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New trails connect Gene Shepherd Park, Yates loop

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SHELBY TOWNSHIP/ROCHESTER — As spring weather approaches, residents may be interested in checking out a new network of nearly finished trails located between Chief Gene Shepherd Park and Yates Cider Mill.

Last March, the Shelby Township Beautification Committee received permission from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to create two trails through its conser-



Photo by Sarah Wojcik

Dub Hearon, a longtime Shelby Township resident and citizen trail activist, steps onto an Eagle Scout-constructed boardwalk on a nearly finished trail connecting Chief Gene Shepherd Park to Yates Cider Mill.

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Trails

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vation easement — a park-to-cider-mill connection and a loop behind Yates.

Both unpaved walking paths, created by the Parks, Recreation and Maintenance Department and Beautification and Historical committees, are now ready for foot traffic.

The park trail entrance is located behind the tennis courts. There is not yet a sign, but the grass is mowed leading into the trail, and Eagle Scout Spencer Haithcote built a boardwalk over water near the entrance. Spencer built two more boardwalks along the path for his Eagle Scout project, and his brother, Brendan, is working on a bridge to span the historic canal.

Longtime Shelby Township resident and trail activist Dub Hearon said the township is seeking another Eagle Scout to build a map of the trails at the park trail entrance.

The rustic path connects to the second trail — the Clinton-Kalamazoo Canal Ridge Trail, which follows the Clinton-Kalamazoo Canal and connects to the existing path extending behind Yates.

"A lot of people take the trail on the railroad and they get to the end, and now they have some options. There's some signage that says, 'Cider Mill Loop,' so it's the next

thing for people to take," said Yates Cider Mill co-owner Mike Titus.

Titus estimated that thousands of cider mill visitors walked the loop last year.

"It's a little more offbeat than the main drag. It's given people access to a part of the woods they've never really been able to get to before," he said. "It's been a really big success."

Hearon said volunteers spent May and June clearing brush, and the township helped with the heavier clearing in June and July.

"This adds another segment of trail so people can do something different and check out the woods, check out the canal," Hearon said.

He added that the park trail leading to Yates will also alleviate parking troubles during the cider mill's busy fall season, since Chief Gene Shepherd Park has 200 parking spots.

Hearon said he is hoping the trail from the park will be named the Chief Gene Shepherd Park Trail, but his son, Rick Hearon, said there is a community movement to name the trail after his father.

Hilary Davis, co-chair of the Historical Committee, said her group is working on erecting some lockboxes or signage near where the park trail meets the cider mill loop and possibly the park trail entrance.

"We're going to put information in those with the history of the canal and maybe a map, so we

can capture a lot of people who are walking the trails and see this ditch," Davis said. "Some people actually put some blood, sweat and tears into that ditch. It has quite the history."

Parks, Recreation and Maintenance Department Director Joe Youngblood said township crews will maintain the trails.

"The trail that runs from Gene

Shepherd Park to Yates Cider Mill is a beautiful trail. We should have it finished this spring," Youngblood said. "I'd like to thank Spencer for all his hard work and Dub Hearon for his insight and determination to get this trail completed, even though it isn't officially open."

Chief Gene Shepherd Park is located at 2452 23 Mile Road, east of Dequindre Road. Yates Ci-

der Mill is located at 1990 E. Avon Road, south of 23 Mile Road.

For more information about the trails, call the Shelby Township Parks, Recreation and Maintenance Department at (586) 731-0300. For more information about the history of the Clinton-Kalamazoo Canal, visit the Shelby Township Historical Committee's website at www.shelbyhistory.com.

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