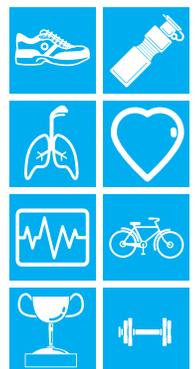


LM FIT

TRAIL-KEEPERS

Area trail-keepers clear the way for bikers, runners and walkers



ART KING LAWRENCE RIVER TRAIL

Art King, retired firefighter and trail coordinator for the Lawrence River Trail, just off the levee, started riding a couple miles on a specialized Hardrock he'd owned since the '80s. Nearly 10 years later, he completes two to three laps daily around the river trail system on the more specialized Gary Fisher Paragon. In two years, he's accumulated 2,600 miles. The 10.5-mile trail is a recreational, introductory path that provides an ideal starting point for novice riders, runners or hikers. King says others can achieve what he did very easily.

"Get a bike and ride; it's that simple," he says.

Although competitive riders with rugged machines traverse the landscape regularly, the softer, smoother surface accommodates an eclectic mix.

"You can start riding the river trail on just about any bicycle," says King. "I see people out there on Schwinn cruisers, road bikes, cross bikes. Everything gets ridden out there."

It wasn't so much the bike that initially propelled King, but rather the environment and its bright yellows and greens that line the dirt path in spring and summer, the wind brushing falling leaves in autumn, the groans of swaying old trees echoing in winter when no one else is around.

He, too, equally enjoys maintaining and riding in such a serene setting, but he never allows the two to collide.

"I try not to work so much that I don't have time to ride," says King. "If you have a choice between working and riding, go riding. The work will be there tomorrow. The ride you miss is gone. Always ride."



LYLE RIEDY PERRY LAKE MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL

"Each trail has its own coordinator," explains Lyle Riedy, a teacher in Topeka, a Kansas Trails Council board member and trail coordinator at Perry Lake. "The one person does the lion's share of the work on that particular trail, but when we have work days, we all chime in together."

Riedy and fellow area trail coordinators Art King and Mike Goodwin vol-



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-MIKE GOODWIN

untarily mow grass, remove debris and fallen trees, spray weeds and generally keep paths safe and functional for thousands who navigate the sometimes tricky terrain year round.

Riedy, who logs 300 hours of trail maintenance annually and bikes the trail three to four times each week, maintains the mountain bike trail, which is also available to hikers and runners. He describes the work as more physical than technical. "It's really rocky and rough and intense," says Riedy. "It's got a lot of climbing to it. It doesn't have the big drop-offs or big boulders. It's just rough, rocky all the time. It jiggles and shakes and rattles you pretty good."

The wooded challenge would never have existed had it not been for Riedy's painstaking efforts. He became its main trailblazer in 1998. Since then, the trail has expanded from 4.5 to almost 25 miles. Much of the early work was blazed without some of the powerful tools used today such as weed eaters and chainsaws.

"This trail was built almost entirely by hand," says Riedy. "I enjoy building the trail and fixing problems and seeing it grow as much as I do riding it."

MIKE GOODWIN CLINTON LAKE TRAILS

Distinctly separate trails marked "blue" and "white" make up the 23 miles of Clinton Lake North Shore Trails. The technically challenging routes parallel each other, with the blue trail snaking closer to the water. Mike Goodwin, trail coordinator and Kansas Trails Council board member, says it's all very user-friendly.

"The thing to know is you can go out a little ways on one trail and there are numerous connectors to the other trail. So you can start out on the white trail and go out two miles and find a connector and return on a blue trail for essentially a 3.5-mile round trip."

A trail runner for 50 years, Goodwin enjoys caring for the trails because it doesn't feel laborious. When working, he's completely in his element, and his work benefits massive numbers of people. He estimates that 50,000-60,000 people use the Clinton trails each year. There's even a playground of sorts that both amuses and challenges its participants.

"We have a section called the skills loop, which is designed for mountain bikers, and it has built structures, which include skinny structures that you ride on, a half pipe, twisty kind of bridges and teeter-totters," explains Goodwin.

But none of these attractions are any good if people can't run or bike to them. And that's where Goodwin steps in. "We spend a lot of time making sure trails are wide open and clear," he says. **LM**

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