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Page: A3

Three towns sign Blue Star Trail pact

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ALLEGAN COUNTY - The Blue Star Trail got a boost of support Tuesday when three municipalities agreed to help maintain it.

Saugatuck Township, Laketown Township and the City of the Village of Douglas signed an agreement on Tuesday, Aug. 14, to share, maintain and operate portions of the Blue Star Trail that cross their jurisdictions.

In the agreement, the three towns pledged to work together on plans and routes for the trail, support good faith efforts to collaborate on general maintenance of the trail, and collaborate on funding and development efforts of the trail.

"The important thing is that everyone is working together," Laketown Township Supervisor Terry Hofmeyer said.

"[The trail] benefits all of our constituents, so it's in the benefit of everyone for us to work together," added Saugatuck Township Supervisor Chris Roerig.

The idea for the Blue Star Trail began in 2008, when a 16-member task force consisting of local government officials, transportation planners and engineers developed a conceptual plan for the creation of a 20-mile non-motorized trail from South Haven to Saugatuck. In 2010, the nonprofit Friends of the Blue Star Trail was formed.

In May, the first segment of the Blue Star Trail opened in Saugatuck Township, running parallel to Blue Star Highway from Old Allegan Road north to North Street. The ultimate plan is to connect the Blue Star Trail to other regional trails like the Beeline Trail in Holland, the Van Buren Trail and the Kal-Haven Trail, with multiple cross trails to businesses, attractions, beaches and workplaces along the route.

Jeanne Van Zoeren, one of the founding members of Friends of the Blue Star Trail, said the organization has two sets of grant applications in for fund to continue building the trail north of North Street and tie it with an existing Saugatuck Township trail that runs along Holland Street.

The plan is to have part of that area be an educational center for Saugatuck Public Schools and anyone else using the trail. That project will also require an agreement with the City of Saugatuck, Van Zoeren said.

The next phase of the trail also includes construction along Blue Star Highway to 64th Street, where it will connect with the Beeline Trail to Holland. The trail will also be extended south to Maple Street.

"This maintenance agreement helps a lot with the grants, because they want to see local cooperation," Van Zoeren said.

