

Blue Star Trail Friends change leadership

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John Adams will replace founding Friends of the Blue Star Trail chair Jeanne Van Zoeren as president of the area nonprofit group, which is working to build a 20-mile nonmotorized trail from South Haven to Saugatuck, effective Jan. 1, 2018.

Van Zoeren will remain on the Friends board, which has expanded from six to 10 directors.

“Jeanne is founder and visionary of the Trail,” said Adams. “She has brought the passion, persistence, patience and skills necessary to transform an idea into actual Trail construction.” He also credited her with laying the foundation for “a sustainable, professional volunteer organization.”

“I continue to be overwhelmed by the many talented and devoted board members and volunteers who have shared this dream with me as far back as 2008,” Van Zoeren said. “Without them this legacy project would not happen.”

Adams, board treasurer for the last six years, retired from a career in investment management including time as a CEO and chief investment advisor in the Detroit area.

Van Zoeren is an independent health planning consultant specializing in developing government funded community health centers, outpatient facilities, diagnostic centers, wellness program and hospital renovations. Given the growing size, complexity and demands of the project, the board has added new members with skills in health, marketing, finance, fundraising and communications. The Friends are going through a “natural evolution from an organization driven by its founder to one sustained by a broad participation of volunteers,” Adams said.

In addition to Adams and Van Zoeren, the board now includes Clark Carmichael and Sunny Hill of Ganges Township, Jack Eisinger and Dan Keller of Saugatuck Township, John Ludlow of Saugatuck, Laura Jager of South Haven, and Rosie Burke and Frank Cunningham of Casco Township.

The paved recreational pathway will be open to walkers, runners, bikers and skiers. Its development is a citizen-operated project funded by private donations. A near-mile-long section was recently completed on the west side of Blue Star Highway in Saugatuck Township. A dedication is planned for May 6, 2018.

The next planned phase of the pathway will connect this section with the Beeline trail to Holland at 64th Street and Holland Street. Completion is expected in 2019.

The Friends, said Adams, are “fortunate to have an exceptional pool of talented professionals willing to volunteer their time and expertise to the project.” A key mission is to demonstrate and communicate the recreational, health, safety and economic benefits the Trail brings to the communities.

To raise awareness and funds the group has established two high-profile summer social events: the annual Toast to the Blue Star Trail cocktail party held last June at the Saugatuck Yacht Club; and the September Lakeshore Harvest Ride, which brings hundreds of riders from around the Midwest to tour the scenic lakeshore farms, orchards and art studios.