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## First phase of Westside path ready for walkers

**MONICA MERCER, Staff Writer**

Members of the Westside Neighborhood Association called it a "whirlwind" of an experience Saturday morning when they officially unveiled the first phase of the Wadsworth Trail.

It's a shared-use path that, when complete, will connect many Westside neighborhoods in a 5.5-mile loop, and it's being called the "perfect example" of what can happen when local government and private parties work together.

It started just 15 months ago. The Westside Neighborhood Association was actually born out of the idea for the trail, when residents realized the county would be repairing Willis Road with money from the \$25 road maintenance fee.

Why not, they asked, pool resources and build a trail at the same time?

The county couldn't help fund the separate project with public dollars, but pledged to build it with county equipment and labor if the association could come up with enough money.

"We wanted this badly enough that we were able to raise enough money for the first phase," said Laura Henthorn, member of the association.

It cost about \$85,000, with \$15,000 worth of seed money coming from the Mary Black Foundation to complete the first phase, which includes the Willis Road portion and another portion along Reidville and Oak Grove Roads.

The second and third phases, with construction beginning in mid-2007, will complete the loop.

There have been other big partners like the Palmetto Conservation Foundation, Upstate Forever and the Westside Club, but Henthorn said much of the money simply came

from hundreds of local residents.

Getting support like that, the Westside Neighborhood Association believes, is proof that quality of life issues are important to county residents -- and that taxpayers' dollars could certainly help fund future projects across the county.

"This is still not in our county's budget, and we're still kind of sad about that," Henthorn told the crowd Saturday morning.

Earlier in the week Henthorn said, "We've stepped up to the plate, and we feel the government needs to step up in the future."

The trail seems to have evolved into something much bigger than just improving Willis Road, says Westside Neighborhood Association President Pat Rourke.

Building on the shared-use path idea, Westview Elementary has plans to build a three-quarter-mile running track. It would not only accommodate the school's 120-member running club, but be connected to the Wadsworth trail as well.

"We'd want the entire community to use it," said Josef Lorenz, Dorman soccer coach and Westview physical education teacher.

Tom Foster, who joins County Council as District 6 representative in January, acknowledged private support as the key to getting things done when the government can't.

"These people have been so proactive. They didn't wait for the county to do it for them, they did it themselves."

Monica Mercer can be reached at 562-7215 or [monica.mercer@shj.com](mailto:monica.mercer@shj.com).

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