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County of Berks – Press Release

New markers along Union Canal Trail improve experience and safety for visitors

Reading, PA— 4/13/2021 — As Berks residents return to the County’s many parks and trails this spring, they’ll find a new system of markers along the popular Union Canal Trail. The brown fiberglass markers are spaced every 1/10th of a mile along the six-mile linear trail that stretches from the northern border of the City of Reading to Blue Marsh.

The Berks County Parks and Recreation Department had been contemplating a trail marker system in years past, but the project became a priority in 2020 after an increase in park and trail usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 60 distance markers were installed over a four-day period in late January and the parks department plans to install several point of interest markers in the upcoming months.

“This past year, with COVID and the shutdown orders, our parks were significantly busier over the spring and summer months and we had quite a few more incidents out on the trail,” Park Ranger Supervisor Eric Seidel said. “Now is the time to get this done.”

The markers are a great tool for visitors interested in knowing how far they’ve traveled on the trail but are even more important in assisting the Berks County Department of Emergency Services when someone is in need. The markers will be incorporated into the County’s GIS mapping system and will allow emergency responders to better identify where an individual is when they call for help.

Brian Gottschall, Director of Emergency Services, said that being able to rapidly establish the location of someone calling 9-1-1 is a key component in getting the necessary aid to the caller. And while location technology continues to improve, it is also not completely reliable because it depends on the type of phone, the carrier’s capabilities, and the quality of the signal.

“Having physical markers in the field that can be *correlated* to our mapping in the 9-1-1 Center creates a safer environment for folks who are using the County Parks system and makes the job of emergency responders easier when they need to locate callers in distress,” Gottschall said.

Brendan Lederer, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation, said the trail marker system will help improve all uses of the trail and adjoining parks for regular recreational use and larger functions and events in the future.

“It was very nice for us to have multiple agencies collaborate on a project like this, with the County, DES and local safety officials,” Lederer said. “It culminates in this nice project that’s definitely going to help the community. We’re very excited about that.”

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