

A Shared Commons

SCHUYLKILL RIVER
NATIONAL & STATE HERITAGE AREA

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Schuylkill River Trail Trails Town Conference

A "Trail Town" is a destination along a long-distance trail. Whether... a rail trail, towpath, water trail, or hiking trail, trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby communit(ies)...

*from the Allegheny Trail Alliance's
Trail Town manual*

Trails can have a strong, positive economic impact on the communities they intersect. On March 19, 2009, the Schuylkill River Heritage Area will host a Trail Towns Conference that aims to inform nearby municipalities and businesses about the Schuylkill River Trail and how they can benefit from the trail's growing popularity.

Business owners, local governments, economic development agencies, recreational organizations and county officials are among those who will be invited to the day-long event. The workshop will identify the entities that can benefit from the trail and will feature presenters talking about how to engage trail users and trail hospitality.

Eateries, bed and breakfasts, historic sites, bike shops and outdoor outfitters all stand to gain from the trail. But people won't stop at those businesses unless they know about them. Signage at trailheads listing services and tourism opportunities is one promotional tool that will be looked at. A map of the entire trail will be unveiled at the workshop and participants will be asked for their input about local trail amenities. This information and



Bicyclists take a break in Manayunk, a major destination along the Schuylkill River Trail.

map will be used for a future trail brochure that will be made available to the public.

"We want to start promoting the Schuylkill River Trail as one regional trail and encourage communities along it to reap some economic benefits from the trail," said SRHA Executive Director Kurt Zwikl. "This will help municipalities take advantage of all these people who are going to be passing through their communities on a daily basis."

When complete, the Schuylkill River Trail will run approximately 130 miles from Philadelphia to Pottsville. Three major sections are now complete: Philadelphia to Mont Clare (26 miles), Pottstown to Reading (19 miles) and Hamburg to Auburn (7 miles).

The workshop is being funded through grants from the William Penn Foundation, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corp. Additional sponsors are being sought.





Celebrating the Past

The Sovereign Majestic Theater was built in 1910 as a reverse-screen theater on North Centre Street in Pottsville. Today the newly renovated facility serves the area as both the only movie theater in downtown Pottsville and a performing arts center. It is one of only two reverse-screen theaters remaining in Pennsylvania.

The Majestic Theater opened its doors on Saturday, July 9, 1910, and entertained Pottsville-area citizens with a mix of westerns and serials for 20 years. It was built as a reverse screen theater, meaning that the screen is at the entrance of the theater, so that the seats face the doorway. This is unlike a more traditional theater which puts the screen opposite the entrance, with seats facing away from the access point. This was done as a safety precaution, with the theory being that if a fire broke out, people would automatically rush forward and out of the building.

In 1930, after 20 years, the theater closed. It remained shuttered for nine years, until it was finally purchased by the Baker family of Bloomsburg, who reopened it as a farmers' market in 1939. The building's long, rectangular open space lent itself well to this use, and so for the next three decades, despite several changes in ownership, the farmers' market served as its primary use until August 1995, when it shut down.

That same year, a regional plan identified a performing arts center as essential for the City of Pottsville's further evolution into a thriving and vibrant community. The Sovereign Majestic Theater Association (SMTA) formed in 1998 to champion the cause of revitalizing the theater into a state-of-the-art facility for theater, music, and motion picture presentations.

In January 2001, the Pottsville Area Development Corporation (PADCO) and SMTA purchased the building for \$80,000 with plans to transform it into a regional performing arts center.

Today the eclectic style, two-and-a-half story building with a Beaux Arts-classical façade is a 224-seat venue for the presentation of professional cultural programs for children and adults. It is a contributing structure within the Pottsville Downtown Historic District, and is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.



It is suitable for many types of performances, including plays, children's theater, concerts and movies. Programming developed by the SMTA provides the local community with affordable musical and artistic entertainment.

