

# Experience a Galyans Near you

## INtake

March 25 - 31, 2004

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## Features

March 25, 2004

## Happy trail

Where trains once traversed, thousands of Indianapolis residents walk, bike and run along the popular Monon greenway.

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Winter is loosening its grip on the city. The sweet smells and colorful sights of spring have returned to Indianapolis.

So why are you still stuck in couch-potato mode, watching reruns?

Put down the remote, and put on your walking shoes. It's time to hit the trail.

Experience the start of the season with a trek along the Monon, one of the most recognized urban trails in the nation.

On the last day of winter, I went on an up-close-and-personal discovery of a segment of the historic route, which sees about 1.2 million visitors each year.

### 8:30 A.M.

Einstein Bros Bagel, 1055 Broad Ripple Ave.

I ordered a honey wheat bagel, grabbed a cup of overpriced "freshly squeezed" orange juice and sat down with the newspaper.



Trail mix: A pack of bikers whiz by on the Monon greenway. -- Arnel Reynon / INtake

### HISTORY OF THE MONON

**1872** Indianapolis, Delphi & Chicago chartered to connect its namesake cities. Eventually, it combined with other railroads to create the Monon system. Monon is a Potawatomi word that means "swiftly running."

**1883** Passenger service begins from Indianapolis to Chicago.



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The bagel shop was buzzing with the sounds of brewing coffee and customers conversing about the morning news. This was in stark contrast to the rest of the Broad Ripple village, which usually doesn't wake up until lunchtime.

At a table across from me sat about six or seven men and women, whom the manager referred to collectively as "the Einstein club."

Curious to know the story behind the name, I chatted with 65-year-old Gretchen Mathews.

"We've all been coming here for years. We sit, drink coffee and talk," she said.

Some in the club stop on the way to work, but Mathews always comes after her hour-and-a-half walk along the Monon Trail.

"I've been doing it about six or seven days a week, for eight years. It's my way of staying young and keeping my sanity," she said with a smile.

After we spoke for a little while longer, I looked at the time.

It was nearing 9:30 a.m., and I needed to head out to the trail soon. But as I walked out, I decided to chat up Tony Johnson, a 34-year-old Broad Ripple resident who looked like he was playing hookie from work.

He said he wasn't.

"I work for a publishing company out of my house," Johnson said. "After I work out, I am going to meet some friends at Broad Ripple Tavern to watch the (NCAA tournament) games."

### 10 A.M.

Over the canal near Westfield Boulevard

People along the trail were bundled up with winter coats and earmuffs. The temperature was high 30s, but it would improve by noon.

Sally Lanham, 47, and Cheri Alexy, 49, both had pink cheeks from the cold air and were slightly

**1910** Now known as the Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville, the line carries 1.9 million passengers, 3.5 million tons of freight and grosses \$5 million.

**1932** Passenger service drops to 173,362; the company declares bankruptcy.

**1940s** The company emerges from bankruptcy, converts from steam to diesel locomotives and improves passenger service.

**1956** The company officially changes its name to the Monon Railroad.

**1959** Passenger service ends on the Indianapolis to Chicago route.

**1986** Former Monon lines come under the control of CSX Transportation, which removes the tracks through Indianapolis.

**1987** Indianapolis officials reach an agreement with CSX to purchase the former rail bed that will take three years and \$530,000 in federal loans to complete.

**1990** Carmel and Clay township officials consider obtaining rail beds within their respective areas.

**1993** A citizens group in Indianapolis officially recommends the former Monon line be converted into a trail.

**1994** Federal officials allot the city \$500,000 in funds to begin construction of the first segment of the trail and forgives earlier loan made to purchase the rail bed.

**1996** First section of the trail opens,

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STORY TEXT

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winded.

I stopped to talk to them as they caught their breath after a six-mile walk.

"We want you to know that we are on this thing 12 months a year, and sometimes we are the only ones here," Lanham said.

Both women recounted stories about regulars they see on the trail every morning.

"Did you see Robert E. Lee?" Alexy asked.

Apparently, Robert E. Lee is mayor of the Monon.

"He's this sweet 86-year-old man who walks the trail every morning, and he keeps a journal of all the people he talks to, especially the ladies. He loves the ladies," Lanham said.

#### **10:13 A.M.**

Greenways headquarters, 900 E. 64th St.

I popped in to speak with Annie Brown, Indy Parks Greenways administrative assistant.

She filled me in on the progress of the trail and informed me of the volunteer opportunities along the Monon.

"You know, we always need volunteers to help keep the trail clean," she said.

I politely nodded my head, thinking volunteer work would be a great way to give back to the community. However, I barely have time to clean up my apartment, let alone the trail.

(A quick plug: If you manage your spare time better than I do, the parks department is looking for people to help check signs for graffiti, touch up paint on the bridges and manicure the trail's landscape. Contact Jonathan Gick at [jgick@indygov.org](mailto:jgick@indygov.org) or (317) 327-0129.)

#### **10:51 A.M.**

Jerrye Ann's Antiques and Collectables, 7501 Westfield Blvd.

I continued north to 75th Street, near the Indiana School for the Blind. To my right, I spotted a familiar site.

