

## A trail of two townships

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**STAFF WRITER**

In the decade since the trail linking Lawrence Township with Hopewell Township was first proposed, much has changed.

A gallon of gas costs about twice what it did in 2001.

The national rate of childhood obesity has soared.

Tough economic times have made short work of what used to be called "disposable income" for vacation and recreation.

One thing has not changed over those 10 years of planning and fund-raising -- the determination of the nonprofit LHT Corporation to achieve its goal of a leafy, looping path connecting key destinations in Lawrence and Hopewell.

Conceived by employees of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Lawrenceville campus in 2001 and then quickly embraced by staff from Educational Testing Service, the LHT was officially incorporated in 2002.

It's an admirable example of a public-private partnership. About a third of the \$3.5 million raised for the project so far has come from corporations, most notably Bristol-Myers Squibb and ETS. Funding from the two townships, as well as county, state and federal stipends and grants and behests from dozens of other groups and countless individuals, have made up the rest.

By the end of 2008, about half of the trails were open to the public. The LHT Corporation expects to reach its final goal of almost 23 miles of trail for walking, hiking, biking and general recreation next year. The finished trail will open those pursuits to almost 78,000 people as it links area parks, including Carson Road Woods, Village Park, North West Mercer Park and Curlis Lake County Park. It will also connect with The Lawrenceville School, the main street district of Lawrenceville, and a number of residential neighborhoods along the way.

Longtime champions of the trail see it as a way for area residents to get out and experience all the region has to offer.

"In two years, we want families, kids and student-athletes to be able to walk or ride their bikes between schools and playing fields, commuters to ride their bikes to places of employment and families to enjoy outings," says Becky Taylor, LHT co-president.

In the nation's most densely populated state, such ready access to the quickly disappearing preserves of nature cannot be overestimated. Thanks to the corporate, public and private trailblazers, this perpetual path will add much to the region's quality of life. It also may go a long way toward less reliance on gas-powered transportation, more active children and a ready source of recreation right in the neighborhood.