The SMTA is a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to preserving and operating a quality performing arts facility in a fiscally and socially responsible manner to further develop the civic, cultural and artistic needs of the Schuylkill County regional community.

Upcoming events at the Sovereign Majestic Theater:

Dec. 7 at 2 p.m.: A Majestic Christmas with Syncopation (Music)

Dec. 12 at 7:30 p.m.: A Victorian Christmas with Lillie Langtry (Play)



Dec. 13 at 7 p.m.: M&T Movies at the Majestic—It's a Wonderful Life

Dec. 19, 20 & 21: Lions Club Free Christmas Movies.

Photos courtesy Sovereign Majestic Theater and Pottsville Republican.

Scenes of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area

The 2008 annual Scenes of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area juried art show was an outstanding exhibit, featuring a unique collection of 54 paintings and photographs by talented regional artists. All works depicted scenes from the Heritage Area. Some of the places represented were St. Peters Village, Historic Yellow Springs, Valley Forge National Historical Park and Fairmount Water Works.



SRHA's President Jack Koury (L) congratulates Robert L. Williams, the 2009 Scenes of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area Art Show's selected artist.

This is the sixth year the SRHA has held an art competition, and the first year photography was an accepted medium.

Twelve selected paintings and photographs were reprinted in a 2009 Scenes of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area wall calendar.

This year's winning entry, *Hidden River*, graces the cover of the calendar. *Hidden River*, by Gilbertsville artist Robert L. Williams is a



Susan Williamson's pastel *The Doctor's House*

finely rendered oil painting that portrays through light, shadow and subtle hues a bend in the Schuylkill River in the Pottstown area. Also included are second prize winner Susan Williamson's pastel of *The Doctor's House*, a scene from Norristown



Robert L. Williams' oil painting, *Hidden River*, graces the cover of the 2009 calendar.

Farm Park, and third prize winner Hazel Kilp's watercolor *Sun and Snow at Yellow Springs*.

The exhibit ran from September 8 to October 24 at the Montgomery County Community College West Campus Art Gallery, 16 High St., in Pottstown. A reception was held on Friday, October 10, in conjunction with Pottstown's Schuylkill River Festival on October 11.

The Schuylkill River Heritage Area benefits from sales of the original art and the calendars. The show also presents an opportunity to stimulate an awareness of regional artists, and to foster an appreciation, through art, of the diverse attributes of the river corridor, which stretches 130-miles through five counties (Philadelphia, Montgomery, Chester, Berks and Schuylkill).

For more information, contact the Heritage Area at 484-945-0200 or info@schuylkillriver.org.



Hazel Kilp's watercolor *Sun and Snow at Yellow Springs*

Art Calendars Available for Sale

The Scenes of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area art show featured so much beautiful, regional artwork. Why not take some of it home with you? Even if your budget can't quite manage a piece of original art, you can still enjoy works from the show all year with a 2009 wall calendar that features 12 different paintings and photographs.

Calendars are on sale now at \$10 each. To order, call 484-945-0200 or send us an e-mail at ckott@schuylkillriver.org.

Schuylkill County Reception

More than fifty people attended a September reception at the Sovereign Majestic Theatre in Pottsville hosted by the Schuylkill River Heritage Area

State, county and local elected officials were among those in attendance, including State Rep. Tim Seip and Pottsville Mayor John D.W. Reiley. Representatives from a number of Schuylkill County organizations such as historical societies, chambers of commerce and conservation groups were also present.

The event, which was followed by a Schuylkill River Greenway Assn. board meeting, was one of several over the past two years that have been held in various parts of the Heritage Area. John A. Koury, Schuylkill River Greenway Assn. Board President, has recommended holding board meetings twice a year away from the SRHA headquarters in Pottstown, in an effort to reach out to community members across the Heritage Area.

In the spring, the board met at the Goggleworks Center for the Arts, Reading. Last year, receptions were held at Fairmount Water Works and Valley Forge National Historical Park, each time with community and business leaders invited.

