

MetroWest Daily News

On the Trail of a Clear Path

By Laura Crimaldi / News Staff Writer

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FRAMINGHAM -- Sue and Jim Saber of Framingham have traveled all over New England to bike the region's rail trails.

Yesterday, they pitched in to clear the first trail that will actually run through their backyard.

"It is so nice just seeing so many people out enjoying nature and the trails. Off-road (trails) are so important. You don't have the traffic you have here," said Jim Saber as he waited to head down the trail for the 16th Framingham Cochituate Rail Trail Committee (CRT Committee) cleanup.

Tax cut money bought the Sabers their newest set of two wheels and since then the couple has driven to western Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Cape Cod, Rhode Island and beyond to bike rail trails.

Along the way, the couple said they've stopped in restaurants they would have never visited and discovered sights that are hard to find from major roadways. The rail trails give small businesses a boost while giving folks a chance to see communities from a whole new perspective, they said.

"We feel like we want one in our backyard," said Sue Saber.

More than 30 volunteers raked, cleared ragweed and picked up trash during the cleanup, which stretched from Old Connecticut Path in Framingham to the entrance to Home Depot in Natick.

Although this is the last cleanup of the year, CRT Committee member John Brennan said the rail trail effort took some major steps forward over the summer with negotiations for leases and easements and progress with the Natick Mall expansion plan.

By spring, the CRT Committee hopes to finalize a lease agreement with the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority for use of its property between the Massachusetts Turnpike and School Street in Saxonville, Brennan said.

The town already has a permanent easement from the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority for rail trail construction from Rte. 30 to the Pike, Brennan said. That half-mile portion of the trail should be open to the public by spring.

The CRT Committee has also struck a deal with the Natick Mall developers for \$100,000 to build a crossing at Rte. 30. The developer has also promised a multi-use trail on the north and east side of the expansion area, bicycle parking and a bicycle and pedestrian crossing at Speen Street, according to the CRT Committee's September newsletter.

"We do a lot behind the scenes," Brennan said.

Tim Flavin of Framingham has been pitching in to get the rail trail project off the ground since work began more than three years ago.

He rode his bike to the cleanup, which was aimed at clearing overgrown brush from the summer months.

"It will just give people a better place to use bikes and walk," he said. "I can use it to bypass a lot of intersections and roads."

The CRT Committee holds its last fall event on Oct. 17 with a two-hour tour of the rail trail beginning at 10 a.m.

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