

Carolina Thread Trail puts 'Hero' on the right path

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[Bernie Petit](#)

A lot of people don't appreciate Gaston County's natural beauty, according to Gary Mims.

That's one of the reasons he's involved in an effort to make our area's natural environment more accessible to residents. And in recognition of those efforts, the Gaston County Health Department recently named him a Public Health Hero for 2009.

Mims served as the chair of the committee that oversaw the mapping process for the Gaston County portion of the Carolina Thread Trail. The county received a \$50,000 grant to accelerate local plans for the proposed 15-county greenway system.

"The Carolina Thread Trail project has huge implications of improving the community's overall health," said health department director Colleen Bridger. "The thread project would expand access for people in the community to have the ability to get out and walk and enjoy the scenery."

Throughout most of last year, Mims and others led public forums on what the project is and what the trail design could look like while working closely with community leaders to gain support for the project.

The mapping process was completed late last year, with plans to interconnect existing trail systems in the county that would eventually mean being able to ride a bicycle from the National Whitewater Center across the Catawba River to Mount Holly, and on to places Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden and Crowders Mountain.

It won't just be wilderness. The thread trail would eventually make its way through downtown Gastonia along Marietta Street, for example. Gaston towns are now in the nuts and bolts phase of applying for grants and planning for parts of the trail slated for their backyards.

"A lot of plans are in place," Mims said. "It's something we're proud of. We were the first to be recognized by Carolina Thread Trail."

Frequent *Gazette* readers know Mims' public service isn't limited to his Carolina Thread Trail efforts. He's been an occasional contributor to the newspaper and is a longtime employee at Gaston Memorial Hospital, where he is the cardio pulmonary services manager.

He also serves on the Quality of Natural Resources commission, which advises county commissioners on environmental issues; Connect Gaston, where he was a charter member; and the health department's Fitness and Nutrition Council.

"He's very dedicated to whatever he agrees to work on and has put a lot of personal time in all of these efforts," said Gaston Together director Donna Lockett, who serves on the Fitness and Nutrition Council with Mims.

Mims said Gaston County is a community where he feels like he can really make a difference. That's why the Boy Scouts Troop 11 adult leader feels so strongly about the Carolina Thread Trail project.

"I'm an outdoorsman," he said. "I really believe if more people got out and got on the trails and saw the natural environment of Gaston County, they'd appreciate it a lot more. We really do have a gem of a county."



Photo Mike Hensdill/TheGaston Gazette Gary Mims was recently named a Public Health Hero by the Gaston County Health Department for his work with the Carolina Thread Trail project. Here he poses on the Avon Creek Greenway near Lineberger Park.