



More Hiking And Bike Paths Leading To Nowhere

By: Gene Prim

For the past decade there has been a determined effort on the part of the City of Barnesville to provide hike and bike paths for pedestrians and bikers. In many cases these are trails that lead to nowhere but are very much appreciated.

One of those pathways to nowhere is the trail system that meanders through Blue Eagle Park on the northeast corner of Barnesville. Hikers and bikers at the park will find a winding path around the lake itself, through the tree-lined shade that goes past the playgrounds on each end of the lake, over the levy between the lake and the settling pond, past the fishing pier, around the softball diamonds, the new basketball courts, the bathhouses, the beach and the parking lots.

The Blue Eagle Trail System is the brainchild of David Riddering. He headed up the Barnesville Public Works and Parks Department for 14 years before he died in 2011. During his tenure as head of the departments he acquired a small paving machine used mostly for patching small areas of deteriorating bituminous potholes on the city streets.

Riddering took it upon himself and his department to put the paving machine to work creating bigger and better things. With no assistance from planners or engineers he laid out the trail system within Blue Eagle Park. The only cost the city has involved in the popular BEL trail system is the cost of the bituminous itself.

That Blue Eagle Trail System is used extensively by hikers during all months of the year with the highest usage coming during the warm months. It is not at all uncommon to see a vehicle pull up from another part of town and the occupant get out to make a lap or two around the lake. There is usually someone on the Blue Eagle Paths at any hour of the day providing there is not stormy weather outdoors.

To honor Riddering, past Barnesville Mayors Ken Bauer and Gene Prim last fall approached the Park Board with the request to name the Blue Eagle Trail System in honor of Riddering. The Park Board approved the request and sent it on to the Barnesville City Council who also concurred. The action took place last fall. A formal dedication and signage have not yet been added to the system but both are expected to happen this summer.

There is another trail system that starts at Blue Eagle Park and goes nowhere. That hike and bike



The Blue Eagle Lake Hiking Trail is a popular spot for dogs to take their humans out for a walk. The BEL Trail connects up to the Highway 34 Trail and also to the new 13th Street Trail on the north end of the community.

path connects with the Blue Eagle Trail System near the footbridge and parking lot on the north side of the park. The trail then follows the south ditch of Highway 34 from Blue Eagle Park to the intersections of Highways 34, 9, Old 52 and Clay County Highway 2.

That hike and bike path is a continuation of the Minnesota Department of Transportation Trails System. That trail was financed by MnDOT and was opened for pedestrian and bike traffic in 2016. There are plans in the works to continue that trail system to the west as far as the Reed Field Ball Diamonds as soon as financing is approved.

The MnDOT program for trails is on a grant system with a few projects approved each year. Barnesville has been submitting grants to MnDOT for several years and will likely move to the head of the list sometime in the near future to complete this trail system to Reed Field.

The newest hike and bike trail system in Barnesville opened last fall. This is a mile-long hike and bike path that runs on the west side of 13th Street, the East City Limits Road. The trail begins at 9th Avenue Southeast and runs north for a mile to the St. John's Church Parking Lot.

This trail became possible after property negotiations and a purchase were concluded in 2019. During those negotiations the City of Barnesville was able to reach an agreement with the Ed and Patty Gilbertson family on private property that was on the "wrong" or west side of 13th Street.

This crooked road, as well as city and township responsibilities and jurisdictions, had been a problem area for decades. But the matter was finally resolved with a survey and a purchase of a narrow strip of land. That was followed by an annexation which brought the roadway out of Humboldt Township and into the City of Barnesville control.

The land involved had no real value to anyone but the purchase did clear up title issues that allow the city to make plans. The purchased land and annexation allows the city to plan and build for the future. That planning includes the new hike and bike trail, the eventual paving of the south end of the East City Limits Road and perhaps future residential growth.

The new hike and bike path is a cooperative effort of the City of Barnesville, the Barnesville Park Board and the private sector. The \$204,400 trail was made possible through the efforts of the local Giving Hearts Program which is conducted in the city every February. In February of 2020 the Giving Hearts Program was able to generate \$65,552 in private donations to be used for a trail on the west side of 13th Street. That effort combined with \$118,000 in city and Park Board Reserves made the construction of the new trail system possible.

