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News (/News/)

Volunteers clear the way for a new trail in downtown Woodstock

Volunteer Judith Taylor, of Woodstock, Vt., pulls hard to remove grapevines and Japanese knotweed along the Ottauquechee River Trail on Saturday, Aug., 15, 2020 in Woodstock. (Valley News - Jennifer Hauck) Copyright Valley News. May not be reprinted or used online without permission. Send requests to permission@vnews.com. » Buy this Image

By NORA DOYLE-BURR (/byline?byline=By NORA DOYLE-BURR)
Valley News Staff Writer

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WOODSTOCK — The sun shone and blue sky peeked through fluffy white clouds as volunteers hacked through tree limbs, grapevines and Japanese knotweed along a new trail next to the Ottauquechee River in downtown Woodstock on Saturday morning.

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“I get very excited when we have days like this,” said Randy Richardson, a Woodstock resident and development director for the Upper Valley Trails Alliance, which is helping to construct the trail. Richardson said the turnout of more than a dozen volunteers was unusual for trail work and illustrates the public’s interest and excitement in the new trail.

“This trail is going to be tremendous,” said Bill Corson, a 60-year-old retiree who moved to Woodstock from New Jersey last year.

Despite a recent bout with Lyme disease, Corson, who was limbing trees to improve views of the river along the trail on Saturday, said hiking and trail maintenance are taking up much of his time these days. While the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that he isn’t getting out as much as he used to, hiking is one activity that he has been able to continue.

Corson is in good company in spending more time outdoors this year. Dog walkers, joggers and cyclists were busy along the streets of Woodstock on Saturday. The Norwich-based trails alliance, which operates an online trail finder (https://www.uvtrails.org/find-a-trail/), has seen a spike in interest this year due to people seeking out trails close to home, Richardson said. At one point, hits to the website spiked 150% compared with last year, he said.

While Woodstock boasts other trails including those at Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historical Park, Richardson said the new Ottauquechee River Trail is unusual in that it’s mostly flat and it offers public access to the river. Though it won’t be “fully accessible,” people will enter the trail via a ramp that’s slated for installation before an opening celebration on Sept. 8, Richardson said.

“The hope is (that the trail) really becomes an alternative to the parks,” he said.

The approximately 2½-mile trail, which has taken volunteers years of planning and coordination with private landowners, is slated to be mostly completed and open to the public beginning early next month. The route will take walkers on a relatively flat loop along the river, past the town’s water treatment plant, through a hayfield and back along an old railbed. In addition to the river, walkers will have views of Mount Tom and Mount Peg.

The trailhead and parking sit next to East End Park (https://www.vnews.com/Out-and-About-27394025) on Maxham Meadow Way. Formerly known to locals as “the jungle,” which served as a trash and snow dump for the town, the park is now a grassy picnic spot with an amphitheater, picnic tables and various flowering and fruiting plants.

In addition to the community volunteers, who are slated to return for another workday next Saturday, the project also has gotten a youthful assist from members of the trails alliance’s high school trails corps this summer and has gotten financial support from the Woodstock Economic Development Commission, Richardson said.

Richardson, a former teacher, coach and school administrator, said he hopes the trail will also serve as an educational resource for the community, giving people a chance to learn about the flora and fauna of a riparian ecosystem, as well as the history of the area, including the old railbed. The plan is to eventually install informational plaques and even artwork along the trail.

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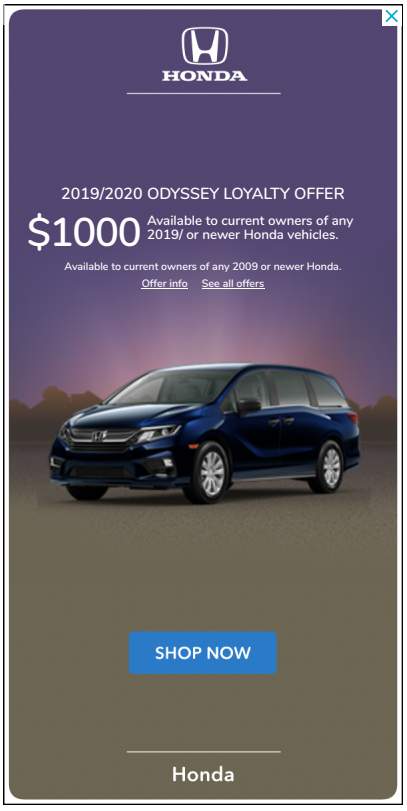

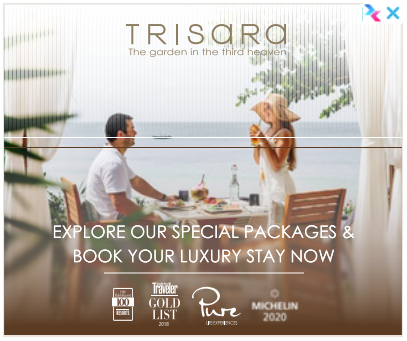

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Mary Anne and Brian Flynn were among the volunteers clearing the area along the trail on Saturday. The couple, who moved to Woodstock last year, live close enough to walk to the new trail site. They like the idea of having a trail nearby, Mary Anne said.

It's "so beautiful," she said.

As other volunteers felled a small tree nearby with a crack, she said, "Wow. That was a good sound," before picking up her clippers and returning to work.

Nora Doyle-Burr can be reached at ndoyleburr@vnews.com or 603-727-3213.

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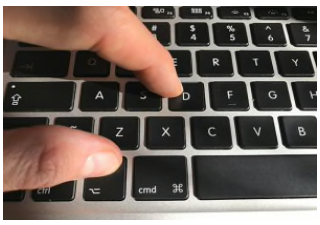

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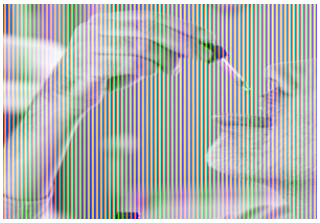

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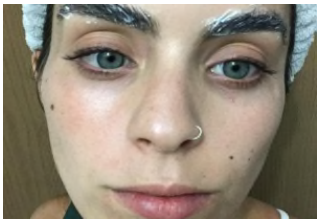

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