Jerrye Ann's Antiques and Collectables, housed in a canary yellow ranch style home, is known for

between 86th Street and Broad Ripple.

**1997** Trail from 96th to 86th streets opens.

**1998** The trail from Broad Ripple to Fall Creek opens. Some Carmel landowners fight the proposed trail and reject city ownership of the rail bed.

**1999** Carmel's trail construction begins as land-ownership issues continue.

**2001** Carmel acquires all required land; construction is complete from 96th to 146th streets; 12.5 miles of connected trail is in place.

**2003** Construction on the trail between Fall Creek and 10th Street is complete; it now stretches more than 15 miles. Westfield begins trail plans.

Sources: "Monon, The Hoosier Line" by Gary and Stephen Dolzall; Indy Greenways; The Indianapolis Star and News archives and Star research

its beautiful displays of yet-to-bloom flowers and lush landscape.

Inside, Jerrye Ann's son, Michael McKinney, 45, of Indy, was holding down the fort.

He encouraged me to take a look around and said, "We've got stuff here from about every time period."

#### **11:17 A.M.**

Near the Indiana

School for the Blind,

7725 N. College Ave.

A trip on the Monon Trail is a special treat for 2-year-old Abigail and 9-month old Arthur McManus.

Dad Stephen McManus, 36, of Indy, puts the tots in a double stroller and heads down the trail.

"This is such a nice place to get away from the traffic and feel safe with the kids," McManus said as the family stopped at the entrance to the blind school so Abigail could get a drink of water.

The computer programmer said he's between jobs and waiting for interviews.

"So, we are giving mom a break today," he said.

#### **11:59 A.M.**

Blackwood's Monon Café, 1403 E 86th St.

As I neared 86th Street on the trail, I began to smell fried food. I love the smell, but was looking for something a little healthier. A post-burger-and-fry food coma is not a good scene on the trail.

Earlier at the antique shop, McKinney told me he had heard great things about a new café in Nora called Blackwood's.

I decided to give it a try. There wasn't much of a crowd, so getting a table was easy.

In a white chef's coat, owner John DeCosta, 58, greeted me with a handshake and a smile.

Over my \$7 Monon Trail salad, the Chicago native told me his story.

"I know you're probably questioning my sanity right now," he said. "Why did I decide to open a restaurant at 58 years old?"

He said he simply needed a change.

DeCosta and his wife spent 20 years in the art business, running a gallery in Broad Ripple called

Winthrop.

Meanwhile, DeCosta couldn't stay out of the kitchen.

He loved to cook. In fact, he started cooking when he was 10.

"My parents left me to take care of my younger brother, and I had to cook for him. Back then, it was OK to leave your kids alone," he said.

While walking the trail one day with his wife, Andie, he noticed the empty space next to Chris's Ice Cream.

DeCosta said the location next to the trail was too good to pass up and opened up shop in October.

On the menu, DeCosta offers a large breakfast menu in addition to typical lunchtime favorites.

### **1:33 P.M.**

Rest stop near 96th

and I-465

Rest stops pop up infrequently along the trail. At these sites, trail users can get a drink of water, use the restroom and read the community bulletin board.

As I left one rest stop and walked toward the I-465 overpass, I noticed Nancy Myers.

The Indianapolis resident sported a pair of binoculars she used to look for early migratory birds -- a telltale sign of spring.

"Not much out here aside from our resident bird population: robins, house sparrows, cardinals," she said.

### **3:22 P.M.**

Grape Inspirations, 1307 S. Rangeline Road, Carmel

After a long, fairly uneventful walk from 96th street to Carmel Drive, I wanted to check out some sites off the trail.

I wasn't hungry yet, but I needed a snack and place to sit for awhile.

"FREE WINE TASTING," read a sign from across the street.

Perfect timing, and I love free stuff. Behind the sign was Grape Inspirations Winery, a place I thought just sold wine. After an hour-long conversation with owners Joyce and Ron Shoff, I learned not only do they sell wine, you can also make your own.

The Carmel couple said they came out of retirement to open a winery. Why?

"We have peach trees in our back yard, and I got tired of making peach pie, peach jam, peach cobbler. So, we started making our own peach wine," she said.

The Shoffs have been in business since Valentine's Day and claim to be the only do-it-yourself and fermentation winery in the state.

Not only is making your own wine entertaining and a great gift idea, Ron said, it's economical.

"It's less expensive if you look at our price, \$5 to \$8 a bottle, compared to a \$14 to \$40 bottle of wine you buy at a wine store," he said.

Making your own wine is a two-step process.

On your first visit to Grape Inspirations, you belly up to the tasting bar and sample different wines, reds and whites, until you find something you like.

Then, with the help of a wine kit, you add the yeast for fermentation and make another appointment for bottling.

Over the next four to six weeks, the winery monitors the fermentation process, kind of like an incubator. Finally, the wine is ready for bottling and labeling.

"We always tell people to bring friends and family because it can be a party," Joyce said.

The company motto: "We make it simple, you make it great."

