



Photo by Sarah Wojcik

A bicyclist coasts along the new trail connecting Shelby Township's River Bends Park to downtown Utica Dec. 15.

Officials formally open Shelby-Utica trail connection

BY SARAH WOJCIK
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SHELBY TOWNSHIP/UTICA — On Dec. 15, dozens gathered to celebrate the ribbon cutting of the 1.28-mile Shelby-Utica trail connection, which links Shelby Township's River Bends Park to downtown Utica.

The project was more than five years in the making and encountered setbacks in terms of variances, funding and other unforeseen hurdles. But through perseverance and, in the words of Utica Mayor Jacqueline Noonan, "more than a village" coming together, the trail became a reality.

"This is my last term (as mayor), and I will not be running again, so getting all of these I's dotted and T's crossed has been an absolutely wonderful present to me, as part of my last stint in office," Noonan said.

Macomb County Department of Roads Director

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Photo by Donna Agusti

Sarah Miller, 20, of Fraser, warms up for the Jingle Bell 5K at the Shelby Community Center Dec. 13. Miller hopes to begin a walking and running group for other students with special needs.

Following in her footsteps

Trail

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Bob Hoepfner said that constructing new paths is far harder than constructing roads.

After receiving "sky high" bids the first two times the project went out to bid, Hoepfner said the project's saving grace came from a Michigan Transportation Alternatives Program grant.

"I urge all of you to go on this path, because it really turned out very well," he said.

Contractor LJ Construction concluded the project by the target deadline of Nov. 15. Utica DPW Superintendent Bill Lang commended the contractor for its professionalism and flexibility.

"It was an extremely challenging project," Lang said, praising the collaboration of many people, including engineers and inspectors.

The total price tag of the trail ended up being approximately \$2.4 million, with federal and state grants funding the majority of the project — \$1,774,000 from the Federal High-Priority Projects Program, secured by Noonan, and \$338,000 from the Michigan Transportation Alternatives Program.



Photo by Sarah Wojcik

Officials snip the ceremonial ribbon to formally open the new Shelby-Utica trail connection Dec. 15.

Shelby Township and Utica split the remaining cost of the project 41 percent to 59 percent, respectively. Although both communities received 0.64 miles of trail, Utica's portion was more costly because crews had to tunnel under Conrail train tracks and stabilize the trail where it hugs the Clinton River.

"Not only is this a tremendous improvement to our recreational infrastructure, but it is also a great testament to government collaboration," Shelby Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis said. "When you really get together and do teamwork, there are some great results when you don't look at the boundaries."

With the completion of the hike and bike path, trail users can now travel from River Bends Park

to Lake St. Clair Metropark.

Shelby Township Parks, Recreation and Maintenance Director Joe Youngblood said the township's next trail project is to connect Chief Gene Shepherd Park to the Macomb Orchard Trail, an approximately 2.5-mile stretch.

Gabriele Halsall, one of several members of the Macomb County-based Slow Spokes Bicycle Club who attended the trail ribbon-cutting event, said she was thrilled about the trail connection.

"I love it," Halsall said. "We just rode down from River Bends (Park) to come to the ceremony today. It's a great trail. It's beautiful, and there's a little bit of history there with the (Clinton-Kalamazoo) Canal."

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