

# ALL ROADS lead to: Milaca

**Editor's note:**  
Throughout June, July and August, the Sauk Rapids Herald will feature interesting people and places from our neighboring cities.

## Riding along the river



### Milaca's trails: A community staple

BY MAURA WENNER | STAFF WRITER

Tucked away in the town of Milaca are 13 miles of city owned trails used by both locals and visitors for a variety of activities.

What began in the early 1990s as a smaller

group of trails slowly became something more. "These trails were formed in batches throughout the years," said Kurt Bauerly, member of the Milaca Trails Initiative, a volunteer group that formed four years ago. "The trails give an opportunity for the locals to enjoy their community and not leave, and it brings people in to use our gas stations, restaurants and grocery store."

Growing up in Milaca, Bauerly watched initial work being done on the popular destination for mountain biking.

"There was a race

series called the Blast series held there each year," Bauerly said. "Because of that some biking shops got involved helping with the trails. They got local groups to help out, including my 4-H group when I was a kid. It kind of got me into the sport (mountain biking) at the time and into making trails. I got into bike racing, lots of other things, went off to college, came back to Milaca, and the first thing I did was go to the trails."

Unfortunately, during the years Bauerly was away, the majority of the volunteer groups who had dedicated time toward maintaining the trails drifted apart, leaving the upkeep to the city alone. Ultimately, roughly 5 trail miles went unusable.

"It got rough," Bauerly said. "Everything was overgrown and hardly rideable.

So, me and a couple guys who were also into mountain biking asked the city if we could do work out there and get it back to rideable."

The men's wishes were granted. They formed volunteer groups once more

and aligned goals with detailed plans to improve the trails.

"Because it's beautiful land with great terrain and it's there, so we may as well use it," Bauerly said.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MILACA TRAILS INITIATIVE  
The Rum River runs adjacent to a trail that can be used for hiking, running, biking or even cross-country skiing. The Milaca Trail Initiative is a volunteer group that helps the city maintain the trails for the community and visitors.

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Stones Throw Golf Course  
City of Milaca  
Recreation Park  
Milaca Trails Initiative March 2020

- The city of Milaca has a trail system that includes over 12 miles of terrain. The trails can be at Recreation Park, 435 Second St. NW, Milaca.



# Milaca trails

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Their first step was to reopen and fix the troublesome spots. After receiving local donations, funding through the park system and grants, they created fixtures such as board walks, kiosks and bridges.

“Along with signage and GPS mapping,” Bauerly said. “We tried to make the whole experience a little more pleasant.”

Part of becoming a sustainable trail is heavily involved in the making of the terrain. Bauerly said the group studied areas where there was water wash outs and erosion and applied what they learned to construct areas that needed less maintenance.

While Bauerly said the trails are well known especially as a pit stop on the way north to the popular Cuyuna bike trails, many people still believe the trail system remains in rough shape.

“Now we need to educate people to let them know to come give it a try again,” Bauerly said. “Anytime we bring it up people say, ‘I remember that place; I had a blast up there.’ So, people know about it, but I don’t think they realize the amount of work that has been done and how nice it is.”

In addition to forest and other scenery, part of what makes the trails most attractive to enthusiasts is the variety of terrain, Bauerly said. Everyone can find an activity to enjoy year-round, whether cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, dog walking, hiking, mountain biking or even geocaching, he said.

“We have one trail called Rum River Run that mainly goes along the river,” Bauerly said. “That is a real wide, a 3.5 mile loop.”

The loop is mainly for beginner bike riders. Then, as participants grow more comfortable, they have the option to hop off on other loops of higher degree of difficulty.

“A lot of people call us one of the last standing, old school mountain biking trails where it’s not all machine built or super manicured,” Bauerly said.

Instead of building in features with machines, there are hilly areas with rocks and roots adding to the level of difficulty. Maintaining the trails terrain involves ongoing projects during all four seasons.

While Recreation Park had been the sole access point at the very south end of the trails, recently a second access at the north-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MILACA TRAILS INITIATIVE  
Mountain bikers cruise through the wooded area of the Milaca Trails system. The trail system offers varied levels of difficulty, offering something for all people to enjoy.

west corner was created. Having a second entrance point allows easier access to different groups of trails.

“We added it in partnership with Milaca School District,” Bauerly said. “They use it for different school projects, so we asked if we could make it an actual access point.” The main event hosted at the Milaca trails is Running in the Rough, where participants can choose between a 10K or 2 mile trail competition.

Bauerly said he would like to see additional events in the future. He said mountain biking has also become a popular sport among high school athletes, and he has been working closely with the group to hopefully include Milaca’s trails as one of the

competitive courses. His long-term goal is to introduce the sport to schools in the area.

“It hasn’t happened yet, but we are working together on it,” Bauerly said. “Those races bring in tons of people, so we would enjoy that. Events would introduce a lot of people to our trails and bring more people, money and visibility to the community.”

As fall approaches, Bauerly looks forward to what he considers the best time to use the trails: autumn. The trails in fall are in good condition, without mud often times, and the high, rolling hills offer views of the fall leaves. A journey through the trails offer people a outside activity before winter sets in.

“It gets people out and active,” Bauerly said.

“Anytime people can get out in nature is good; good for stress, good for your wellbeing.”



The Bog Monster trail is a difficult loop through a swampy area of the Milaca Trails. Other names of trail portions include Aspen Maze, The Meadow and Sky Hill Trails.

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For an application and job description

visit the SHNFP website @ [www.shnfp.org](http://www.shnfp.org).

For further information, please contact Sara Benson at 320-523-3831 or [sarab@renvillecountymn.com](mailto:sarab@renvillecountymn.com).



## District Technician

The Benton Soil and Water Conservation District is hiring a District Technician. Tasks include:

- Provide landowner assistance for the installation of conservation projects
- Assist with the SWCD environmental education program.
- Assist with the district tree program

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- Bachelor’s degree in conservation, agronomy, hydrology or related field of study. Applicable experience may be substituted for minimum educational requirements at the discretion of the hiring authority.
- A vehicle and a valid Minnesota class D Drivers’ License.
- Additional qualifications can be found on the position description.

### To apply submit an employment application, letter of introduction and resume to

Benton SWCD, 14 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave W. Foley, MN 56329 by 4:00 pm, Thursday, August 25, 2022.

Application materials and a complete job description are available at [www.soilandwater.org](http://www.soilandwater.org) or can be picked up at our office.

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