

Visitors flock to Riverwalk

By Jamie Self

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Tom Bell, left center, from Rock Hill Parks, Recreation and Tourism, gives instruction to a group of people before they go kayaking on the Catawba River. Alex Barnes, 11, right, and Korey Yang, 10, center, wait to have their foot pegs fitted. (PHOTOS BY DANNIE WALLS)

ROCK HILL -- Standing on the bank of the Catawba River on Saturday, Juliette Stock captured the crowd's mood simply and eloquently.

"I'm glad we actually get to use the river instead of just looking at it all the time," she said. Stock and her family were among those who attended the Riverwalk Celebration, the official opening of Rock Hill's newest recreational facility.

The Riverwalk Trail is the park's main feature. It is 2.5 mile of paved path for walking or biking along the river. The trail is part of the Carolina Thread Trail, a regional system of trails crisscrossing 15 counties in the Carolinas.

Rock Hill Mayor Doug Echols was among those strolling the trail under the trees. "To be able to enjoy this much beauty and this much nature is fantastic," he said.

The Riverwalk is not all about nature. The trail is the first completed feature of a larger planned community on the old Celanese industrial site. Plans call for the 1,000 acres to have residential, commercial, retail, and recreational development.

About 250 acres have been set aside for public recreation including river access, athletic fields, green space, a climbing wall, and cycling venues.

Up on the hill, BMX pro racers Matthew Silvia, 35, Tim Dinger, 34, and Cole Tesar, 14, tested the packed-clay BMX racing course.

Tesar, a two-time world champion of BMX racing in his age group, signed autographs near the edge of the track. He remembers his first jump.

"It was intimidating, going down the hill to a 20-foot jump," he said.

His mother Josette Tesar remembers when he first asked if he could ride on a BMX track. After seeing some riders, he came home and asked his parents to remove his training wheels. After his first ride, his knees were bloody, she said.



Veteran BMX Pro rider Tim Dinger, 34, shows off some of his riding skills during the Riverwalk event Saturday in Rock Hill.

"I thought he was hyperactive but I guess he just needed something to do," she said.

Down by the river, less X-treme visitors climbed into kayaks and took to the river.

"That was awesome!" yelled Laylon Baucom, 9, running toward his mother, Juliette Stock.

Laylon had just gone kayaking. It was "fun, but kind of hard," he said. "The hard was trying not to get your pants wet."

Pat and Walter Wallace of Rock Hill sat at a picnic table waiting for their turn to kayak.



A lot of nature lovers come out Saturday to enjoy the new Riverwalk in Rock Hill.

For them, the park is "another way to relieve some stress" built up during the week, Walter said. Before the park opened, yard work and office work were the couple's weekend activities, they said, laughing. Now they can come to the park.

"It's such a beautiful place and the potential is starting to come about," Walter said.

Along the trail, the Carolina Raptor Center introduced the crowd to eagles and owls the conservation group had saved.

And city's parks and recreation department's mascot, Gabby Greenleaves - a walking, talking evergreen tree - gave children a guided tour of the river.

Rock Hill's Robin Clinton, who works for the city's parks department in the environmental education program, played Greenleaves on Saturday. She likes the park.

"There's something about water that attracts people. You hear the rippling water and it excites you, gets your adrenaline flowing. There's just something about it," she said.

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