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Plan to add new Maple Hills Snowshoe Trail in Shawano County park wins AARP Small Dollar, Big Impact Grant

SHAWANO, WI – A proposal submitted by Shawano Pathways to create a new snowshoe trail with signage and new maps in a small county park just south of Shawano has been selected to receive an AARP Wisconsin “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant.

Grants are being awarded each month throughout 2021 to projects across Wisconsin that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. Judges selected this project for a \$1,000 grant after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state.

“This project fits perfectly with the spirit and intent of the Small Dollar, Big Impact grant program,” said AARP Wisconsin Interim State Director Christina FitzPatrick. “Our goal is to support communities as they make positive changes that inspire long-term progress on livable issues. This proposal hits that nail right on the head.”

A seldom-used snowshoe trail has existed in the Maple Hills Recreation Area in Shawano County for many years, but will not be available at all after this season because of a coming solar panel installation, according to Nancy Brown-Koeller, President Shawano Pathways, who submitted the grant proposal.

“This is unfortunate as interest in this easy-to-do winter activity has grown and Shawano County needs more access to low-cost physical activities in winter,” Brown-Koeller said. “The county parks department budget is small because of a small tax base so ‘extras’ such as building a new snowshoe trail is difficult. This

recreation area needs a replacement for the trail that will be lost and add new signage and maps. We'll recruit for several volunteer days to help with these efforts."

That's where the \$1,000 grant comes in. In addition to ordering new signs and printing new maps for the trail network, work will begin soon to map out a new trail and remove obstacles such as fallen branches and trees from the new pathway so that it people can start using it as soon as possible, potentially even this winter.

"We appreciate getting the grant very much," Brown-Koeller said. "Our group is made up solely of volunteers and our funding comes from grants, fundraising events and membership dues. This grant enables us to move forward on creating recreational opportunities and improving safety in the county."

Brown-Koeller said Shawano Pathways will work closely with the county's parks department and get public input to prioritize the work that needs to be done. "Our mission is to get people outside on bikes and on their feet, and it's hard to do that when the trails are not well defined. We want to improve that," she said.

This is the second Small Dollar, Big Impact grant awarded to Shawano Pathways this year. In March they received their first \$1,000 grant, which helped create a new, contemplative walking path in Alpine Shores Park.

AARP Wisconsin's launched its "Small Dollar, Big Impact" grant program in 2020 and is now in its second year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state.

"We've seen how these small grants are making a huge impact around the State of Wisconsin. This grant will help Shawano Pathways provide fun and recreation for citizens of all ages," said Amber Miller, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin.

The grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit www.aarp.org/WIsdbi

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