Birding and Wildlife Guide

The SRHA, together with a number of partners, has been hatching plans to publish a regional bird and wildlife guide. Now, those plans are preparing to take flight.

The Eastern Pennsylvania Birding and Wildlife Guide is expected to be ready for publication next summer. It will include a breakdown of bird watching sites by county, with details about what to look for in every season. Incorporated into each site description is information on parking, restrooms and, when pertinent, historical background. Special vignette pages take a larger look at areas and sites that play a significant role either in the landscape, or the important bird-watching history that played out in S.E. Pennsylvania.

"This book is intended to be user friendly and interesting, not just to bird watchers, but to anyone wishing to spend some time with nature," said Susan Fordyce, SRHA communications and project manager.

The book begins with an introduction by Pulitzer Prize finalist Scott Weidensaul, a Schuylkill County native who is the author of more than two dozen natural history books.

It is being published in partnership with Lehigh Gap Nature Center, SRHA, Delaware and Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the National Park Service.

Things to See and Do



The Smackdown exotic chopper, winner of many national awards and featured on several TV programs, 2006, Courtesy of Tommy Graves Customs, TGC.

Born to Be Wild: Adventures in the Art of Motorcycle Design

Through January 4, 2009 at the **Reading Public Museum**, in Reading. This exhibition examines the art and design of the motorcycle through the lens of classic and contemporary cycles. Forty-six motorcycles are exhibited including two of the most famous of all time: the Captain America chopper and Billy Bike featured in the 1969 film, *Easy Rider*. They headline a section of the exhibition featuring early choppers of the 1960s and 70s. The original jacket and helmet worn by Peter Fonda in *Easy Rider* is also on display. Visit www.readingpublicmuseum.org for more information.



Foxes with Goose Egg
Photograph by James Campion

A True Focus on Nature

November 8-January 31, 2009, at **John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove, in Audubon**. This exhibition features photographs by James Campion, an internationally recognized wildlife fine art photographer who works in traditional film. The exhibit is free with regular museum admission. Call 610-666-5593.

Ghosts and Shadows Environmental Art Installations

Through January 2, 2008, 9-5 daily at **Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education**. Four

artists were chosen to produce site specific installations that are a dialogue with the natural and human constructed landscape at the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education's Second Site location. At the corner of Port Royal Ave. and Hag's Mill Road in Philadelphia. www.schuylkillcenter.org.



Holiday Lights at Gring's Mill

November 29 through December 27, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at **Gring's Mill, Wyomissing, Berks County**. Walk through the illuminated park and see light displays and decorations, then take a seat in the barn by the fireplace and enjoy lively entertainment each night. Children's activities include visits from Santa and model trains winding through a miniature town. Light refreshments available. Admission is \$2.00 per person, children free with an accompanying adult. 610-374-8839, www.countyofberks.com

Christmas at Joanna

December 4-6, 6-9 p.m. at **Historic Joanna Furnace, Berks County**. A live nativity, Victorian decorations, Christmas craft market, 1,000's of luminaries, living history presentations, historic walking tours and horse-drawn wagon rides (weather permitting). Call 610-286-0388 or visit www.haycreek.org.



Iron Plantation Christmas

December 6, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at **Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, Berks County**. Glimpse the various ways Christmas was observed by the inhabitants of Hopewell over the course of 100 years. Children can watch for the Belsnickel and everyone can join in singing Historical Christmas songs in the historic Bethesda Church. Call for details. Call 610-582-8773 or visit www.nps.gov/hofu.

Christmas Market: A Tour of Pennsylvania Traditions and Folk Art

December 6, 9:30-4 pm and December 7, 12-4 p.m. Enjoy colorful Pennsylvania traditions at three Montgomery County heritage sites-**The Goschenhoppen Historian's Folklife Museum in Green Lane, the Schwenkfelder Library in Pennsburg, and the Mennonite Heritage Center in Harleysville**. Each location will have memorable exhibits and handcrafted folk art or collectibles available for purchase. www.goschenhoppen.org.

