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FEATURED

Schuykill Center unveils new River Trail Gateway

A press release from the Schuykill Center Oct 3, 2018



The Schuykill Center for Environmental Education holds a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new River Trail Gateway Thursday, Sept. 27. Submitted photo — Schuykill Center

ROXBOROUGH >> The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education unveiled its new connection to the Schuylkill River Trail last Thursday, Sept. 27.

The River Trail Gateway merges two trail systems, providing a second entrance to the center and increasing public access while inviting visitors to rest, hike and learn through interpretive signage, stream overlooks, enhanced programming and educational outreach.

Previously, most trail users were unaware of the center's proximity, due to a chain-link fence and illegible signage. With a clear pathway and inviting trail markers, visitors can now hike up to the center from the River Trail, explore the paths and read about native plants and watershed history.

Kay Sykora, who founded the Manayunk Development Corpo. and championed the Schuylkill River Trail through Manayunk and Roxborough; Sarah Clarke Stuart, executive director of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia and chair of the Circuit's steering committee; Andrew Johnson of the William Penn Foundation; Timothy Szuhaj, Schuylkill Center board president; and Mike Weilbacher, executive director of the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, all spoke at the event.

The Schuylkill River Trail is part of a larger network of multi-use trails in the Greater Philadelphia region called the Circuit Trails.

Clarke Stuart said that this was a great meeting of two institutions, noting the River Trail Gateway as a major outpost along the Circuit's 800-mile network.

"The Schuylkill Center is a well-known presence in the region," Johnson said, "and a pioneer in environmental education. Its location adjacent to, but high above, the heavily used Schuylkill River Trail presented an enormous — if challenging — opportunity to reach hundreds of thousands of people who use the trail every year for recreation and commuting. By creatively establishing a direct physical link to the trail, the center will be able to connect with thousands of people on the trail to increase their awareness of the Schuylkill River and its important role in the Delaware River watershed."

The stretch of River Trail abutting the Schuylkill Center is now landscaped with native plants,

beneficial to the environment and local wildlife. The landscaping includes flora displaying shades of red at varying seasons as part of the center's "Ribbon of Red" initiative.

Referencing the colors of the Schuylkill Center logo and its signature red maple leaf, the "Ribbon of Red" will translate the center's identity into a striking palette of colorful flowers, berries, leaves and stems (such as red maple, redbud, staghorn sumac and Andropogon grass) in the landscape.

"The project," Weilbacher said, "is a major component of our Master Plan, which includes revamping our visitor center, re-envisioning our Wildlife Clinic as a world-class facility, building a new trail connecting us to Roxborough on the other side of our property, adding environmental art installations at key points on our trails and presenting cutting-edge programming."

The River Trail connector includes the following features:

- Signage identifying the Schuylkill Center
- A bike rack, supported with a grant provided by REI, so that visitors can lock their bikes at the River Trail and explore the center's trails
- A welcoming kiosk with a large trail map and paper trail maps for visitors to use, as well as information about the center's educational programming
- An overlook of Smith Run, a rare first-order stream that originates on the Schuylkill Center's property, passes through a forested glen and flows underneath the River Trail directly into the Schuylkill River, along with interpretive signage that puts these water resources in context
- A gathering space for the public, allowing the Schuylkill Center and the Circuit Trails network to hold public events on site, using the connector as a meeting and programming space

Viridian Landscape Studio served as the landscape architect and design team lead on this project. The engineering firm was Meliora Design. Paul W. Steinbeiser Inc. was the project contractor. Graphic design firm Cloud Gehshan worked with the Schuylkill Center on revised trail maps and signage design for the site, including interpretive signage for the stream overlook. PECO provided access to build trail assets within the PECO right-of-way.

