

ADVENTURE

David Kurtz (left) with Vincent Barletta and Ethan Brauser at Sunnyside Paddle Park in Bellefonte.



PHOTOS BY DARREN ANDREW WEIMERT

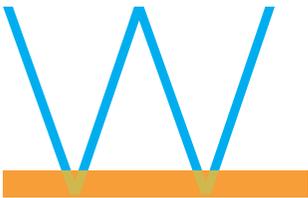
As more people look to the outdoors for entertainment, new initiatives are enhancing the area's standing as a recreation hub

BY VINCENT CORSO

CENTRE



Members of the Centre County Crows youth mountain-biking team at Sunset Park.



When longtime road cyclist and outdoor recreation enthusiast Josh Stapleton started mountain biking with his two children, he quickly realized that while there is a wonderful, extensive trail system in nearby Rothrock State Forest, there weren't many places for beginners to learn the sport.

While the trails in the area are sought out by experienced bikers, hikers, and runners because they are often rocky and steep, they can sometimes be daunting for newcomers to these lifetime sports.

"Soon thereafter, my daughter joined a local youth mountain-biking team, the Centre County Crows, and seeing the number of kids interested in the sport with no good places to practice got me thinking about what we as a community might be able to do to create opportunities to get more kids on bikes and off screens," Stapleton says.

With the help of a community of supporters, a new multi-use public trail system is under construction at Calvary church's Harvest Fields in Boalsburg and will be open this summer.



Harvest Fields Community Trails is just one example of initiatives that are helping the region stand out as an outdoor adventure destination.

Ground was broken recently for the Harvest Fields Community Trails (lower right, on opposite page), a new multi-use public trail system in Boalsburg that will be accessible for beginners. Jeremy Wimpey (opposite, top left), of Applied Trails Research, designed the trails. Josh Stapleton, Calvary church pastor Dan Nold, and founding partner Steve Heinz (from left in middle photo) helped spearhead the effort.



"THE WHOLE COMMUNITY IS EAGER FOR OUTDOOR REC THAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND REFRESHING. I AM SEEING A LOT OF PEOPLE DISCOVERING AMAZING OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES WE ARE BLESSED WITH HERE IN CENTRAL PA."



tion. And the timing is just right, as the coronavirus pandemic has led more and more people to hit the trails and streams in search of entertainment.

“As most of the community can see, the sidewalks are full, the dogs are happy, and the trails are – dare we say – positively crowded,” says Stapleton. “The whole community is eager for outdoor rec that is accessible and refreshing. I am seeing a lot of people discovering amazing outdoor recreation opportunities we are blessed with here in central PA.”

Stapleton was aware that his church, Calvary, was looking for ways to make the surrounding Harvest Fields lands an asset for the whole community. The church had already developed a Frisbee golf course on the property and donated land that includes a pond to the Harris Township park project.

“When Josh approached Calvary’s leadership with the possibility of putting in a series of walking and beginner mountain-biking trails, it was an easy yes. We are offering our property for use and so many people and organizations have donated to the cost,” says lead pastor Dan Nold.

Thanks to the church’s generosity, the project quickly gained momentum. Soon thereafter, the Nittany Mountain Biking Association got on-board and began to pour energy



into all areas of the project – from design and fundraising to construction management and long-term maintenance. A slew of community partners pitched in to help.

Top-notch trail designers and builders were brought in to construct a sustainable trail that will provide a place for the community to get outdoors. For the Centre County Crows youth mountain-biking team, the trails will provide a new place for the team to train and grow and potentially hold competitions – something they have to travel for currently, says coach Margot Kaye.

