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The Green Mile ... plus 57

Trail boosters excited about NB-Chicago plan

By David Johnson - For the Herald-Palladium Dec 25, 2017

NEW BUFFALO — There are a lot of quick ways to travel between Chicago and its Michigan exurbs in and around New Buffalo.

There are trains, planes and automobiles, or you could go the slow way: hiking and biking.

And that could become a very attractive way if one organization gets its wish.

The Marquette Greenway is a planned 58-mile trail from Chicago's Calumet Park through northwestern Indiana to downtown New Buffalo. About 28 miles of the 10-foot wide path have either been built or funded.

Furthermore, there are visions of extending the trail to St. Joseph and South Haven.

Enthusiasts threw a fundraising dinner this month at the Bentwood Tavern in New Buffalo. The idea was to help fund the 3.8-mile leg leading to New Buffalo from Indiana.

"I am overwhelmed with the enthusiasm for the Marquette Greenway Hike and Bike Project in Harbor Country," said Arnie Feinberg, president of the Friends of Harbor Country Trails. "The huge turnout for this Give Back Dinner and the very positive input we are receiving for this project will inspire our whole team to work even harder to make it a reality."

Chad Gradowski, part of a community support team for the New Buffalo portion, said the money raised will support a route survey. With a survey in hand, supporters can get approvals from land owners in places like Grand Beach, Michiana and Forest Beach.

Bicycling or hiking through those communities today means traveling on a busy, four-lane U.S. 12.

Securing easements, raising money and garnering grants would follow, supporters say. The goal is to build the Michigan leg in 2020.

A flier issued by Friends of Harbor Country Trails states there is an immediate need to raise \$25,000 for pre-development work.

"Our 2018 goal is to raise another \$200,000 to leverage state and federal grants," the flier states. Donations can be made online at harborcountrytrails.org or via mail to Friends of Harbor Country Trails, P.O. Box 371, New Buffalo, MI 49117.

A Dec. 19 Pokagon Fund press release reported that the Marquette Greenway Giveback Dinner raised \$9,685 toward the initial target of \$25,000 and was attended by more than 175 people.

Marcy Hamilton, senior planner with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, said her organization has been a "convener" in the process – helping bring people together, including the many units of government along the Michigan route.

Hamilton said the trail is likely to go on past New Buffalo. She said routes to St. Joseph and South Haven are being discussed.

New Buffalo Township Supervisor Michelle Heit said the city and township have contributed funds for the survey.

"This will be great for the residents as a whole, but especially the people who live in Michiana and Grand Beach. They'll be able to ride their bike into the city," she said.

Heit said she hopes the Marquette Greenway route will be near Grand Beach Road and not along the railroad tracks. Amtrak could present time-consuming bureaucratic headaches, she said.