

Towpath stretches deeper into city

3-year-old and dad earn right to be first to trek new segment

By Bob Downing
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Three-year-old Mary Winer of Akron was the first official user of the newest section of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.

After speeches and a ceremonial rope-cutting Wednesday, Mary, in her stroller, and her 52-year-old father, Bruce Winer, led a parade of 250 hikers, wheelchair users and bicyclists on the 1,665-foot stretch of trail from West North Street to Martin Luther King Boulevard (the Akron Innerbelt).

The father and daughter were chosen to officially open the trail in a contest sponsored by the grass-roots Cascade Locks Park Association and its partners: the city of Akron; Metro Parks, Serving Summit County; the National Park Service; and the Akron-based Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition.

"We're avid users of the trail... and we're honored to be first," Winer said.

The trail opening connects downtown Akron to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and the southern edge of Cleveland. The segment runs along the Cascade Locks.

Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic said work will be done later this summer on extending the new trail 675 feet up Beech Street and then posting signs along another 2,845 feet south to Lock 3 Park off South Main Street.

Green resident John Villilo, a longtime Towpath Trail booster, said opening the new section could create public pressure to solve Akron's overflowing sewer problem.

Akron uses the canal for storm-water runoff, and after heavy rains raw sewage gets dumped there.

The city has devised a \$384 million plan to solve the sewer problem, but it says it has limited funds for the project.

Tours of the Cascade Locks will be offered at 11 a.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Sunday and Monday. The tours will leave from the Mustill Store off West North Street.

In addition, there will be a four-stop tour of the Cascade Locks neighborhood from 2 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday. The tour starts at Hickory Street and Memorial Parkway. For more information, call 330-374-5625 or check out www.cascadelocks.org.