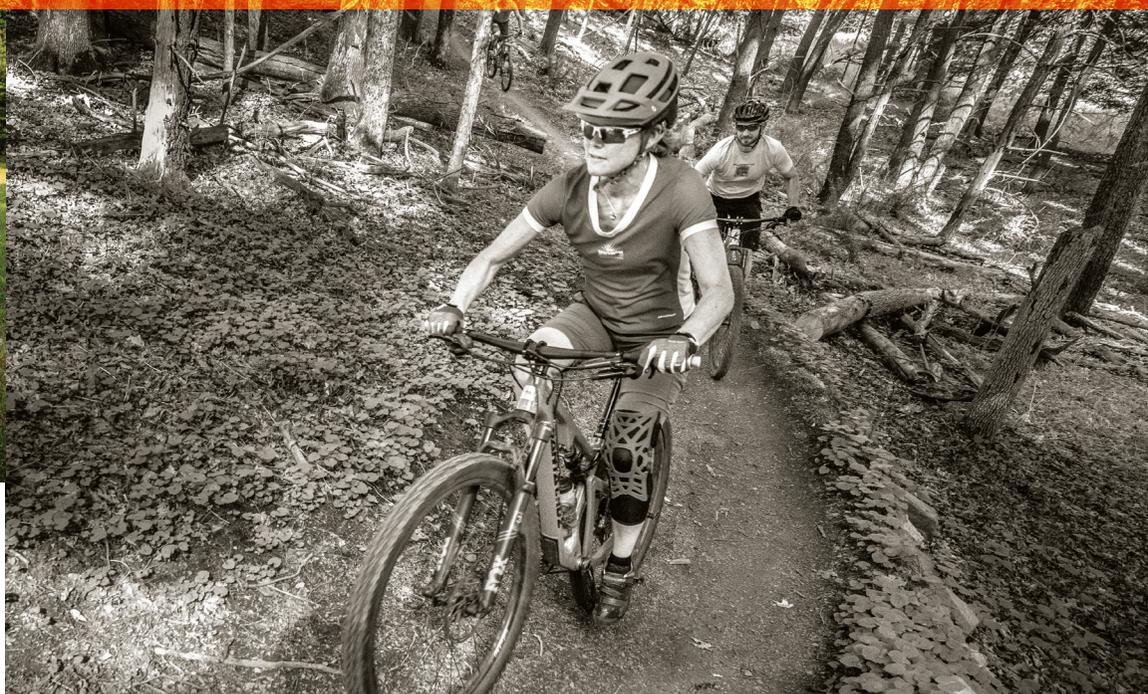
Mountain biking provides the team of 6th-through-12th-graders a chance to grow physically and socially, says Kaye, while also providing opportunities for them to compete as a team and as individuals.

“They are riding with kids from different schools, different districts, different genders, ages, orientations. On

the team there are no cliques. So the social aspect is great,” says Kaye. “As for mountain biking, I think they like the challenge; it is something they can do on their own or with the team.”

For NMBA, the trails offer a chance for more people to see what they love about one of the fastest-growing recreational sports. President Perry Schram remembers when he began riding the technical trails at Rothrock, at the well-attended NMBA Thursday-night rides that start in the Galbraith Gap parking lot. He says the community support he got from other riders was helpful as he learned to navigate the “puzzle” of rocks and roots on the trail.

“You see people doing it, but at first you are like, ‘Wow, how is that even possible?’” says Schram. “But I just love the challenge of it, being in the woods, just being out in Rothrock. It is a great way to relieve the



Perry Schram (above) and fellow bikers at Colyer Lake. The fact that people can hit the trails all day and then be in State College for dinner and nightlife is a big draw for the area, Schram says.

stress of the day and get fit. “Harvest Fields is going to be huge. It is going to let beginners of all ages be able to start on trails that are designed specifically for beginners, with alternate lines and measure that kind of advance your skills without being in the really technical rocky terrain that Rothrock offers – which we love of course, but with these new trails, you can build up to it safely.”

COMMUNITY THROUGH MOVEMENT

Since moving his outdoor gear company, Organic Climbing Inc., to the area 10 years ago, Josh Helke was looking to provide the region an indoor climbing gym. As he struggled to find a location that worked, his company in



Thomas Kistler, who led a citizens group to save Colyer Lake, says the area has been a "beehive" of activity this season.

Josh Helke is partnering with 5.Life to build Climb Nittany, a gym like this one in Ohio.

Philipsburg grew and grew. Recently, he partnered with Ohio-based 5.Life and they are in the process of building Climb Nittany, a 12,000-square-foot gym that will feature 10,000 square feet of climbing walls for bouldering, top rope, and lead climbing, plus space for yoga and fitness. While the pandemic pushed construction back, the goal is to open sometime in July or August. Climb Nittany is located next to Calvary and the Harvest Fields Community Trails in what looks to become an outdoor adventure corridor with the Tussey Mountain ski slopes and Rothrock State Forest as the backdrop. "I have always lived in developing outdoor towns that were off the radar and then kind of come on the radar," says Helke. "And to see State College kind

of release from the whole football mentality and start to appreciate and market the outdoor aspect, it is just so cool." Rock climbing is an up-and-coming sport that was to be featured in the 2020 Olympics for the first time, and Helke is excited to get people into the sport that he says is like "a mix between rhythmic yoga and running." "Our motto [of] 'building community through movement' is really our goal," he says. "We want to bring people from all over the Centre Region, not just State College, together where people can enjoy a sport and recreate for the fun of it and enjoy each other's company. "There is a lot of outdoor climbing potential in the area, so it is going to be cool for

people to be able to connect the strength and skill that they gain at Climb Nittany and translate that into some outdoor trips. We are hoping that as we get integrated into the community, to offer taking groups outside." "This area now is really starting to be on the radar as far as biking and all these outdoor sports," Helke adds. "So it is fantastic to think that now climbing will be added to this mix of these world-class sports in an area that is kind of undeveloped in terms of that."

