

Piscataquog River bridge officially opens

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MANCHESTER — Traffic was heavy and welcome at a new bridge spanning the Piscataquog River on Monday.

Joggers, bicyclists and people just out for a sunny stroll crossed in both directions during a ceremony to officially open the Irving and Bernice Singer Pedestrian Bridge and the completion of a project years in the making.

“This is all about quality of life,” said Bob Dastin, a co-founder of the nonprofit that led a considerable fundraising effort for the bridge, which connects a gap in the Piscataquog River Trail between Manchester and Goffstown.

Dastin and Dean Williams started Manchester Moves Inc. in 2008 with the goal of converting a network of abandoned rail lines into trails connecting the city with surrounding communities.

After years of planning and delays, construction on the bridge north of Kelly’s Falls began in May and wrapped up last week, replacing a deteriorating railroad trestle that hadn’t seen rail traffic since 1981.

It was on full display Monday with a backdrop of brilliant fall colors as Manchester Moves joined city leaders for the ceremonial ribbon cutting after a round of speeches describing the project and thanking the sponsors.

Williams said Manchester Moves needed to raise 20 percent of the necessary funds to qualify for federal grants that covered the remaining 80 percent. The expected costs grew as delays stalled the project until this year, when Williams said he turned to the Singer family, known for its philanthropic efforts throughout the state, to meet a \$65,000 shortfall.

“They were quick to respond when I did ask,” Williams said.



Connell Caswell, 1, of Manchester takes a stroll with his grandmother, Shaunna Pinard, and great-grandmother, Claire Pinard, over the Irving and Bernice Singer Memorial Bridge after Monday’s dedication of the bridge in Manchester.

The bridge is named for Irving Singer, founder of the family business that has grown to Merchants Automotive Group in Hooksett, and his wife, Bernice, who helped cut the ribbon near a plaque bearing her name and her late husband's.

Stephen Singer spoke on behalf of the family Monday, saying his parents had always stressed to their seven children the importance of giving back to the community.

Singer said the new bridge was a perfect metaphor for the family to carry on its longtime practice of spanning the gap between socioeconomic groups and different cultures.

"We appreciate the opportunity to perpetuate their legacy with this tremendous honor," he said.

The bridge was bustling before and after the ceremony, when a pair of joggers headed west needed to navigate their way through the crowd gathered on the east bank.

Manchester's network stretched as far as the West Side, where the Piscataquog prevented the trail from going further and connecting with Goffstown's trail line to the west.

A bridge was needed and a site was already in place north of Kelly's Falls, where a rail line first spanned the river around 1875.

The original bridge had been replaced multiple times, and the latest was a trestle dating back to the 1940s that hadn't been used since the early 1980s. It was a popular spot where local children and teens enjoyed the unsanctioned and dangerous practice of plunging about 20 feet to the water below. Signs posted at the foot of the new bridge make it clear that leaping over the steel arches connecting the two sides is not allowed.

The bridge served its intended purpose Monday as people on bikes and on foot crossed the wooden planks now linking the two sides, where split-rail fences lined the trailway.

"It's really beautiful," said Abby Easterly, who attended the ceremony.

Easterly said the connection provides more than just a pretty place to exercise. It is also a safe alternative for people whose primary means of transportation is a bicycle.

"It's just not optional for some people," said Easterly, one of the organizers of the non-profit QC Bike Collective.

The Bike Collective offers a place where people can buy used bikes or donate one that isn't being used. It also has parts and tools needed to maintain and repair bikes.

"Bike riders that we talk to most use their bikes for true transportation," Easterly said. "I was really glad to see the project completed. It's really good for Manchester to be seen as bike-friendly."

Dustin said the work is not done on Manchester's trail network. He said the next project will be around South Willow Street, where a connection will require getting across Interstate 293.

"We still have a number of trails to go in the city," he said.