#### **4:45 P.M.**

Carmel Cycling & Fitness,

625 3rd Ave. SW

I'm getting a bit tired and cranky at this point. My legs feel like blocks of concrete, and people whizzing by on bikes and roller blades are annoying me. I need caffeine!

I see a café just past the bridge over City Center Drive, but, of course, it's closed.

Just as I was about to die (note, my drama meter was on high), I see the bright red glow of a Coke machine calling to me from inside Carmel Cycling & Fitness.

Sweet salvation!

After chugging my Coke, I have the energy needed to forge on, but my chatty Cathy instincts kick in, and I harassed some gear heads.

Matt Graham, a 19-year-old college student who was working at the bike shop while home on spring break, said business picks up with warmer weather.

In addition to retail, the shop rents surrey bikes (a bike with two seats side-by-side, covered with a canopy), tandem bikes, skates and tag-a-longs to tow the children. Prices for a rental up to eight hours range from \$10 to \$40.

As for what to buy, Grahm predicts the Giant Sedona will be a popular mountain bike this season.

"It's more comfortable, because it has shocks in the seat post and up front on the fork."

Giant Sedona Mountain Bike -- \$249. How cool you'll look riding on the Monon -- priceless.

### **5 P.M.**

Laser Flash,

617 3rd Ave. SW, Carmel

As I left the bike shop and turned to get back on the trail, I noticed this warehouse-like building about 20 feet away.

"Laser Flash, a game of tag," read the sign.

I didn't know what to expect as I walked in, but I soon realized I didn't want to leave.

The room was filled with video games, the strong smell of pizza and loud music.

At first glance, I thought it was an arcade. However, after talking with manager Mando Lanuti, 22, I got the major hookup -- laser tag.

Behind a starship-like door, we enter an 8,000-square-foot arena where futuristic games of tag are played with high-tech vests and phasers.

Lanuti suited me up and turned me loose in a sea of 10-year-olds having a birthday party.

"Go ahead," he said. "You can shoot 'em."

When they fired back, my vest vibrated and my green lights turned red. I supposedly died.

Technology is a great thing.

It would've been nice to have laser tag when I was 10. Most of my childhood birthday parties consisted of lame-ass freeze tag in the back yard.

Laser Flash is not just for kids; adults can play, too.

For \$450, you can rent the facility for a private party and receive a one-day liquor permit to accommodate the kegs you roll in to play drunken laser tag.

### **5:50 P.M.**

Along the Monon, nearing downtown Carmel

Amy Taylor, 23, of Carmel, walks her yellow lab, Jack, just about everyday.

"I have to or he will go crazy in my apartment," she said as Jack nearly pulled her arm out of the socket trying to continue his walk.

Taylor lives just a stone's throw away from the Monon in AMLI Carmel Center, an apartment complex adjacent to the Trail.

"I moved here because of the trail," she said. "Jack loves it."

Real estate agents say with the trail's growing popularity, living near the Monon is like living near the ocean -- property values are enhanced by the convenience and developments continue to grow.

One example is AMLI in Old Town Carmel, a community of new luxury townhomes with shared retail and residential space. Most of the units at the development face the Monon.

#### **5:50 P.M.**

Chaos, 130 W Main St.

I've reached my destination. The post-9-to-5 scene is impressive for the small town, with busy restaurants and still-open retail shops.

From the corner of my eye, I see a sign that speaks to the story of my life: Chaos. I have to go inside.

As soon as I opened the door, I was overwhelmed by the smell of girlie lotions and fruity candles. Ying Yang Twin's "Salt Shaker" was thumping in the background.

Score 10 cool points for Carmel Mayor Jim Brainard. This is my kinda place, *tres* Broad Ripple without the smell of patchouli.

Inside I found trendy women's digs, signature jewelry and charm bracelets.

April Wright, 26, of Carmel, runs the store, which opened in July.

"We have clothes you can't get anywhere else in town, especially our jeans. People love them because they are long and stretchy," she said.

Before I left, I scanned the price tags throughout the store. Fairly reasonable, I thought, \$12 to \$57 for most items.

#### **6:30 P.M.**

Bub's, home of the Big Ugly Burger, 210 W. Main St.

After walking what felt like 20 miles (really only seven and a half), I was starving.

I thought what better place to pig out than a burger joint named Bub's. The name just screams flannel meets food.

The owner, Matt Frey, a 32-year-old Carmel native, opened the restaurant that sits near the Monon last year.

His marketing strategy is to lure people off the Monon into his restaurant with the smell of 12-ounce burgers grilling on a bed on onions. If that doesn't work, the ice cream shop would surely pull 'em in.

"It works," he said. "Runners literally stop in their tracks and come in for food."

The restaurant's interior oozed a "Happy Days" kind of vibe. Like The Fonz, Frey gave a big "heeyyyyy" to everyone who walked through the door.

After ending a lucrative sales career in Michigan, the hometown boy returned to Carmel.

"I work twice as hard now for about half the money, but I love it," he said.

Frey sent me away with a hot dog that will make any girl blush.

Named the Giant Bub Dog for a reason, the 1/2 -pound-Black Angus all-beef hot dog with cheese was the perfect ending to my long day.

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