

You Built It, They Came

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – March 3, 2013

Four weeks have passed since an overstuffed rodent in Stone Mountain declared six more weeks of winter were coming to Georgia. Evidently, he wasn't referring to these most recent weeks.

We can't blame General Beauregard Lee, though, for guessing wrong. He didn't know he had popped out of his burrow on the coldest morning we would see through the first two months of 2013. In fact, Ground Hog Day was one of only three February mornings with temperatures below freezing. January had none.

And, it's not like old Beau doesn't have company in the "oops" department. "Wet and chilly" is how the Farmer's Almanac predicted our Southeastern winter would unfold for 2012-13. They were half right. The General wasn't headed back to bed to avoid winter chills; he was off to build an ark.

I'll shut up now, before I get blamed for the foot of snow that will probably hit by the time this column goes to print!

My real point is the good people of Newton County aren't letting this unusually warm (and sometimes sunny) weather go to waste. I know because I took a bike ride last Sunday afternoon on the new Eastside Trail, enjoying the 2.5 mile trip from Chimney Park to Eastside High School on one of the nicest afternoons of the past two weeks. I rode with a friend visiting from out of town, but we were soon surrounded by a slew of people.

In one pass through the trail, I counted 38 people walking, biking, jogging, or otherwise making use of Newton County's newest passive recreation area. We saw soloists out exercising, families taking a stroll together, and couples or friends sharing a leisurely walk and chat. We passed kids on bikes, babies in strollers, and little ones clasping mom's hand or perched upon dad's shoulders. Young and old, black and white, athletic or casual, they all had one obvious thing in common. They were happy to be outdoors.

It was a scene to make my heart feel good – not just the organ that pumps my blood as I exercise, but the part of me that experiences joy. The Eastside Trail on a sunny, warm day is a slice of a very special kind of life – the healthy, vibrant, prosperous life those of us who advocate for greenway trails knew would come. Like my fellow Newton Trails board members, I am so pleased with the public reaction to the new trail.

People aren't only using the new greenway, they're raving about it. We see that regularly on our Newton Trails Facebook page, from comments to our website, and in conversations with people around town.

“We walked the Eastside Trail yesterday! Loved it!” wrote one follower recently on our Facebook page.

“Love the trail behind the library, here's a picture I took of the s curve bridge... love this bridge, very photogenic!!!” commented another person, who also shared a nice photo.

Said another: “Just finished the entire route! Loved it and so excited our community has this! Best part, I never have to get in a vehicle to get there and enjoy this! Thanks!!!”

The expressions of gratitude and excitement are rewarding to the Newton Trails board. I hope, too, those same words are reaching the eyes and ears of our elected and appointed officials at Newton County and the City of Covington. The Eastside Trail was a long time in the making, and local leaders faced some difficult choices in the final stages to ensure the trail was completed as designed. Conceived and planned under the leadership of Mayor Sam Ramsey and Chairman Aaron Varner, put into motion during the terms of Mayor Kim Carter and Chairman Kathy Morgan, and brought to fruition under Mayor Ronnie Johnston and Chairman Keith Ellis... Projects like this require incredible persistence and constancy of purpose. But, that makes the finish line that much sweeter!

If you are enjoying and benefiting from the trail, please make sure you thank those leaders who kept things moving forward – not just the Mayors and Chairpersons, but the council members, commissioners, and city/county administration. Well done, team. Well done!

Despite Beauregard’s reservations, I suspect some nice days surely lie just ahead. Take a spare hour some afternoon to walk, jog, or bike down to the Eastside Trail. You can even join us this afternoon at 3 pm on the Square for a trail ride with the Covington Community Bike Ride. Just don’t blame me if it happens to be snowing! ☺

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