Holiday Historic House Tours

December 13-14, 5 to 8 p.m. **Our Town Foundation, Downtown Hamburg**. Selected Hamburg residents open their doors to showcase their finely decorated, historic homes on this self-guided holiday stroll through town. Call 610-562-3106 or visit www.hamburgpa.org for more information.

Please Touch Museum

The Please Touch Museum opened its newly renovated and expanded museum at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park on Saturday, October 18. The museum is now housed in a National Historic Landmark, the last major building remaining from Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exhibition. The move more than tripled the size of this museum that offers a wide array of interactive, hands-on learning opportunities for children aged seven and younger. New exhibits include a life-sized replica of the Statue of Liberty's Arm and Torch and the restoration of the century-old Woodside Park Dentzel Carousel. Visit www.pleasetouchmuseum.org for more information.



Grants Awarded for River Quality Projects



Gallery on High Camp



Memorandum of Understanding was signed by (L-R): John Hines-PA DEP; Joanne Dahme-Philadelphia Water Department; Carol Collier-Delaware River Basin Commission; Kurt Zwinkl-SRHA; Jon Capacasa-EPA Region III, and Jen Adkins-Partnership for the Delaware Estuary.

In August the Schuylkill River Heritage Area awarded \$134,900 in grants from Exelon Nuclear to three non-profit agencies for projects aimed at improving water quality in the Schuylkill River and its tributaries.

The three projects selected focus on agricultural improvements, stream bank restoration, and storm water mitigation.

This is the third year money has been distributed from the Schuylkill River Restoration Fund, which was created in 2006 by Exelon Nuclear, and is administered by the SRHA.

To date, Exelon has been the sole funding source. However, an effort is now being made to expand the fund and increase sources of financial support. Recently, the SRHA signed a Memorandum of Understanding concerning administration of the fund with members of the Schuylkill Action Network (SAN).

Agencies included in that agreement are: US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Mid-Atlantic Region, Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), PA Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP), Philadelphia Water Department, and Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, Inc. and SRHA

"This partnership will enhance our ability to expand this program and, ultimately, fund more projects," said Kurt Zwinkl, executive director of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area.

Projects selected were:

- Berks County Conservancy: \$15,500 to address dairy farm manure issues that are currently negatively impacting Maiden Creek.
- Montgomery County Lands Trust: \$25,000 for installation of a storm water infiltration

system for storm water mitigation of an unnamed tributary of Scioto Creek which flows to Perkiomen Creek.

- Pennsylvania Environmental Council: \$97,400 for storm water detention basin retrofit demonstration projects in the Wissahickon watershed, including construction, education, outreach and community relations.

Recipients were chosen by a committee of representatives from Exelon, DRBC, Philadelphia Water Department, EPA, DEP, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, and the SRHA.

The annual fund is part of a demonstration project for the water diversion program at Exelon Nuclear's Limerick Generating Station and is under the purview of the DRBC. This year, Exelon contributed \$162,123 into the fund, \$24,260 of which will be carried over to the 2009 grant round. Remaining funds were used to cover costs of administering the grants.

The Schuylkill Action Network (SAN) is now seeking to expand the fund by including contributions from additional businesses and corporations in an effort to support more water protection and enhancement projects across the Schuylkill River watershed.

Learning About the River

The SRHA hosted several summer programs that introduced students from urban areas to various aspects of the river and the heritage area. Pottstown's Gallery on High organized a camp called "Life on the Schuylkill." About 20 children and teens spent a day at the SRHA offices learning about the Schuylkill River Trail, the National Parks and the SRHA's goals and projects. While a plan to kayak on the river was cancelled due to inclement weather, the students still had a great time. Two educators from the John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove came to speak about local birds, bringing with them an Eastern Screech Owl and a Red Tail Hawk.



