

Web site highlights Valley trails

By Sadie Jo Smokey
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Want to walk, bike, jog or fish but don't know where to go? You'll now have that information at your fingertips.

Beginning Saturday, you can get a map featuring the regional trail system or you can just log on to an interactive Web site showcasing an updated list of hundreds of miles of recreational areas.

■ Interactive map at www.valleyforward.org.

The goal is to lure more residents to venture outside and to lobby local government leaders to add more than 600 miles of new trails linking the regional gems while preserving open space.

"We have always known that

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open space and recreation are key to quality of life," said Diane Brossart, president of **Valley Forward Association**, which came up with the Web site and the map highlighting 177 miles of trails.

Dubbed the Valley's Pedestrian Freeway — A Priceless Necklace of Trails and Gems, the map identifies a fraction of the Valley's existing trails and proposes trails to link far-flung parks and recreation areas for everything from hiking to horseback riding without sharing the road with motorized vehicles.

The map will come in handy for cross-Valley adventure — for example, those wanting to trek from Thunderbird Paseo Park in Glendale to Tempe Town Lake on urban trails and canal corridors.

This weekend, 100,000 maps will be available. On Saturday, you can get it at the Piestewa Peak trailhead after 8 a.m.

On Sunday it will be distributed at the Phoenix Outdoor Recreation Festival at South Mountain Park/Preserve and the West Valley Recreation Corridor in Glendale.

Not everyone is enthusiastic about adding hundreds of miles of recreational areas.

Connecting trails is a noble idea but there's a difference between a hiking trail and a biking trail, said Phoenix resident Larry Wayt,

who created www.squawpeakhiker.org, a Web site that encourages hiking. "It's a nice concept, but we're too urban," Wayt said. "We're lucky to have what we have. Canals are multiuse, but they're not really a trail."

Wayt said maps are one of the tools people need when hiking, but a map that doesn't include all the trailheads, where to park or the level of difficulty and thus isn't of much practical use.

"We don't encourage creating more trails because of the damage trail building does," Wayt said. "It's still a pristine area. There are enough trails around the Phoenix area to accommodate all levels of hikers."

For three years, city and county staffers worked with Valley Forward to identify community gems and trails. Phoenix and Chandler each contributed \$5,000 for the pedestrian freeway project. Tempe, Scottsdale, Apache Junction and Maricopa County each contributed \$2,500, Brossart said.

Private firms donated graphic design and Web site services.

"We're guessing we'll have to redo the map in about a year," Brossart said. "This is a living, breathing project. We would be thrilled to hear from people about new gems, trails to include for next year."

Gems on the map include Phoenix's Camelback Mountain, the Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch in Gilbert, Saddleback Mountain in Peoria and Indian Bend Wash, a greenbelt of trails and athletic fields that meanders through Scottsdale covering 1,200 acres with a 7.5-mile pedestrian trail.

Phoenix has identified approximately 1,000 miles of trails to develop, said Jarod Rogers, Phoenix city landscape architect/trails coordinator.

New trails generally are done when adjacent development occurs and are paid for by the developer or the city through bond funds or impact fees.

"Because of the distances between preserves, the task of connecting them with trails is fundamentally problematic," Rogers said.

Rogers said Phoenix works with other agencies to ensure cohesive connections of other municipalities' trail systems.

Maricopa County Parks is in the process of building the Sun Circle and Maricopa Trails, a part of which cooperatively takes advantage of the city's trail system through South Mountain Park.

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