

Rails to trails

Oakland has chance for fun, cash

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

Some 78 miles of railway are due to be abandoned in Oakland County in the next decade. They could become recreation trails for hikers, bikers and horseback riders.

The trails could become part of one giant trail looping the state. They could — if communities seize the opportunity, says Larry Falardeau, a landscape architect in the Oakland County Planning Department.

"Our intent is to point out to communities the recreation and utility corridors," said Falardeau. He added the idea becomes more attractive when small towns realize they can make money from the trails.

TO MANY local governments, trails are a dirty word, particularly when they abut private property whose owners consider it "their" property. But Falardeau wants to persuade them there are two kinds of economic opportunities:

- In southern Oakland County, the old railroad rights-of-way can be fiber optics corridors for high-tech industries. It so happens that some of the ROWs lie along the tidal wave of industrial development moving northwest across Oakland County.
- Companies can communicate between plants with fiber optics — glass or plastic lines that transmit light by internal reflection. Companies would lease space on the ROWs for their lines. Going rate is by one mile of fiber optic line: \$5,000.

- Communities such as Oxford, Rochester, Lake Orion, Milford and Ortonville could become small-scale Aspens, catering to the recreation trade with bed-and-breakfasts, bike concessions, cross-country ski concessions, horse rentals, convenience stores, perhaps even campgrounds.

The May issue of National Geographic endorses rail-to-trail links, Falardeau said.

But if the communities let the rail land slip into private ownership, he said, the land will be virtually impossible to reassemble into large parcels.

FALARDEAU (pronounced fel ARE doe) presents his message cau-

tiously. He doesn't want it to appear that the county is pushing anything down an unwilling community's throat.

"It's not a 'grand plan.' Our intent is to point out the opportunities," he said.

A hiker and water colorist, Falardeau grew up in northwest Detroit, graduated from Milford High, now lives in Sylvan Lake and observes, "I'm familiar with how things disappear."

Last week Falardeau spoke to parks and recreation directors from the state Department of Natural Resources, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, Oakland, Wayne, Macomb, Livingston and Washtenaw counties.

One city and township after another in Oakland County will get his opportunity pitch. Saturday he's due at the Michigan TRails Alliance in Lansing.

THE STATE group is author of the idea for a 1,000-mile "Discover Michigan" trail on abandoned railroad rights-of-way. DNR supports the idea though it isn't willing to finance local development.

Already two parts of the plan are on their way to reality.

With county encouragement, four communities established the Paint Creek Trail, a 10.5 mile multi-use trail from Lake Orion to Rochester along a scenic stream. West Bloomfield Township is seeking \$114,000 in state money to develop the Grand Trunk Western Railroad ROW as a hiking and cross country ski trail.

But tough times lie ahead. In Green Oak Township, in eastern Livingston County, any public recreation proposal is fought strenuously, and much rail ROW has disappeared into private ownership.

Green Oak's action has stymied eastward extension of the Lakelands Trail, which runs from Jackson to the Livingston County hamlet of Hamburg.

A group called Friends of the Lakelands Trail for three years has sought state money to buy a 12-mile segment of ROW in the Wixom-South Lyon area in western Oakland County. Its application for a state grant has received negative reviews from an arm of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

RECREATION professionals like the rails-to-trails idea, though they see problems. Sample reactions:

- Oakland's Ralph Richard and Wayne's Eric Reickel are enthusiastic. "Oakland will support, help, encourage and do everything but own it," said Richard. "The locals should own and maintain it."
- The Livingston County Board believes hoodlums would be attracted to the trails, and off-road vehicles would tear it up. Green Oak Township is particularly hostile.

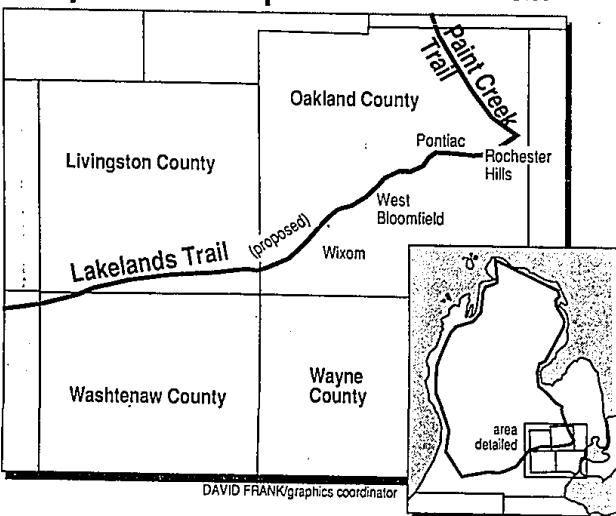
- The DNR has found that property owners along rail ROWs assume the property is theirs. They fear lawnmowers will be stolen from sheds at the rear of their property and their horses will be harmed. On the Kai-Haven trail from Kalamazoo to South Haven, a farmer blocked the trail with a junk truck, and another plowed up the trail and planted corn.