The SRHA also hosted two other student groups, both for the second time. About 45 prospective Montgomery County Community College students visited the SRHA headquarters for a day. They divided into three groups and rotated through several activities including kayaking on the river with Hidden River Outfitters. They also assisted with a cleanup of Riverfront Park, learned about the SRHA from Tim Fenchel, Grants Program Manager, and heard a talk on environmental issues by MCCC Professor Rob Kuhlman. Those students were participants in the MCCC sponsored LEAD Institute, which is designed to prepare under-represented students and their families for the rigors of a college education by focusing on study skills, career exploration and leadership development.

A third group of 20 inner-city high school students from Philadelphia also visited SRHA offices. They were part of a program called Upward Bound, similar to LEAD, but sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania. It is designed to motivate and prepare selected students to pursue a four-year college education. The Upward Bound students spent part of the day taking stream samples with Professor Kuhlman. Then, they had the opportunity to try their hand at kayaking with Hidden River Outfitters.

By hosting students in the above programs, the SRHA is able to assist important local educational initiatives while achieving one of its key goals, which is to educate community residents about the river and the region.

"This partnership will enhance our ability to expand this program and, ultimately, fund more projects,"

Thun Trail Section Complete from Pottstown to Reading



Officially opening a critical section of trail in Birdsboro are (L-R): Kurt Zwikl, DCNR Secretary Mike DiBerardinis, Berks County Commissioner Kevin Barnhart, Birdsboro Mayor Robert Myers, State Representative Dave Kessler, SRHA President Jack Koury, Congressman Jim Gerlach.

The Schuylkill River Heritage Area cut the ribbon on a new .68 mile addition to the Schuylkill River Trail's Thun Section in July, marking the completion of the last link in the 19-mile Pottstown-to-Reading piece.

The ribbon was cut by Birdsboro Mayor Robert Myers at a ceremony attended by about 80

people. Speakers included Congressman Jim Gerlach and Secretary of the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Michael DiBerardinis.

"This trail honors the past and the wonderful history of the Schuylkill River, but it also looks to the future," observed DiBerardinis. "The future is the new economy built on accessibility, built on clean, built on green, built on the values of conservation."

Other speakers included State Representative David Kessler, Berks

County Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt and Kurt Zwikl, executive director of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area. All mentioned the dedicated partnerships and years of commitment that led to the construction of the 19-mile Pottstown-Reading section of the trail.

"To see the partnerships that have developed to improve the quality of life for all of us is really wonderful," said Gerlach.

Funding for the Pottstown-to-Reading section was provided by DCNR, PA Department of Transportation, Montgomery County, Berks County, Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, Wyomissing Foundation and the William Penn Foundation.



If You Build it, Will They Come?

Yes they will. That has proven true in Pottstown, where the Schuylkill River Trail in Riverfront Park is attracting people by the thousands. A recently completed trail count found that over 65,000 people used that portion of the trail during a period ranging from May 2007 to October 2008, with 178 people coming out on a typical weekend and 114 on weekdays.

Trail Steward Kara Wilson installed trail counters at various places along the trail as a means of determining just how much use different areas are getting.

"The counters enable us to quantify the impact of the trail and the impact of the work we're doing," said Wilson.

The counts can be used, for example, to judge whether or not newly installed trailheads or signs correlate to better usage. That information assists the SRHA in making decisions on which trail improvements to continue, based on which demonstrate the greatest benefits. It also provides solid data on trail use—a valuable component for grant applications.

The recent trail counts indicate that the Pottstown section of the trail is growing in popularity. Looking at the months of June, July and August, when usage is at its peak, recorded visits jumped 27 percent from 2007 to 2008. A total of 13,410 visits were logged during those months in 2007, rising to 17,115 in 2008.

