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HENDRICKS COUNTY

April 22, 2005

HENDRICKS COUNTY

Group works to clear a trail

Local efforts are part of a broader project to build a 150-mile east-west path across state.

By **Stuart A. Hirsch**
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With the sound of his chainsaw splitting the cool morning air, Reid Haney expertly makes quick work of a small evergreen tree encroaching on the Vandalia Trail between Amo and Coatesville.


Meanwhile, seven other people clear debris, prune tree branches and block paths in the shoulder of the rail bed to prevent four-wheelers from making more ruts along the milelong section of abandoned rail corridor.

During the past month, volunteers have been clearing, mapping and scouting a new section of trail for what eventually will be a 150-mile cross-state National Road Heritage Trail along the former Pennsylvania/Vandalia rail corridor.

Early this week, the Amo-Coatesville Sewer Conservancy, which owns the rail corridor between the two southwest Hendricks County towns, granted National Road Heritage Trail Inc. authority to develop the trail for hiking, biking and horseback riding.

Greg Midgley, a 43-year-old aerospace engineer who lives in Indianapolis' Pike Township, is spearheading efforts to create the trail.



 zoom

Making cuts: Greg Midgley, who lives in Pike Township in Indianapolis, is leading efforts to create the trail. He went to Amo with his plan in March 2004. -- Doug McSchooler / For The Star

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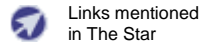
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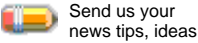
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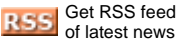
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He said he became interested in Indiana rails-to-trails efforts after riding the 225-mile Katy Trail in Missouri three years ago.

"I came back wondering if there was a plan like that in Indiana, and I found there wasn't," Midgley said while taking a break from trail clearing Saturday.

There were independent local efforts to convert the former rail corridor to a trail, he found, but no coordinated effort to tie all the pieces together.

Amo was the first town Midgley approached with the cross-state trail concept in March 2004. His timing couldn't have been better.

Haney, president of the Town Council, said local officials were tossing around ideas for a trail to coincide with the \$473,000 renovation of the old Amo interurban station, which sits just off the corridor.

"We were actually looking to do something on our own when Greg approached us," Haney said.

Plainfield already has opened 1.5 miles along the route, with plans for five by 2007, and the section between Amo and Plainfield is in the works.

Formed in 1905, the Vandalia Railroad was made up of several lines on a route from Indianapolis to St. Louis. Part of it became known as the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1921.

By the mid-1970s, Penn Central largely abandoned the route.

"I think it's wonderful to have something like this," said Clayton resident Jan Davis, another of Saturday's cleanup crew. "It's preserving part of our history."

Another volunteer, Chris Lowe, of Reelsville in Putnam County, is a director of the Indiana Trail Riders Association, a statewide group that advocates for, builds and maintains horseback riding paths.

"If we don't do what we do, what will be left for our kids and grandkids?" he asked.

Davis' 13-year-old son, Morgan, is doing his part.

A railroad and history buff, he's helped Midgley research the history of the Vandalia Railroad.

"There's just something about 200 tons of steel being able to travel at amazing speeds," Morgan said. "I like history, and I like trains, so this works."

Midgley said he hopes Morgan's enthusiasm for the rail-to-trail project will spread to other county teens.

Meanwhile, work on another rail-to-trail project is moving forward much slower.

Rail Corridor Development, which recently changed its name to the B&O

Trail Association, is continuing its work to develop 19.5 miles of trail in Hendricks County, said Diana Virgil, president of the group.

Last year it acquired a mile of the abandoned B&O railway, although the property is in three noncontiguous segments.

Developers of the Cedar Run subdivision donated several hundred feet near 21st Street and Raceway Road.

About a half-mile of a route along the former Speedway Airport near Brownsburg on Hendricks County Road 900 East, just south of County Road 300 North, was donated by the Indianapolis Airport Authority.

The third section, along an old 50-acre farm southwest of North Salem, was bought by trail supporters with a Department of Natural Resources grant.

Plans call for the 65 miles of the rail corridor from Speedway in western Marion County to Montezuma in Parke County to be developed as a recreational trail.

Virgil said the B&O Trail Association hopes to begin surveying the entire corridor through Hendricks this summer.

Call Star reporter Stuart Hirsch at (317) 444-2805.

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