

WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

Loyalsock continues to thrive with projects, partnerships

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A number of projects and partnerships emphasizing accessibility is Loyalsock Township's answer to an ever-increasing aging population among a thriving business sector.

"Making the community a place to live, work and go to school is really our primary focus," Bill Burdet, Loyalsock Township business manager, said of the township's plans for 2018.

The township has become increasingly aware of the area's large population of aging adults and a need to continue work on bringing accessibility to Loyalsock's seniors.

"About 42 percent of our population is senior citizens," Burdet said.

For the past three years, the township has worked with STEP Inc. to offer senior fitness exercise classes at the township's recreation center. A recent partnership between STEP and Loyalsock to move STEP's current local facility, the Loyalsock-Montoursville Center for Healthy Aging, to an addition of the recreation center, would ease travel between the two centers.

"This project really started with the over-60 population who wanted to find a location that better suited their needs," Rachelle Abbott, chief operations officer for STEP, said. "The addition to the rec center that would house the Healthy Aging Center would actually be dual use because the seniors would use it in the mornings for their fitness classes, and the after school program Loyalsock operates would be utilized at 3 p.m."

The \$400,000 project is already halfway to its goal through a \$150,000 grant from the First Community Foundation Partnership of Pennsylvania, \$50,000 from the township and \$7,000 raised by local residents.



ANNE REINER/Sun-Gazette

Above, the newly-renovated Sheetz gas station is up and running on East Third Street in the Golden Strip. Left, a sign welcomes passerby to the township and shows it was first settled in 1785.



This year began with a number of new storefronts, many businesses having finished building last year, with Sheetz, Aldi's, Giant super markets, MidState Beverage and Taco Bell all having major renovations done.

"In 2017, we had quite a bit of new commercial growth in the township," Burdet said.

Xfinity, Cricket Wireless, River View Bank, NDH Automotive, T-Mobile, Mattress Warehouse and Williamsport Dental Office all opened over the past year, according to Burdet.

A larger project spearheaded by the township will complete its first portion in 2019, but when it is done, it will help connect the Susquahanna Bike Way with James Short Park.

The first phase, connecting the township's recreation center to James Short Park, is planned to go out for bidding by this winter.

"It's been a long-term goal of the township to connect the residential areas of the township to the trails along the river," Burdet said. "For most of the people who live in the township, if you want to

use the Susquahanna Trail, you have to get in your car and drive somewhere to park because you can't get over 1-80 or across Third Street to get you or your family across to the trail safely."

Completing the entire project is a large task, but for the township creating a path through the business sector to recreational trails will give more residents access to shopping as well as recreation.

"It's good for health and recreation. Just one less excuse to get in the car," Burdet said. "If you want to go shopping, any of our parks or the river you can go to the trail."

The township recently demolished Becht Elementary School, which closed in 2015, and will begin work on 30 new town homes. The homes, which will begin presale this summer and could see construction in early 2019, will be another welcome addition to the area for the township's aging population.

"We've seen a lot of interest, particularly with seniors, people looking to downsize and to get into a smaller facility where the maintenance is taken care for them through the homeowners association."