St. Joseph County Parks Department. “With the parks operating budget continually under fire and reduced almost every year since 2008, the fact the Bike the Bend has stepped up to assist us is huge.

“The bicycling community is leading the way to push for trail development, safer laws for bicyclists, safety training for kids, and additional options for riding, including mountain biking. I think they saw early on that if they want more trails in the area, they have to get involved. And they have,” Kirkwood added. “They understand ... that the benefit of bike-pedestrian paths is not just about additional miles to ride.

It's about growing a healthier community, through fitness and economic development. People want to live in communities where these options are available.”

The 3.1-mile Niles-area segment of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail represents Phase I of two phases planned by the Niles Charter Township board. Phase I extends from the state line north to the Brandywine Creek Nature Park, just north of U.S. 12. The \$842,000 project needs a little more than \$26,000 to reach its fund-raising goal, yet construction is scheduled to begin in April with preliminary completion in July. More than 80 percent of the funding has come from the Michigan Departments of Transportation and Natural Resources, with the remainder from grants and private contributions. Built along a former railroad corridor owned by Indiana-Michigan Power Co., the trail will cross U.S. 12 with an upgraded intersection at Third Street, where a traffic signal already exists. The upgraded crossing will include a traffic stop button, clearly delineated trail crossing stripes, upgraded lighting and trail warning signage to drivers from all directions.

“Bike the Bend has been behind the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail project for years, and [the matching grant] grew out of mutual respect and an inherently compatible goal of promoting family friendly biking opportunities,” said Harry Thibault, park commission chairman for Niles Charter Township. “My family has enjoyed Bike the Bend since the inaugural ride in 2010, and I have a deep appreciation for the vision and volunteer dedication put forth annually to hold this spectacular event. Bike the Bend’s financial support of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail is a testament to their greater vision of creating one of the premier bike friendly communities in the Midwest.”

LaSalle Trail: Located just west of Ind. 933, the LaSalle Trail now extends 0.8 miles through Roseland to Cleveland Road. The new, 0.5-mile segment will cross Cleveland Road with an upgraded traffic signal and connect at Darden Road with the Darden Road Trail, which runs along the south side of Darden Road from the Riverside Trail on the west to Ind. 933. Originally part of an interurban rail line opened in 1903 and operated by the Indiana Railway Co. subsidiary South Bend & Southern Michigan Railway Co., the entire LaSalle Trail will extend 3.5 miles to the state line when completed.

Niles-area portion of the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail: When completed, the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail will be a continuous, 34-mile, off-road paved corridor connecting Niles, Mich., to Mishawaka, Ind., passing through Niles Charter Township, St. Joseph County, Roseland, Notre Dame and South Bend. A common goal of municipalities and government bodies throughout the region, the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail could serve as a bicycling and pedestrian highway to promote the growth of collateral trail systems. According to Thibault, a Phase II segment of the trail will be a joint effort of Niles Charter Township and the City of Niles to connect Phase I with the 2.25-mile Niles City Trail, which terminates in Plymouth Park. Costing an estimated \$611,000, the 1-mile segment would wind through the wooded 22-acre Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve, including a new bridge over the creek and possibly a handicapped-accessible fishing area. The government bodies still need to acquire some additional property, but Thibault is hopeful Phase II could be complete by 2016 or 2017.

For more information about Bike the Bend and the matching grant program, visit www.BiketheBend.com or call (574) 204-2458.

###