

Construction started on 1.6 mile trail named for Saratoga man

By Brian Babcock
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It's been years in the making, but construction on a trail that would parallel railroad tracks from Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road to Saratoga Avenue symbolically began as residents and city council members shoveled dirt and spread wildflower seeds along what will be known as Joe's Trail.

"I can remember that locals walked, rode their bikes and jogged beside the railroad line," said Mayor Ann Waltonsmith at the groundbreaking ceremony held on Oct. 17. "They did it then and we will continue to do it for exercise, for going from home to school or work, for walking the dog and for socializing with neighbors."

The ceremony was held on a parcel of land near the railroad tracks off Saratoga-Sunnyvale Road between Sea Gull

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Way and Manor Drive and was attended by council members, city staff and residents — particularly Dee Sanfilippo, who donated close to \$400,000 to the project.

The 1.6-mile trail is named after Sanfilippo's

husband, Joe, who died of cancer in 1993. Sanfilippo said her husband enjoyed riding his bicycle down the trail as their dog ran beside him.

"My husband would be so overjoyed to see all of this," Sanfilippo said before the ceremony began. "It's an honor for me to be able to offer it to [the community] because I hope they enjoy it as much as he did."

Sanfilippo said she became involved in the project about five years ago after reading in the newspaper that the city of Saratoga would be unable to come up with the \$399,515 needed as a local match for the estimated \$1.9 million project.

"I just thought what a waste that would be," she said. "The next thing I knew, I was on the phone with my attorney."

Most of the project is being funded through a grant from the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. Construction on the pedestrian and bicycle trail is scheduled to begin within a month and should be finished by next spring, said public works director John Cherbone.

The 12-foot-wide trail, which narrows to 5 feet near PG&E towers, will be made from decomposed granite.

During the ceremony, Waltonsmith said the trail has been in the works for about 15 years and has been renamed multiple times. It was the De Anza Trail and the PG&E Trail in the past, Waltonsmith said.

There are a plethora of reasons for the delay in development of the project, including a shortage of staff in the city's public works department in 2004 and the need to receive easements from PG&E and the San Jose Water Company, which own the property the trail will run through.

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There was also strong opposition from the beginning from neighbors of the proposed project who feared that putting a trail behind their homes would lower the value of their properties.

However, the council at the time pushed forward with the project, although neighbors claimed the council wasn't listening to their concerns.

"This is a council that feels strongly about trails," Kathleen King said in 2005. "We are listening, and we want to make it friendly for the neighbors."

At the groundbreaking, Waltonsmith intimated that the trail could add to property values within the vicinity.

"We believe this city trail will not only be useful for individual use, but an amenity for local neighbors that will enhance their homes," the mayor said. "We believe that it will build local community."

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