



Housatonic River Walk recognized

By David Pepose, Berkshire Eagle Staff
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Page B1

Sunday, June 14

GREAT BARRINGTON — Some called it an oasis. Others called it a labor of love. But on a perfect, bright Sunday morning, the Housatonic River Walk along the W.E.B. Du Bois River Garden Park in Great Barrington was declared a National Recreation Trail.

This designation honors "exemplary trails of local and regional significance," and joins the path to America's National Trail System, a 12,000-mile network that includes the Freedom Trail in Boston. Nearly 100 people stood underneath the garden's leafy canopy, as U.S. Rep. John W. Olver, D-Amherst, State Sen. Benjamin B. Downing, D-Pittsfield, and Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox dedicated the walkway.

"There are a lot of parts about this job that are frustrating, especially during these economic times," said Downing. "Then you get to come to an event like this. ... You see people focus not on what's wrong with the community, but with what's right with the community."

Olver, meanwhile, said that while he was pleased with the funding the project had received, he acknowledged "we're not providing as much as we need. But with President Obama, we are seeing increased commitment to trail conversation."

Olver said that because of this, smaller conservation groups "should see more money coming in, so you can get off the ground."

"We're in the early stages of the appropriations process," he added, but "we have had a far better budget proposal from the current administration than we have had the last eight years."

Rachel Fletcher, director of Housatonic River Walk, said that nearly 2,200 volunteers worked a total of 17,831 individual hours to help clean up and remove 400 tons of rubble and debris from the area, as well as to replant natural vegetation and restore the ecology to its original state.

"It is really wonderful to see you all here," she said, recalling the original clean-up of the park, when they scavaged telephone poles from Butternut, and carried heavy stones one-by-one on a pickup truck. "It's almost as if... the last 20 years of my life are passing across. You've all had a role in it."

The ceremony made special notice of volunteers who had passed away, including giving away native seed mixes collected by Monica Schultz Fadding, who passed away in 2006. Meanwhile, volunteer Linda Small gave a speech in honor of her late husband, Comstock Small, who put in over 1,000 volunteer hours on the Housatonic River Walk.

Jim Bashour, who lives alongside the path, said he was excited to attend the dedication. "We just really appreciate the work they've done to make the river trail open to everybody," Bashour said. "This is a gem to have here — not every community is lucky enough to have this."

George S. Wislocki of the Berkshire Natural Resource Council, agreed. "This is special — a small but special river trail," he said. "It's certainly a role model to other cities and towns. ... To see a river trail built here, it'll do wonders for the community."

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The logo for The Berkshire Eagle, featuring the text "The Berkshire Eagle" in a white serif font on a dark blue rectangular background. The word "Berkshire" is slightly larger and more prominent than "The" and "Eagle".

Berkshire Eagle

Sunday June 14, 2009

Page B1

The Berkshires

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