- Law enforcement people say rail trails are impossible to patrol if there are multiple entry-exit points.
- Snowmobilers are able to organize to promote the trails, but non-motorized trail users dislike the snowmobilers.

- In time, conflicts develop along multiple-use trails. Fast bicyclists resent slow ones. Hikers dislike horses.

- Wayne's Reickel is optimistic about the ability of recreation planners to develop multi-use trails. He points to Hines Parkway in the western suburbs, where walkers, joggers and cyclists manage peaceful coexistence.

Proposed Sesquicentennial Trail



The Michigan TRails Alliance proposes a 1,000-mile "Discover Michigan" trail based on former railroad rights-of-way (inset map). In the region, the Paint Creek Trail and west Liv-

ingston County of the Lakelands Trail are realities. A Rochester-to-Wixom link is in the planning and talking stage.

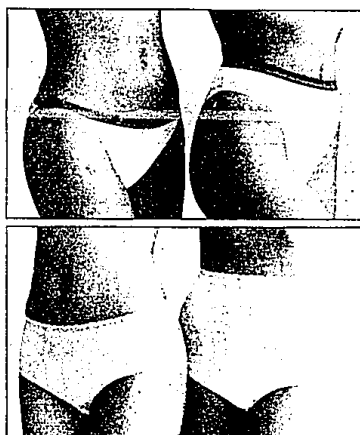
DAVID FRANK/graphics coordinator

Some things you can never have enough of. How did they know?

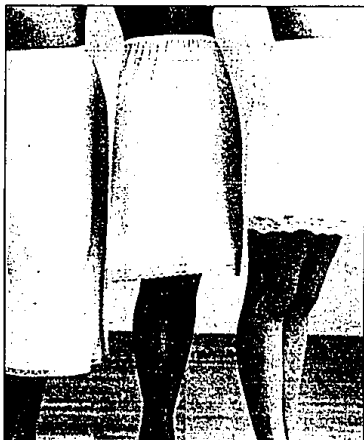
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13 seek 2 posts on OCC board

Thirteen candidates filed for ballot spots seeking two posts on the Oakland Community College Board of Trustees June 13.

The OCC field includes one incumbent, a county commissioner and a city attorney. Filing deadline was Tuesday.

Winners take office in July and serve for six-year terms. One incumbent did not seek re-election.

Here is the list, in alphabetical order, with any biographical information filed with the college:

Richard A. Blende, 33, Rochester Hills — an OCC student and 13-year Michigan Bell employee.

James A. Dojos, 41, Madison Heights — seven-term Oakland County commissioner who will vacate that post Dec. 31. He is a substitute teacher.

Edith Gonzalez, 65, Troy.

David W. Hackett, 44, Rochester Hills — 22-year OCC trustee and retired teacher.

Arts Foundation to honor 5 at DIA

The Arts Foundation of Michigan will honor five of the state's artists with \$2,500 awards at a ceremony on Thursday, May 5 at Detroit Institute of Arts. Reception will follow the ceremony.

Winners are: Gunnar Birkerts, architect, Birmingham; A. Spencer Barefield, composer, Detroit; Robert Caskey, sculptor, Flackney; Sue Marx, filmmaker, Detroit; and David Regal, actor and director, Hamtramck.

Birkerts has been an architect for more than 40 years. Among the projects he has done in Michigan are the Domino's Pizza World Headquarters, Ann Arbor; the IB, office building, Southfield; the law library at University of Michigan; and the Baldwin Library addition, Birmingham.

Barefield, musician and composer, has produced more than 70 jazz concerts at Detroit Institute of Arts and

has toured and performed throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

Caskey, sculptor, teacher, curator and adviser to artists, has been art professor at Moti Community College in Flint since 1972.

Marx recently won an Oscar for best documentary short for her film, "Young at Heart."

Regal has been artistic director of The Theatre Company based at University of Detroit since 1976. He has had leading roles in more than 50 plays and directed more than 30 productions.

The Foundation is a statewide organization dedicated to supporting and recognizing excellence in the arts. It is funded by corporations, foundations and individuals and has awarded more than \$1.3 million in grants since its founding in 1966.

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