



## Flint River Trail breaks ground

Holding golden shovels and umbrellas that warded off the sprinkling rain, conservation officials and trail commission members easily dug into the muddy ground by the intersection of Flint Bottom and Prairie Grove roads Friday morning.

An audible "yee-haw" erupted from the crowd of 30 community members gathered around the diggers, and the official ground-breaking ceremony for the Flint River Trail was complete.

"It was almost two years that I was in RiverPark Place and we were announcing our kick-off of our fundraising campaign for the Flint River Trail," KBUR program director and on-air personality Steve Hexom told the crowd. "Well the ground-breaking today, or mud-breaking, is the result of many, many labors. It's going to be a recreational trail for bikers, runners, walkers, cross country skiers."

The ground-breaking was for a seven-mile stretch of the trail that will run from the Flint Bottom and Prairie Grove Road intersection to the Thye Woods Habitat Preserve. Cole Construction Inc. out of Des Moines will begin work on the trail in late June, and trail officials are hoping work will be complete by the end of the year.

"All of the grant money is in place, and the county is looking pretty good as far as the funding goes," said Mike Norris with the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission.

Norris said the next step will be the construction of a quarter-mile trail through Starr's Cave Park and Preserve that eventually will connect to the entirety of the 20-mile trail when it is complete in 2013. Hikers will be allowed on that portion of the trail, but bikers will not.

The city's four-mile portion of the trail, which includes a mile from the Port of Burlington to the shuttered Burlington Basket Co., should be under construction by next year.

"According to the Iowa DOT, this will be the largest non-rail trail in the state," Hexom said.

When completed, bikers and walkers will be able to walk or pedal their way from the Port of Burlington to the Big Hollow Recreation Area — except for the no bikes section of the trail at Starr's Cave. The trail will connect with the

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KBUR's Steve Hexom interviews Mayor Bill Ell, middle right, as Jim Steer, Chairman of the Des Moines County Conservation Board, far right, holds an umbrella for him during the Flint River Trail Groundbreaking Ceremony Friday, May 21, 2010, at the intersection of Flint Bottom Road and North Prairie Grove Road in Burlington. The trail, expected to be completed by 2013, will stretch from the Port of Burlington to Big Hollow Recreation Area.

Mississippi River Trail, downtown Burlington, the Port of Burlington, Riverside Park, Starr's Cave and Preserve, Thye Woods, the historic Zion School and Flint River Valley.

While the entire trail won't be complete until 2013, sections will be opened in phases over the next couple of years, depending on the speed of construction.

"This has been a long time coming," said Burlington Mayor Bill Ell. "I think this project is a great testimony to what can happen when good people work in partnership with each other."

The entire cost of the project is expected to be about \$6.5 million dollars, and more than half that money has been acquired by the Flint River Trail committee. That includes a \$555,000 Transportation Enhancement grant from the Iowa Transportation Commission that was awarded just this year. The trail also was awarded a \$150,000 grant by the Resource Enhancement and Protection Program, matching another REAP grant the trail received in 2006.

More than \$3 million has been raised toward the trail, with 70 percent of that money coming from grant funding, 12 percent coming from the city and county, and 8 percent from the Vision Iowa fund.

Norris is hoping to raise 10 percent, or \$650,000, of the needed funds from private donors and businesses, and about 30 percent, or \$200,000, of that already has been raised.

"We need to do more outreach. It would be nice to have all the money by next year, but I don't think that's going to happen," Norris said.

More than \$1.75 million in grant awards have been given to the trail, and about 75 percent of the trail will be constructed using federal and state grants.

A bid for two phases of the trail came in at about a quarter of the estimated cost. During the board of supervisors meeting on Tuesday, county engineer Brian Carter said the bid from Cole Construction was for just over a million dollars, which will be paid for by grants. The county now has about \$100,000 left to use for the trail, which Carter said could be used to pay for up to four bridges that weren't covered in the estimate.

Carter said they will go through a bidding process for the bridges and use the leftover grant money to build them.



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Greater Burlington Partnership workers, from left, Sam Manka, Kay Sackville-Breuer and Beth Nickel talk while holding ceremonial shovels after the Flint River Trail groundbreaking ceremony Friday at the intersection of Flint Bottom Road and North Prairie Grove Road in Burlington.