COLYER LAKE, SAVED

"Since April, the place has been an absolute beehive," Thomas Kistler says about Colyer Lake, just up Route 322 from Boalsburg. "Weekend days, there is almost no parking at either boat launch. The number of

people out on canoes and kayaks and stand-up paddle boards and fishing, it is just wonderful." Kistler, Centre County senior judge, is president of a citizens group that in 2013 set out to save Colyer Lake after the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources was set to drain the lake because of its aging dam. The committee raised about \$140,000 to help save the lake, \$100,000 of which was slated to help fix the dam, leaving \$40,000 for picnic tables and other features. But the dam project came in under budget, and the Fish and Boat Commission allowed the group to keep the money to use on other projects. The group engaged the same companies that designed the Harvest Fields Community

Trails to build a 2.5-mile, multi-purpose trail around the lake, and it has become very popular. "It has exploded. It has just been so rewarding to see the families, and the sororities and the Cub Scout groups and everybody who is out getting fresh air and keeping their social distance," says Kistler. "You know this is a tremendous community for outdoor recreation, between what Rothrock has to offer and the active people of the community do, it is just a tremendous place," says Kistler. "You know when you get together and you say we would like to add something for this active community, everybody gets in line, everybody says 'yes.'" **ROOM FOR GROWTH** Jerney Wimpey, of Applied Trails Research, designed the

trails at Colyer Lake and Harvest Fields, along with trails all over the country. Outdoor recreation is something the area is known for, especially with trailheads located just a short drive from town, he says. "It is a fantastic local source of outdoor recreation," Wimpey says. "It is more than a blip on the national scene, but it is not like a Moab. Within the mountain-biking community, and the trail-running community, and even with the long distance trail like the Mid-State Trail, it does draw people in, and the new trails will help more people find the outdoors." The fact that people can hit the trails all day and then be in State College for dinner and nightlife is a big draw for the area, Schram says.



Edward Stoddard, communication director for the Happy Valley Adventure Bureau, agrees.

“In Happy Valley, we are fortunate to have convenient access to some of the best trails and scenery in Pennsylvania; the Harvest Fields Community Trails project builds on our reputation as a location offering bountiful outdoor recreational opportunities for individuals and families,” says Stoddard. “Easy trail access close by to Rothrock State Forest and population centers is a great



benefit. Having high-quality trails close to towns gives a boost to tourism and can deliver an economic lift to many businesses in an area.”

Mike Hermann, founder of Purple Lizard Maps, has been exploring the trails at Rothrock State Forest since 1979 as part of the first generation



The paddle park and the Happy Valley Women’s Cycling Team (opposite page) add to the region’s reputation as a hub of outdoor sports. Mike Hermann (above), founder of Purple Lizard Maps, walks at Musser Gap. Hermann says the number of trail users in the area has grown by leaps and bounds.

of mountain bikers in the area. Purple Lizard’s Rothrock Forest map is a great resource for people looking to explore.

Hermann says the number of trail-users in the area has grown by leaps and bounds, as adults have taken up activities that used to be considered just for younger people.

“If you go back 30 years ago, kids rode bicycles, adults didn’t; trail running was an obscure thing that odd people did,

hiking and backpacking was something that college kids did as part of an outdoor program,” says Hermann. “Culturally, you know America has made that fundamental shift that these are lifelong pursuits.”

Herman notes that the local trail system “is growing along with the trail users; as the trail users get more sophisticated, they are starting to realize what a great resource they have.”

The Musser Gap trail system – made possible after the land was purchased in 2006 by ClearWater Conservancy and then given to DCNR – provides a new gateway besides the heavily-used Galbraith Gap parking area near Tussey Mountain and the smaller and often overfilled Shingletown Gap trailhead.

In 2016 and 2017, Wimpey helped conduct an assessment of the trail system and identified many different user groups, including trail runners, hikers, mountain bikers and, to a lesser extent, horseback riders. It showed heavy usage in the eastern part of the forest.

From that study, DCNR made a five- to 10-year recreation plan to build more sustainable trails and trailheads in the western section of the forest, connecting Musser Gap to the Whipple Dam area and decommissioning trails that are eroding due to poor construction for the heavy use they are seeing now.

