

# Train-track bed just right for exercise

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

The abandoned Grand Trunk Railroad right-of-way in West Bloomfield, which is being transformed into an exercise trail, isn't exactly paved with gold. But limestone will do just fine.

According to Dave Burley, parks supervisor for the West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Department, work crews have laid down enough crushed limestone to cover all but 2,500 of the 21,000-foot trail — which extends 4½ miles from the West Bloomfield Nature Preserve at Arrowhead Road to Sylvan Manor Park on Woodrow Wilson.

And when the \$440,000 project is completed in time for next spring, everybody from walkers to bicyclists to the wheelchair-bound will be able to use it with no difficulty, Burley assured.

Burley had been asked whether the trail's limestone surface would make it virtually impossible for wheelchairs to travel on it. "Absolutely not," he said. "This is material wheelchairs will be able to run on. Even small, high-pressure training bicycles

(can). They will pick up some grit, but it can be wiped off."

Burley said it isn't uncommon to use limestone for such a trail, noting it has so far worked successfully for the Paint Creek Trail near Rochester.

Meanwhile, for the West Bloomfield project, which was evenly funded by a township parks and rec millage and Michigan Department of Natural Resources water and conservation fund, workers of the Troy-based Active Asphalt Co. put down six inches of the limestone and then compacted it down to four inches, Burley said. Work began in early

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September and should be 90 percent completed by January, in time for cross country skiers to use it.

"It (limestone) is more forgiving than asphalt, less expensive than blacktop, aesthetically pleasing, easy to maintain and has a long life," he said, explaining the positive aspects of the

gray granules. "With exception for erosion and repair, we expect it to last 20 years or longer."

Every year, workers will be called upon to grade and pack the limestone, possibly placing additional limestone near portions where the trail meets intersections, he said.

Besides completing the lime-

stone surface, additional landscape work — such as placing top soil and seed in areas along the trail — also is planned.

Burley said those who have previously used the abandoned right-of-way for exercise purposes will be happy with the new surface, which replaces gravel.

The latter, left under railroad ties since the township bought the right-of-way in 1989 for about \$145,000, "is totally inappropriate for any kind of travel, even walking."

Burley said the trail crosses Orchard Lake Road three times and stops just short of crossing it

a fourth time. Along the way, it passes through much of the West Bloomfield Nature Preserve and portions of Orchard Lake Village, Keego Harbor and Sylvan Lake.

"Other trails in the nature preserve will be tying in with it," Burley said.

Although he didn't know whether all of those communities would contribute to the project in some fashion, "there will be linkages to existing streets in Keego Harbor so people can use it."

After all work on the trail is completed next spring, a dedication ceremony will take place, he said.

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