



'A Great Place'

KATELYN HIBBARD/Sun-Gazette

Above, a man coasts along the Susquehanna River Walk Friday afternoon, after the greenway was designated a Great Place in Pennsylvania by the American Planning Association Pennsylvania Chapter. Inset, Commissioner Dick Koch, far left, of the American Planning Association Pennsylvania Chapter, shakes hands with Lycoming County Commissioner Rick Mirabito. Looking on are Mark Murawski, second from left, county transportation supervisor, who oversaw much of the river walk project, and Commissioner Jack McKernan.

'Elite' river walk designated Great Place in Pennsylvania

By KATELYN HIBBARD
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The Susquehanna River Walk was one of three greenways or trails statewide designated a Great Place in Pennsylvania by the American Planning Association Pennsylvania Chapter in a surprise announcement during STEP Inc.'s Pathway to Fitness dedication on Friday at the STEP RiverWalk Center in South Williamsport.

"You have done really outstanding work here. This is the best I've seen in the entire Susquehanna River basin and you should give yourselves credit for that," said Dick Koch, of the chapter, who announced the designation. "Looking at what you've done now and what you have planned in the future — I think it's one of the most remarkable stories up and down the

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'Elite' river walk awarded Great Place in Pa.

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Susquehanna River."

The river walk now is one of 31 Great Places across the commonwealth, Koch said.

"It puts you in a rather elite group," he said.

Jerry Walls, chairman of the board of directors for the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership and former director of county planning, applied for the designation, Koch said. He and others praised Walls, who was not able to attend the ceremony and see his vision come to light.

Great Places are designated based on their "sustainable vision for the future" and the ability to "serve as a model for other communities."

The river walk was first envisioned in the year 2000, was included in the 2002 Susquehanna Greenway Partnership Strategic Vision and became a reality in 2008, Koch said. New connectors are being planned or already are in development, including at Basin and Maynard streets to connect the colleges.

"The river walk offers panoramic views of the river, as well as views of nesting locations for bald eagles and peregrine falcons and other migratory birds," Koch said. "Public art displays and interpretive signage also add to the attractiveness as a scenic place to walk, run, bike or simply enjoy the outdoors. The river walk contributes not only to creat-

ing a healthy community ... but it also stimulates the local economy."

Koch presented the certificate to Mark Murawski, Lycoming County transportation supervisor, and county commissioners Jack McKernan and Rick Mirabito.

"I've been working here at Lycoming County for 32 years, and I've had the privilege to be involved in a lot of projects we had seen on infrastructure over the years," Murawski said. "But the river walk was my favorite. There was just something about it ... this project lit up the community with excitement."

Even as the contractors continued building the river walk, people couldn't

stop themselves from climbing up and taking a stroll, he said.

"Well, if this is a prelude of things to come, it's going to be really well-used," he recalled thinking.

Counters placed around the river walk prove him right — hundreds of people use the river walk daily, year-round, he said.

Murawski followed the ceremony with a reminder that there is more to come.

"This is a great place, but we can make it a greater place," he said. "We are working on the design of a top-10 trail gap in Pennsylvania, which is extending this river walk from Maynard Street over to Susquehanna State Park."

River Walk Center dedicates Pathway to Fitness

By KATELYN HIBBARD
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A literal pathway to fitness offers exercise equipment stations dotted along a new walking path outside the South Williamsport Park Complex in an effort to provide more opportunities for community members to focus on their health in fun ways that get them outdoors.

The path was designated by STEP Inc. Office of Aging's RiverWalk Center, next door to the park, on Friday afternoon as a "health pilot" for the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in collaboration with the state Department of Aging.

"Healthy, active living is critical to Pennsylvania's future," said Cindy Adams Dunn, secretary of DCNR.

The pilot program was born of the "overlap of interests"

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Middle, Brenda Garver, of Williamsport, tests a piece of equipment along the Pathway to Fitness. Above, Teresa Osborne, left, secretary of the state Department of Aging, and Cindy Adams Dunn, secretary of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, share a surrey and ride along the newly designated Pathway to Fitness near STEP Inc.'s RiverWalk Center in South Williamsport.

Center dedicates Pathway to Fitness

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between the two state departments, Dunn said. In particular, the need for getting outdoors and being active, particularly among Pennsylvania's seniors, she added.

Previously, folks envisioned retiring from being healthy and active to sitting on the porch, never moving from a rocking chair, Dunn said. Now, things are different.

"That's not the way our seniors

are aging these days. Our seniors in Pennsylvania are demanding, and they're active," she said. "There's no limit to what our senior population is asking of our mission, and we love that."

The pilot will serve as an example to other communities statewide.

"Not only is it important locally, but it's important as a pilot to help show the way for other communities and to help us in government find ways to work together more effective-

ly to really serve Pennsylvania," Dunn said.

The pathway is a project meant to ensure older Pennsylvanians can age healthily and with the dignity they deserve, said Teresa Osborne, secretary of the state Department of Aging.

In addition to the fitness equipment at the LifeTrail stations, the RiverWalk Center has bicycles, tricycles, walking poles and Surreys available to be signed out.

"This STEP RiverWalk Center now serves as the very heart for healthy aging, and having a healthy heart is essential to having a strong community, a strong city, a strong region and a stronger Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," she said.