The Giving Hearts money accumulated in 2020 for the trail came from private sources through the Barnesville Community Fund. The committee generating those funds consisted of Dionne Merkens, Karen Lauer, Co-Chairs: Michelle

Durensky, Adam Hutton, Nate Strand, Jaye Abarr and Katie Hutton.

The Giving Hearts Program has been active in other community projects as well. In 2021 it was a scholarship program with the committee again being chaired by Dionne Merkens and Karen Lauer. Other members of the committee included Marla Field, Dave Gross, Leah Baker, Mark Klein, Maddy Stuvland and Vikki Nielsen. In 2019 the Giving Hearts Program generated matching funds to see much of the playground equipment in the city parks replaced.

The physical work on the new walking trail was performed last summer as an alternate bid by Dirt Dynamics. They had been awarded the general contract on the infrastructure in the new DelAcres/Gilbertson Phase III that would be built on the east side of the city over the summer of 2020.

As with most big projects, the trail was not completed without some controversy. There was a major glitch during the final phase of the project. The north end of the trail was paved well below an acceptable grade. This issue was cleared up at no expense to the city as the engineers and contractors corrected the issue. The north end of the trail now has a substantial base underneath it on the north end as there are four inches of blacktop buried below the surface of the trail.

There was an additional glitch in the trail when a water retention pond became necessary. It was discovered during the construction that there was not enough natural

drop in elevation to assure a reliable water drainage. That was corrected with the construction of the retention pond and another \$21,000 added to the final bottom line bringing the grand total to \$204,400. The \$21,000 for the retention pond came from wheelage tax money that the city accumulates from state and county sources.

Barnesville has come a very long ways in developing a trail system for resident's recreation and enjoyment during the past few years. And it's not over yet. As indicated earlier, plans to extend the trail system to Reed Field are still involved in the MnDOT grant process and will likely become a reality in the next few years.



A trail improvement that could come sooner than that would see the recently completed hike and bike trail along 13th Street extend another quarter mile to the north. The trail would then follow Highway 34 back to Blue Eagle Park where it would connect to existing trails through the park and along Highway 34.

Another hike and bike path that will become a reality in the very near future is a half-mile trail that runs from downtown to the major intersections of highways on the north end of the city. Highway 9 within the city is slated for a rebuild by MnDOT during the summer of 2023. At that time the highway from the City Hall Corner to the north end of the city at the intersection of Highways 9, 34, Old 52 and Clay County 2 will be rebuilt.

Already included in the demolition and rebuild of Highway 9 will be the replacement of city infrastructure under the present highway.

During the rebuild the highway will be narrowed. This will allow for a planned hike and bike path that will be incorporated into the final design plans. That downtown

The trail system that winds in and around Blue Eagle Park was the determined work of Barnesville Public Works Superintendent Dave Riddering. He headed up the department from 1997 until his death from cancer in 2011. He designed and built the Blue Eagle Trail with the only cost to the city the price of the bituminous.

hike and bike path would hook up with the already existing path along Highway 34 on the north end of the city.

Those plans so far are just that and are changing with some regularity with input from state, county and local sources. But the rebuild and a new \$300,000 hike and bike path downtown seems to be a part of all modified plans.

While a trail system that completely loops the city may not be possible or even practical, the trails already built and those in the planning and grant stages have made huge advances in just a few years. Those trails will be enjoyed by generations well into the future of Barnesville.




The creation of the new hike and bike path along 13th Street was begun last spring and wrapped up last fall. Dirt Dynamics devoted time to the project when they were caught up at the new DelAcres/Gilbertson residential housing development that they were building the infrastructure for.



Barnesville's latest "trail to nowhere" was paved last fall and has been receiving steady traffic ever since. The trail is located on the west side of 13th Street on the very south edge of town. The new trail keeps pedestrian, bike, skateboard, rollerblade and pet traffic off the narrow shoulders of the road and safely on the new pathway.



The hike and bike path on the west side of the East City Limits Road was completed only last fall. It already has proved to be one of the most popular walking routes in the city. On any day the weather is anywhere near cooperative there are folks walking, jogging, running, skateboarding, rollerblading, or just taking the dog out for a run.



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