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Shelby Township

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National trail group touts Macomb Orchard Trail

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SHELBY TOWNSHIP — The Rails to Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit trail organization, chose the Macomb Orchard Trail as its featured trail for the month of July and gave the approximately 24-mile route national acclaim.

Staff writer Laura Stark, who penned the article and who has been in charge of selecting the organization's "trail of the month" for two years, said the Macomb Orchard Trail stuck out to her for a variety of reasons.

"What drew me to this one in particular was this rural-area amazing trail system with walking and biking areas," Stark said. "One thing I definitely found that was really cool about this trail is that it's the backbone of an (unfinished) 70-mile loop through the county with so many great parks and communities."

Stark said she interviewed six local officials involved with the Macomb Orchard Trail, which stretches from Shelby Township to Richmond, and each of them loved the trail and recognized its value and importance.

"They really embrace the flavor of the area in terms of the trail's signage and the trail's character," she said, noting the apples on the trail's arch and the cherry red, barnlike toppers on nearby pavilions.

She said she wanted to do a trail in Michigan because the state is the unequivocal leader in open rail to trail mileage — more than 2,300 miles.

"That is just amazing. Only five states in the country have more than 1,000 (miles). To be on the top of the list is pretty incredible," Stark said. "The 'trail of the month' story is definitely inspiring to other trail managers in other states."



Photo courtesy of the Macomb County Department of Planning and Economic Development

Bicyclists pass under the Macomb Orchard Trail arch. Staff writer Laura Stark said part of the reason she chose the trail was because of its cohesive, sleek signage featuring Michigan flavor, such as the apples on the arch.

Joe Youngblood, director of the Shelby Township Parks, Recreation and Maintenance Department, grew up in Shelby Township and graduated from Eisenhower High School in 1989. He recalled that teenagers used to hang out on the railroad tracks that eventually became the Macomb Orchard Trail.

“After a while, though, they had some issues that some kids were breaking bottles and causing issues late at night,” Youngblood said. “When the trail was built, it kind of took care of that because now you have a lot of activity on the trail. Knock on wood, but since we’ve had it, we haven’t had any issues.”

The county purchased the railroad line easements for approximately \$2.5 million and finished the trail in 2011, Youngblood said. He also represents Shelby Township on the Macomb Orchard Trail Committee, which is responsible for making decisions and improvements regarding the trail.

Currently, Shelby Township is working on constructing a “pocket park” along the trail near the southeast corner of 25 Mile and Shelby roads, with a rest area and picnic tables, Youngblood said.

He added that the trail is great for the local economy.

“There is a newer bicycle shop at 26 and Mound that they built right off of the trail system,” Youngblood said. “There is a 7-Eleven at 26 and Mound that does very well, as well as a Dairy Queen at 25 and Shelby, (and) a coney island and bagel shop that reap the benefits of having a trail system.”

Shelby Township Supervisor Rick Stathakis said that he is grateful for the state, county and local support for the Macomb Orchard Trail because it adds to the quality of life in the township and other communities along the trail.

“It’s really nice when you have residents telling you how nice (the trail) is, but it’s quite an honor when you have somebody on the outside looking in saying, ‘You guys are doing a great job,’” Stathakis said.

To read the article or learn more about the Rails to Trails Conservancy, visit www.railstotrails.org.

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