

***Founded
in
Gratitude***

Kevin Shaw

**Friends
of the
LANSING
River Trail**



Gratitude

Virg Bernero, Mayor
9th Floor City Hall
124 West Michigan Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933

May 23, 2013

Dear Mayor Bernero,

I am a frequent user of the Lansing River Trail. Every week as I use it I want to thank someone for dreaming it up, maintaining it and expanding and improving it.

This morning as I was riding my bike from Grand Ledge to my office in Delhi Township, I decided I would just send you a very positive letter of gratitude, and hope that you will pass on my compliments and gratitude to those who should share in my appreciation.

As a runner, swimmer and bicyclist, there is really nothing better than the Lansing River Trail. It provides me with a safe and beautiful place to run and ride, and I wanted to say thanks to someone.

With deepest appreciation,

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Say Yes

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Friends of the River Trail being established

You don't have to be a runner very long before you experience close calls with cars, semi-trucks, angry dogs, and all other manner of distractions while running on public roads.

It's enough to drive a runner off-road.

This is exactly how and why I discovered the Lansing River Trail four years ago.

Having been sprayed with winter slush, honked at and generally annoyed by vehicular traffic, I began taking advantage of this precious natural resource (both on foot and on bike). The River Trail provides traffic-free routes and beautiful scenery throughout Greater Lansing.

My joy and satisfaction of the River Trail was so great that I decided to write a simple thank you letter. Unsure who was responsible for the trail, I sent my letter to Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero's office, simply thanking him and whoever was responsible for the trail's upkeep.

So imagine my surprise when the Mayor's office contacted me after receiving my letter and asked if I could stop downtown for a meeting. I agreed to attend, both with caution and excitement. What I learned in that meeting is the impetus for the rest of this column.

As Mayor Bernero ex-



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plained to me in his office that day, The Lansing River Trail is a precious resource, but one that stresses the city coffers, and its coffers alone. Although the River Trail is used by thousands of people from the tri-county area (like me, a Grand Ledge resident), the sole burden of funding, expanding and maintaining the River Trail falls to the city of Lansing.

For those not in the know, the Lansing River Trail starts around Old Town near Turner Dodge House and runs southward along the Grand River, past the Capitol, over to Potter Park Zoo, and extends all the way to the corner of Jolly and Aurelius at Maguire Park. There are several tributaries along the way, providing over 12 miles of contiguous, paved trails touching 14 city parks.

City officials also showed me plans to continue to expand the River Trail towards Fidelity Lake, and also a plan to push the trail into Delhi Township. They asked me if I could consider mobilizing a group of people who use and benefit from the River Trail to become advocates for its future uses.

As a follow up to this meeting, I recently met with the City's Director of Parks & Recreation, Brett Kaschinske, along with representatives from Playmakers and the Playmakers Fitness Foundation. Our group discussed forming an advocacy organization, with early thoughts to call ourselves "The Friends of the Lansing River Trail."

Our group aspires to possibly obtain 501(c)(3) status as a non-profit group, and form a dynamic private/public partnership to maintain, protect and reasonably grow the River Trail over the next several decades. The good folks at Playmakers already use the River Trail for their "Team Playmakers" training sessions. As well, several local races (Lansing Marathon and Capital City River Run Half Marathon) utilize portions of the trail for their annual events.

So, here's a call to action to you - the reader, the runner, the walker, the biker, the photographer, etc. Do you use the Lansing River Trail? Do you enjoy its vehicle-free status, its natural features, and the way it interconnects city parks and sections of greater Lansing? Do you appreciate how the River Trail facilitates physical fitness for multiple generations of local residents?

If so, I would like to ask you to contact us as we aspire to launch the Friends of the Lansing River Trail to help raise funds, advocate for additional government support, and generally volunteer to help keep this trail safe and beautiful.

Contacting us requires no immediate monetary support, political acumen, or precious time from you. What we seek to gain is some inertia, identify people who use and love the River Trail, and slowly organize ourselves into a specific advocacy group that can assist local government bodies to promote the health and welfare of the Lansing River Trail.

For the present time, Brett Kaschinske (Parks and Recreation) has graciously offered to be the "tip of the spear" for those of you who read this story and may wish to know more about this proposed organization. Please e-mail Brett at brett.kaschinske@lansingmi.gov or feel free to send me a message at ksa0624@yahoo.com.

The English writer John LeCarre once said, "The desk is a dangerous place from which to watch the world." Come watch the world from the beauty of your Lansing River Trail. We hope to hear from many of you as we undertake this important initiative.



Ask for Help



What's Next?