Trails to Tales

In August, about 15 cyclists took to the Schuylkill River Trail and rode from Pottstown's Riverfront Park to historic Morlatton Village in Douglassville. The Trails to Tales event was the first of what organizers hope will be an annual tradition.

Arranged by Lee Zelewicz, executive director of Historic Preservation Trust of Berks County, the ride gave people an opportunity to enjoy recreation along the trail and learn about local history. They took a tour of Morlatton Village, Berks County's first settlement along the Schuylkill River, which includes the oldest home in the county, the Mouns Jones House, as well as the bridge keeper's house, White Horse Tavern and George Douglass Mansion.

Participants didn't even need to own or transport a bike. Many took advantage of bikes offered in the newly introduced Bike Pottstown program, a unique, community bike-sharing initiative that makes free bikes available in order to encourage biking rather than driving in the downtown area and along the trail. Introduced this summer, Bike Pottstown has been an initial success, lending bikes to more than 100 people by mid-August.



Favorite Pastimes

Art Shows, Crafts, Music and Paddle Making Highlight Schuylkill River Festival



New this year was a Native American Village where festival-goers had a chance to learn about and participate in Native American folklore and culture.



Participants in a paddle-making workshop spent most of the day handcrafting a Greenland kayaking paddle. The course was taught by Chris Raab of Tuku Paddles, New Jersey.



Beautiful weather and dozens of fun activities brought people out by the thousands to Pottstown's Schuylkill River Festival in Riverfront Park on October 11. Festival-goers visited art shows, shopped for crafts, went on bike tours, took kayaking lessons, painted pumpkins, heard great music and, in general spent a wonderful fall day by the river.

The festival was a community effort organized by Montgomery County Community College West Campus and a number of partners, including the Schuylkill River Heritage Area. The purpose of the festival is to bring people to the riverfront, and to introduce them to a number of opportunities the area has to offer. Bike Pottstown's free bike tours and Hidden River Outfitters free kayak tours on the Schuylkill,



The SRHA's Scenes of the Schuylkill River Heritage Area art show reception at MCCC West Campus Art Gallery was the night before the festival. Here, artist Lori Quinque-Quinn looks at artwork at the reception, attended by about 100 people.

sponsored by SRHA, were among the most popular programs.

Once again the SRHA set up a trail information table, with maps and brochures about the Schuylkill River Trail. Trail Steward Kara Wilson and Trails Project Manager Robert Folwell were available all day to answer questions and hand out maps.



Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area

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www.schuylkillriver.org

Managed by the Schuylkill River Greenway Assn.

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Schuylkill River Heritage Area/Trail Users Blog



Have you recently taken a trip along the Schuylkill River Trail? Or, have you paddled along the river's water trail? If so, we'd like to hear about it! The Schuylkill River Heritage Area now has a blog. We're asking people to contribute their stories, experiences, ideas and comments to this blog. What are your favorite places to hike or bike? Where do you like to stop for a bite to eat or a rest? And what are some of the interesting things you've seen

along the way? What would you recommend as a ride for people new to the area? Or folks using the trail with children? Let us know.

The information you provide can be used at the March Trails Town Conference to illustrate our point that businesses and communities along the trail need to reach out to trail users. The information you provide can also help develop features or stories that can be added to a Schuylkill River Trail website that's in development.

The blog, developed by SRHA Projects and Communications Manager Susan Fordyce (who also hosts a Schuylkill River Sojourn group on Facebook), features links to trail maps and water trail guides, as well as other sites of interest. You can even read about Sue's recent visit to the Reading Public Museum's unique motorcycle exhibit. Access the blog at <http://schuylkillriver.blogspot.com/>.

Support the Schuylkill River Heritage Area

Join or renew online at www.schuylkillriver.org

The Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area is dedicated to assisting communities, and citizens of the Schuylkill River region to preserve and sustain their cultural heritage and natural environment for future generations.



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