

VOICES

THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

Trail something to celebrate

This weekend brings what's being called a "Grand Hopping" celebration — the official opening of a major section of the Greenville Hospital System Swamp Rabbit Trail. The completion of the section between Travelers Rest and the city of Greenville will be marked by a road race, a post-race party, a "Rabbit Rally" and other fun events.

With this weekend's grand opening, the Swamp Rabbit Trail will run from Travelers Rest to Greenville, connecting near Linky Stone Park. And from there it will run through Cleveland Park and near the campus of Greenville Technical College.

The trail will be accessible to everyone from dawn to dusk. It will offer a pleasurable place to walk, run or bike for families and individuals. It will be a place for friends to meet for some wholesome recreation. And it will lure people out of their homes and into nature for some physical activity that is sorely needed by many people.

The opening of the trail has been a long time coming, and the recent rain has forced a little improvising. The plan to have the entire section from Travelers Rest to Greenville paved may have to

wait a little longer because of the rain. Crushed gravel will be brought in if it's not possible to have all of the trail paved by Saturday, said Ty Houck, director of Greenways, Natural and Historic Resources for the Greenville County Recreation District.

In a state with some of the highest obesity rates in the country, and the illnesses that come with that condition, trails such as the Swamp Rabbit Trail are important to encouraging people to be more active. Obesity rates in our state have doubled since 1990, according to the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. In 2007, 65 percent of adults were either overweight or obese, and more than 30 percent of high school students were overweight or obese, according to DHEC.

The Swamp Rabbit Trail represents Greenville at its best — both in terms of long-range planning and of public and private partners working together for the common good. As Houck explained in a 2007 op-ed, in 1999 the Greenville County Economic Development Corporation, which was created by Greenville County Coun-

cil, "had the foresight to buy an abandoned rail line." The rail line was known as the Swamp Rabbit because of the way the trains had "hopped" through some of the rough, marshy areas of the county.

Then in 2005, more than 200 volunteers cleared parts of the Swamp Rabbit Corridor that hadn't seen rail traffic since 1998. Greenville County Council had the bold vision and courage to pass the TRAC Plan (Tourism, Recreation & Athletics Coalition) in 2006. The TRAC Plan funded a number of recreational and athletic initiatives that will provide more opportunities for local residents and draw more tourism dollars. Major funding for these projects comes from the hospitality tax added in the unincorporated parts of Greenville County.

The Greenville Hospital System made a \$1 million donation to the Swamp Rabbit Trail in 2007 as part of its commitment to creating health-related programs in our county. The cities of Travelers Rest and Greenville have played a role in the trail's development, and Upstate Forever and Furman University have helped, too.

Businesses, churches and individuals have "adopted" parts of the trail. Some will allow public access to the trail. They also will serve as "eyes" along the trail — enhancing the trail's safety and reporting possible problems.

As with any hiking or running trail — whether it runs through a national park or a city park — users of the Swamp Rabbit Trail should be cautious and courteous. Walkers or runners should have a buddy or two when traveling along the more isolated parts of the trail.

The Greenville County Recreation District has a lot of information and some rules on its website at <http://greenville-rec.com/parks/swamp-rabbit>. The goal is for this trail to eventually allow people to go from Travelers Rest, through the Greenville, to Lake Conestee Nature Park. But that's just a start, really.

A dream is for the trail to be part of a statewide path that allows people to go from the North Carolina line to the coast, enjoying this state's enormous natural beauty along the way. That's quite a way off, of course, but it's a dream that one day needs to become a reality.

LETTERS