

# Officials tout benefits of bi-state project's newest link

**LOU MUMFORD** South Bend Tribune [lmumford@sbtinfo.com](mailto:lmumford@sbtinfo.com) | Posted: Sunday, August 10, 2014 6:50 am

NILES -- There's one less gap in what in the next few years will be the 34-mile recreation trail between Niles and Mishawaka.

At the grand opening Saturday of the 3.3-mile Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail segment running north from the state line to the Brandywine Creek Nature Park, just north of U. S. 12 in Niles Township, Dick Cooper, a township trustee, seemed to draw from the song once sung by the late Roy Rogers and his wife, Dale Evans Rogers.

"More than anything, it's a place to be happy," he said, echoing the "Happy Trails" tune.

Harry Thibault, the chairman of the township park commission, said much the same thing when he referred to the surprising amount of use the segment received while finishing touches were still being applied.

"There's energy in the township," he told trail officials and supporters gathered on the segment just off Bell Road across from the Niles Township Hall. "People are out, being visible. The township is being transformed."

Although more work remains in Michigan -- the second and final phase to the township's \$842,000 first phase will link the south end of the city of Niles' trail at South Third and Fort streets to the segment at Brandywine Creek Nature Park -- Saturday's ceremony was all about celebrating the trail's progress the last few years. Also, Thibault pointed out the township's \$141,000 share of the mostly grant-funded project ended up with the township board needing to kick in just \$25,000.

The rest, he said, was funded by foundations, bicycle groups and various donations such as a \$25,000 commitment from the Enbridge Pipeline Co., the firm responsible for the new crude oil pipeline that winds through the area.

The result is a trail many might envy, said Niles Township Supervisor Jim Stover.

"Some people in the township would like to have their roads look like this," he said.

But as Thibault pointed out when work started on the trail segment, it's just a piece of the puzzle. Besides the lone remaining 1-mile segment in the township, Indiana still has two gaps to eliminate, hopefully by 2017 at the latest.

Among those anxiously awaiting the trail's completion are Jenny Welch, 29, of Niles, and her mother-

in-law, Tammy Welch, also of Niles. Jenny said she began using the trail in Niles Township about a month ago.

"You see nature. It's great," she said. "Once I get off work, I take the trail."

Tammy Welch said she uses it for exercise and plans to ride her bicycle on it once it's finished to Mishawaka.

Also anticipating the trail's completion are Carolyn Sundquist, her boyfriend, Kris Martin, and their dog, Layla. The Buchanan couple said they plan to ride bicycles on the trail and are looking forward to stopping at South Bend restaurants.

An associate planner for the Southwestern Michigan Planning Commission, Martin said there's another positive aspect of the trail many don't see.

"It's good to see two states work so well together," he said.

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