

Stevens Point's Green Circle Trail turns 20

Nathan Vine, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin 9:42 a.m. CDT June 2, 2016



(Photo: Photo courtesy of Green Circle Trail Board)

STEVENS POINT - From its modest beginnings in a local diner two decades ago, the Green Circle Trail has become a resource for residents to enjoy and a tool to draw people into the community.

The 26-mile trail marks its 20th anniversary in June, and this Saturday will be celebrated at one of the events that has come to showcase it, Walk Wisconsin. Now in its 12th year, the event is billed as the Midwest's premier walking event and offers four marathon events and two children's walks along the Green Circle Trail.

During Walk Wisconsin, there will be a "zero mile" mark in Piffner Park where people can learn more about the Green Circle Trail and its history. A photo booth will be available with recreational props along with displays, trail maps and giveaways. Those walking in the event will see Green Circle trivia along the route, and are asked to remember how many answers they guess correctly in order to collect a gift at the end of the walk.

Those who don't participate in Walk Wisconsin can also participate in the celebration through the trail's [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/GreenCircleTrail/) (<https://www.facebook.com/GreenCircleTrail/>). Along with viewing posts chronicling the "26 reasons to love the Green Circle," people are being encouraged to post why they love the trail and share a photo or video of their favorite part.

People use the Green Circle Trail throughout the year, and businesses have used it as a recruitment tool for prospective job candidates, according to Green Circle Board President Nick Schultz. A report from this past winter through this spring showed around 32,000 people used the trail during that time, and Schultz said the trail has more than 200,000 visits by people annually.

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The idea for trail system linking local parks came from John Jury, a former Stevens Point Parks and Recreation Commission chairman, who saw a similar system on a trip out to Fort Collins, Colorado. Starting in March 1989 a group of active community volunteers — a group that included Dan Trainer, former dean of the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point; Roy Menzel, public relations professional; George Rogers, editor of the Stevens Point Journal; Stevens Point Parks and Recreation Director Tom Schrader; and Portage County Parks Department directors Jerry Ernst and Gary Speckmann — met Fridays at Al's Diner in Stevens Point to develop a trail to connect parks and green spaces in Stevens Point, Park Ridge, Hull, Whiting and Plover.

Organizers raised money, negotiated with landowners for their property and coordinated placement of the trail. Originally a total of 25 residential and commercial property owners agreed to allow the trail to their land at no cost, a number that has now dropped to around 12. The trail cost \$660,000 to design and build, with funding coming from various sources including Portage County, the city of Stevens Point, the villages of Plover and Whiting, state and federal grants, businesses and individuals. The trail eventually opened on June 1, 1996.

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"It was kind of a miracle it happened," said Jury. "We were fortunate that we had people who brought a lot of specific skills that to the table that helped us pull everything together."



(Photo: USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

Today the trail is maintained by Portage County Parks staff, with assistance from Stevens Point Parks and staff from Schmeckle Reserve. A board of typically between 15 to 19 members oversees the business of the trail through four committees: finance, maintenance, land/lease and education.

A major focus of the board is raising funds to support trail construction and maintenance. Jury said resurfacing a mile of trail costs around \$14,000, and that around 3.6 miles of trail were resurfaced last year. Moving forward, Schultz said along with looking at possible ways to expand the trail along with developing an digital interactive map of the trail.

"The Green Circle Trail is a community treasure," Schultz said. "We want to connect as many people with it as we can."

For more information on the Green Circle Trail, including how to volunteer or donate, please visit www.greencircletrail.org (<http://www.greencircletrail.org>).

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