

Insider

For November 12, 2008

By Kim Burger

If you've read this column for any length of time at all, you've likely come upon an article about our recreational trail system and my view that it is an important attraction that sets our community apart. This 85+ mile system of loops encompasses the entire metro area, offering excursions suitable for walking, running, rollerblading, bicycling and cross country skiing. Hotels, coffee shops, restaurants, museums, lakes, streams, wooded areas, and our two downtown cultural and entertainment districts are connected by these lineal parks which are open 24/7/365. An estimated 100,000 people visit the Cedar Valley to ride our trails, spending well over \$2.6 million a year. These figures are, by the way, extremely conservative and rather dated. A new trail count was scheduled for this summer but flooding forced postponement.

This fabulous network of trails is also connected to the Cedar Valley Nature Trail (CVNT), which further links Black Hawk, Buchanan, Benton and Linn Counties. Just a short few summers ago, important connections were made in the vicinity of the National Cattle Congress Grounds that made it possible to ride from Black Hawk Park, in the very northwest edge of Cedar Falls, all the way to Cedar Rapids, all by trail. That was until the Floods of 2008. Two bridges along the CVNT were washed away, severing this 52-mile route. These two bridges have got to be replaced!

The Cedar Valley Nature Trail has a distinguished history as one of the nation's very first rail trails – meaning a former rail route, no longer used for that purpose, was converted to a recreational trail. Twenty some years ago, when this was a new concept, it was not without controversy. Landowners were concerned about litter and other possible mischief trail using trespassers might cause. This experiment has been a great success and attitudes have completely changed. The public has come to value and even expect trails as an integral component to new developments.

The CVNT has statewide significance due to that fact that it connects two of our largest population centers and is part of the American Discovery Trail, a trail that stretches across the entire country. If the CVNT is not repaired, the American Discovery Trail will be re-routed, and it will NOT be here.

A good number of trail enthusiasts attended last week's Black Hawk County Conservation Board meeting to express their desire that the county replace the bridges and restore this important stretch of trails. These citizens realize bridges don't come cheap – \$3.8 million is the anticipated cost – we also realize the county has lots of needs to meet, even without the issues caused by last summer's floods and storms. For that matter, we also recognize the challenges our country faces in view of the wars and economic situation. We believe in wise stewardship of our resources, and we believe the Cedar Valley Nature Trail is important enough to replace.

We are told a funding can be sought from a variety of different sources and are ready to get on with it. During last week's meeting we were encouraged to make our feelings known by writing letters to the editor, talking with our friends and neighbors, and contacting our county supervisors. If you have strong feelings about the restoration of these bridges, I urge you to express your views. Contact the Black Hawk County Board of Supervisors:

County Courthouse  
Suite 203  
316 East 5th Street  
Waterloo, Iowa 50703

Phone: (319) 833-3003

Fax: (319) 833-3070

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