“The exciting thing about connecting Musser’s Gap to Whipple is [that] it is a blank slate, there are no trails there,” Hermann says.

Groups like Friends of Rothrock State Forest and NMBA work hard on management and upkeep of trails, as DCNR cannot manage the extensive trail system on its own. It takes monetary support and man hours to keep these trails functioning.

“People don’t understand what it means to build a trail system. I think Harvest Fields will really open up people’s eyes to what a custom design and

machine-built trail system offers, because that is just a big part of the future of outdoor recreation,” says Hermann.

GETTING GRITTY

There are more than just trails cutting through the forest. Gravel roads also travel through and up the mountains, often used by runners and bikers as ways to avoid the crowded town roads; they provide challenging hills to conquer.

Gravel-riding has also grown tremendously, with bikes that are similar to road bikes, but with tires that can handle the loose gravel on dirt roads.

The Happy Valley Women’s Cycling team is the only women’s team on the East Coast to be sponsored by

Specialized bike company; the team is committed to advancing women’s biking and racing in Centre County. With the support of The Bicycle Shop in State College, the team started off more oriented to road racing, but has now grown to be more focused on gravel and mountain biking, while still doing some road racing, too.

The team hosts a ladies mountain-biking night on Mondays. It was planning to host its second Rothrock Grit Gravel Grinder, a women-friendly bike event, in June, but the event had to be postponed until next year because of the pandemic.

“It wasn’t about having a race; it is about getting more women on bikes and more people in

Rothrock to see how beautiful our forest actually is,” says team member Tanya Hampton.

People often don’t compete in cycling events because they are intimidated. “Once you are in a race environment, you realize it’s not as intimidating as you think it is,” she adds.

Riders never know what they might see along the roads in Rothrock, Hampton says.

“There is a lot of wildlife, and a lot of undisturbed natural areas,” she says. “You have streams and you can see rattlesnakes, porcupines, deer, and it’s great.

“Women are just really underrepresented in every sport,” says Hampton. “It is important for us to have women represented in



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cycling, so the next generation is even more confident. It is not just about riding bikes; it is about having a sense of community, creating friendship, building self-confidence, getting rid of stereotypes, making an equal playing ground for everyone.”

PADDLING AWAY

If you need any proof that outdoor activity will keep you feeling healthy and young for a lifetime, just take a look at David Kurtz. He has been paddling the streams of central Pennsylvania since the 1960s when he attended Penn State. Now 88, he is out on the water multiple times a week, even in the cold winter, paddling away.

“With the gear they got, you can paddle all winter, as long as the water is flowing,” says Kurtz.

His Mach One Slalom Team teaches kids the art of paddling at Sunnyside Paddle Park along Spring Creek in Bellefonte. The slalom consists of 30-odd gates hanging from wires stretched across an easy rapid stretch of the creek.

Spring Creek is good to paddle because it has a reasonable flow year-round and some little rapids, says Kurtz.

Kurtz is glad to help people newly interested in the sport learn to paddle, and he has the record to prove he knows what he is doing. After all, through the years he has trained 10 paddlers who have gone on to U.S. Junior World Champion-

ships or Olympic trails.

The area has many bodies of water on which to paddle, such as Black Moshannon, Red Moshannon, the west branch of the Susquehanna River, Bald Eagle Creek, Penns Creek, Beech Creek, and more, Kurtz says. He has seen more people coming down the river recently, and while he thinks that is great, he reminds everyone to wear a life jacket.

“I think it is the sport to get into. It is one of the best ways to keep in shape,” says Kurtz. “It really is a top-flight way of keeping physically active for decades.” **T&G**

Vincent Corso is a staff writer for *Town&Gown* and *The Centre County Gazette*.



Bellefonte
Art Museum
for Centre County

www.bellefontemuseum.org

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Calling All Community Members

C19 Photo Project: A Time to Remember and A Time to Forget

The Bellefonte Art Museum plans to display a collection of photographs created during the pandemic that will record our observations and document our memories. These images will be shared now on our social media accounts in the order we receive them, and stored to be considered for inclusion in a 2021 gallery exhibition.

Submission Guidelines:

Central Pennsylvania resident

Images must be black/white or sepia

Limit of five images per submission

Email all images to bellefontemuseum@gmail.com

Include title and location of photograph, as well as name of photographer.

In addition to the photography, verbal observations are also welcome. These phrases and fragments of thought will add another dimension of our experiences.

We want to capture these moments and share them with our community. There will be moments we will always remember and feelings we will try to forget. This project will help us realize we are not alone.