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HIGH SCHOOL ART CLUB LENDS TALENTS TO SHEEPSKIN TRAIL BEAUTIFICATION

Uniontown, PA – Usually, when the subject of beautifying a park, trail or community arises, it refers to cleaning up trash or planting flowers and trees. But one local high school club used its talents to bring some genuine artistry to a section of the Sheepskin Trail near Bailey Park.

Members of the Uniontown High School Art Club not only cleaned up trash and debris on the section of the trail between the park and Fayette Street but also created and installed pole-mounted mural panels along that portion of the trail. The community service project was under the supervision of art club adviser and high school teacher Rebecca Gartley and rewilding coach and meditation leader Robert Hensley of Nature Reconnect.

"I had initially proposed a nature club at the high school," Hensley said, explaining he wanted to "create an opportunity for kids to get outside" and learn among nature. "There's a ton of science on the wealth of benefits of students getting outside."

Hensley said someone had introduced him to Gartley as a potential adviser for the nature club. Gartley asked him if he'd like to volunteer with the art club. He accepted and began brainstorming with Gartley and the club president. Together, they came up with the idea for the mural project.

"I wrote the proposal, and we took it initially to the Fayette Trails Coalition to get their approval," Hensley said.

The group also sought approval from the Fayette County Commissioners and Uniontown City Council before embarking on the project. "We had quite a little journey, but we did get approval," Hensley said.

Next, the club had to figure out how to finance the project. At that point, they had a little bit of luck.

"Eric (Snyder) at the Fayette Trails Coalition had introduced me to Sarah (Collier), the executive director of the National Road Heritage Corridor," Hensley said. "It turned out she had some arts funding specifically for beautification in Uniontown."

That funding was able to finance the entire project, including all of the supplies.

"The city came back and asked about potentially adding birdhouses," Hensley said.

The art club honored that request and took it a step further, adding a garden feature. After obtaining birdhouses from the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the club decided on a circular column formation around the garden, next to the mural installation.

The mural panels themselves, Hensley explained, are a temporary installation and can be changed or taken down at any point.

“They’re free-hanging kind of posters,” he said, with inspiration taken from vintage postcards. often sent from exotic locales to friends and family back home. The theme is “Get to Know Your Neighbors Along the Sheepskin Trail,” and the panels feature plants and animals native to Fayette County, along with a bit of information about each.

“(The idea was) they would move in the breeze, and it would look like postcards kind of blowing down the trail,” Hensley said.

For more information about the Sheepskin Trail, visit www.sheepskintrail.com. To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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