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Meramec Greenway trail links Valley Park, Kirkwood

By Mary Shapiro | Posted: Monday, June 13, 2011 6:00 am

Valley Park and Kirkwood are celebrating their connection by the newest half-mile section of the Meramec Greenway trail, which was laid down along the Meramec River.

A completion celebration was held June 10 for the section, which finishes a 3.3-mile paved asphalt trail built over the past five years. The trail connects Arnold's Grove Park in Valley Park and Greentree Park in Kirkwood. The section cost \$113,000.

"It's an important link in the Meramec Greenway trail, one within an established suburban area along a beautiful stretch of the river, and we would hope it will lead to more bike riders, walkers and joggers using it," said Murray Pounds, Kirkwood's parks and recreation director.

This latest segment linked together previously completed trail segments in Valley Park to an earlier trail in Simpson County Park and made a connection to Greentree Park in Kirkwood.

"This will be a nice attraction, intertwining our communities and bringing out bikers and hikers and families, who can walk down and see the beauty of the river and its native wildlife and plants," said Gil DeNormandie, Valley Park parks coordinator.

It's part of more than 60 miles of trails along the river, said Meramec Greenway project manager Lonny Boring with GRG, a local organization developing an interconnected system of trails in area greenways.

Partners on the project included the cities of Valley Park and Kirkwood and St. Louis County Parks Department, as well as the Meramec River Recreation Association. Funding for the project is coming from GRG funds, St. Louis County Municipal Park Grant Commission funds, cities' funding and from the Meramec River Recreation Association.

Boring said the new trail segment is evidence of continuing progress on the planned Meramec Greenway, established in 1975 with the goal of coordinating recovery of the then degraded lower Meramec River.

In St. Louis County, the Meramec River Greenway will ultimately consist of multipurpose paths along the Meramec, from the confluence of the Meramec and Mississippi Rivers to the Pacific Palisades Conservation Area in St. Louis and Jefferson Counties.

Greenways are important not just to protect and preserve the environment, Boring said, but also to promote good health by walking, expand transportation options like biking and even stimulate economic vitality in the region.

"They can be a tourist destination, for example, to encourage others to visit along our rivers," he said. "We've had great feedback about the greenway portions already completed, and we see hundreds of thousands of users each year."