

Best hidden treasure: Green Circle Trail

Jamie Jung, Stevens Point Journal Media 12:14 a.m. CST November 7, 2014



(Photo: Stevens Point Journal Media file photo)

The Green Circle Trail has been named the best hidden treasure for the second time in Stevens Point Journal Media's Portage County's Best reader survey. We talked with John Jury, one of the trail founders, about the award.

Portage County's Best: [For more winners, click here \(/topic/0d85e933-ed0b-46be-a206-d94c90cc8441/Best-of-Portage-County/\)](/topic/0d85e933-ed0b-46be-a206-d94c90cc8441/Best-of-Portage-County/)

How did the Green Circle get its start? The idea of the Green Circle started back in 1983 after the city's 125th birthday celebration. The river had been cleaned up and the city had bought two properties that connected Piffner and Bukolt parks. A trail was put in the next year and it was so popular that the city's Parks and Recreation Commission (of which Jury was a member) started looking for other places it might place a trail. We got planning documents and made transparencies. When we put them together, we could see the rough outline of public properties that, if connected, would form a circular system around the urban area.

Four gentlemen were retiring about this time and were looking for something to do for the community. Roy Menzel (a public relations expert), George Rogers (media and environmentalist), Dan Trainer (past College of Natural Resources dean and well connected with state agencies) and Jerry Ernst (past director of county parks). They were joined by Tom Schrader (city parks) and Gary Speckmann (the new director of county parks).

Along with some others from time to time, they met every Friday morning at Al's Diner (dubbed the World Headquarters of the Green Circle) from 1988 until 1996. They made connections with private land owners, securing easements, building bridges and raising awareness. Roy Menzel wrote a book about his large family and their adventures, which made enough money to hire a grad student who completed a feasibility study. About 90 percent of today's Green Circle follows that plan. The grand opening of the Green Circle Trail was June 1, 1996. A large number of people walked the whole trail, which planted a seed for what is now Walk Wisconsin.

What does the Green Circle offer? The trail is close to much of the population of our county and it connects with the Tomorrow River Trail, the Schmeckle Reserve trails and the Heartland Trail, which connects with even more. It provides an easy "getaway" for people to escape the speed of life today. It offers a place for fitness and recreation. It is a great family activity; birders and photographers enjoy it and it also creates some wildlife corridors that help us live in relative harmony with our natural environment. People who walk past one another during the day, smile and greet one another when they meet on the trail. Also, some use the trails as commuter routes when weather permits.



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How is the Green Circle different from other trails in Portage County? First, the Green Circle is a circle. One can start and end at the same place, so it is convenient. There are also some neighborhood loops for those who want a shorter natural experience.

While some of our trails are pretty much linear, the Green Circle winds around and has some light ups and downs that give it variety. It generally follows the Wisconsin and Plover rivers, which allows for some really pretty viewing rest stops.

What is something people would be surprised to learn about the Green Circle? While there are representatives on the Green Circle Committee from Schmeckle Reserve, the county parks and the city parks who provide terrific assistance, the Green Circle has been driven for the most part by citizens and neighbors.

About the Green Circle Trail

Hours: 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily, except for the University Trail through Schmeckle Reserve, which closes at sunset

Information: Maps are available online at www.greencircletrail.org or at the Schmeckle Reserve Visitor Center, 2419 Northpoint Drive; the Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, 340 Division St. N.; the Stevens Point Parks and Recreation Department, 2442 Sims Ave.; and the Portage County Parks office, 1903 County Road Y.

Contact: 715-346-4992; www.greencircletrail.org; search "Green Circle Trail" on Facebook

Top 3

2. KozyYak Brewery
3. (tie) Stevens Point Sculpture Park and Schmeckle Reserve

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