



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: April 13, 2016

Contact: David Toland, Executive Director, Thrive Allen County
620-365-8128
david.toland@thriveallencounty.org

Unique Collaboration Between Private Landowner, City of Iola, and Allen County Yields Critical “Missing Link” Trail Connection

[IOLA, KANSAS]—Thrive Allen County is pleased to announce a new walking and bicycling connector trail in Allen County, the product of an unprecedented level of cooperation among private and public landowners.

The new 0.4-mile connector trail will link the popular 6.5-mile Southwind Rail Trail with the new Lehigh Portland Trails system, which is scheduled for a June 25th grand opening.

Though not great in distance, the trail required a unique collaboration. The property along the route is owned by various parties, including the City of Iola, Allen County, and private landowner Joy Westervelt.

Westervelt has generously donated a parcel of property west of State Street to the trail, and has leased a strip east of State Street, along Elm Creek, to Thrive Allen County. Two other critical segments of the route are being provided by the City of Iola, which is permitting the trail to pass through Elm Creek Park South, and Allen County, which will allow the trail to pass beneath the State Street bridge on county land. A portion of the route follows an old railroad spur that once served the Iola Brick and Tile Company.

This connector trail will provide people walking or biking a safe passage from Iola, via the Southwind Rail Trail, to the Lehigh Portland Trails western trailhead on the south side of Elm Creek at Washington Avenue, allowing visitors to avoid having to travel on or across busy State Street south of the Elm Creek Bridge. Visitors will also be treated to a lush riparian woodland environment along scenic Elm Creek. The connector trail is being built with funding from the Kansas Health Foundation Healthy Living Grant and Community Engagement Initiative.

The Southwind Rail Trail opened in 2013, connecting the two largest communities in Allen County, Iola and Humboldt, via a 6.5-mile crushed limestone trail built on the rail-banked right-of-way of the former Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. The Southwind Rail Trail was built by volunteers, with funding from the Sunflower Foundation, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, Ed Lincoln, and

private donations, and is owned by the Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy, and managed by local volunteers.

The Lehigh Portland Trails are being built on the site of the former Lehigh Portland Cement Company, which was one of the largest employers in southeast Kansas for nearly 7 decades, until its closure in 1970. The trails, built along the banks of Elm Creek and on land partially surrounding the former Lehigh quarry (Elks Lake), will feature both wide gravel-surfaced trails and natural-surface singletrack trails for mountain biking, trail running, and nature hikes. The trails are being built by volunteers with Thrive Allen County, via a June 2014 Healthy Living grant from the Kansas Health Foundation, on land owned by Iola Industries, Inc. through an easement granted to the Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy.

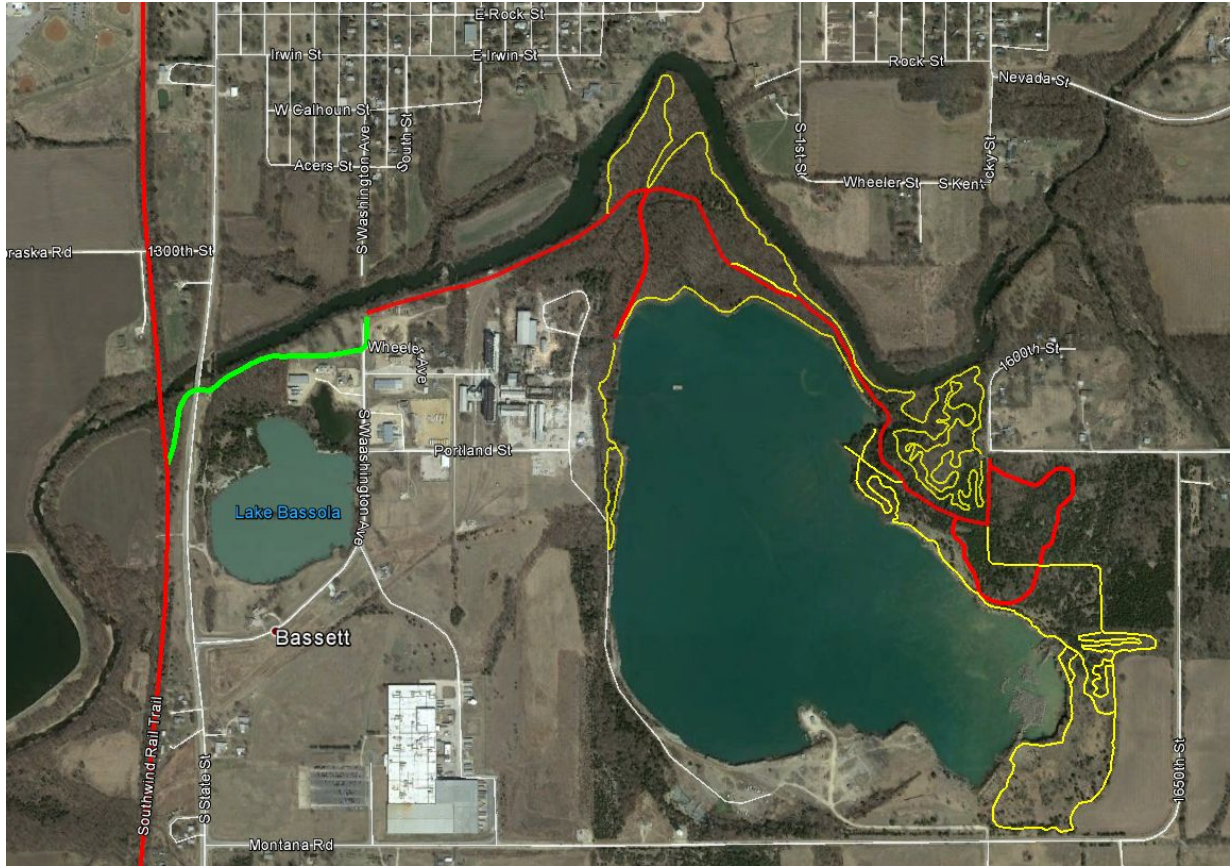
With the opening of the Lehigh Portland Trails, Allen County will have added over 20 miles of trails within the last decade, positioning Allen County as one of the top destinations in the state for active recreation, and providing residents the opportunity for improving both their physical and economic health.

Volunteers are still needed to help clear the new trail corridor and prepare it for public use, as well as to put the finishing touches on the Lehigh Portland Trails, and assist with ongoing maintenance of Allen County's growing network of trails. Please contact Thrive Allen County if you can help.

Thrive Allen County is a non-profit corporation based in Iola, Kansas that works countywide to improve health, wellness, recreation, education and economic conditions. Its vision is that Allen County will be the healthiest rural county in Kansas. To learn more about Thrive, call us at 620.365.8128 or please visit www.thriveallencounty.org, follow us on Twitter @thriveallen, or find us on facebook.com/thriveallencounty.



Connector Trail Detail Map, showing link between the Southwind Rail Trail and the Lehigh Portland Trails.



South Lola Trails overview map, showing gravel trails in red, singletrack trails in yellow, and Connector Trail in green.