

WALHALLA

# Walhalla opens new trails at Stumphouse Park

BY JASON EVANS  
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WALHALLA — Officials say the new Palmetto Trail extension at Stumphouse Park will be a boon not only to the city of Walhalla, but the entire area.

A large crowd gathered at the park Wednesday evening to cut the ribbon on the 4 miles of trail.

“It is a great day for the city of Walhalla and for Oconee County and for the Upstate,” Walhalla Mayor Danny Edwards said before doing

the honors with a pair of oversized scissors. “Working together we can accomplish great things, and these new trails are perfect examples of successful collaboration.”

Natalie Britt, executive director of the Palmetto Conservation Foundation, agreed.

“We so often in the nonprofit world talk about the power of partnerships,” she said. “You talk about it, but this is seeing it in action. This is the best example, in my 20-year history in the nonprofit realm,

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Officials look on as Walhalla Mayor Danny Edwards cuts the ribbon on 4 miles of new trails at Stumphouse Park on Wednesday.

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of showing people coming together and creating something absolutely incredible. By checking your ego at the door, working your tail off, you make great things happen.”

The scope of the project has grown far beyond what was imagined when the first phase was announced.

“When we first laid this project out, we thought Phase 1 would be 1.5 miles,” Britt said. “That’s what we budgeted for. That’s what the plan was for. Today, folks, we have 4 miles. We never thought we’d have 4. We have 4 in less than a year.”

That wouldn’t have been possible without the Palmetto Conservation Corps, “a group of young folks who have committed their lives to volunteerism, to their country, to making this world a better place,” Britt said.

“Palmetto Conservation Foundation has the first trail-based conservation corps since the 1930s,” she said. “These guys are the actual reason we have 4 miles of trail, because they put blood, sweat and tears to clear this trail.”

Stumphouse Park is “an amazing space,” and Benchmark Trails rose to the challenge in building the new trails, Britt said.

“This is their Mona Lisa,” she said of the new trails. “This is truly a work of art. This is a legacy for South Carolina, and I’m so proud to be just a small, little part of that legacy.”

The Palmetto Trail connects the mountains to the sea.

“This section has been one of the sections that our folks have been so excited to see,” Britt said. “When you’re on the Palmetto Trail, you’re walking in the footsteps of Francis Marion in the Francis Marion National Forest. When you’re in



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**Palmetto Conservation Foundation executive director Natalie Britt said the trails at Stumphouse Park are the best examples of “the power of partnerships” that she’s seen in her career.**

the Midlands, you’re crossing the Broad River, and you’ll see bald eagles soaring and you’ll see turtles sunning. When you get into the Upstate, you go through places like Jones Gap State Park, one of the best examples of conservation partnerships. And soon you will be here in this amazing space.”

Once the ribbon was cut, the trails were immediately put to use with both advanced and beginner bike rides, as well as a hike.

Upstate SORBA will be coming out to the park on a regular basis for trail maintenance days.

Walhalla Partners for Progress president Dan Pollock said the Upstate chapter of the Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association will also be essential in getting the word out to the mountain biking community about the new trails.

Construction on the next section of trails will probably start in a few weeks, he said.

“By the end of 2018, we should have

10 miles of trail — which is going to be huge draw for mountain bikers not only in South Carolina, but the whole Southeast,” Pollock said.

The park and its trails will spur economic development for Walhalla and Oconee County almost immediately, he said.

“We’re going to start to see the results of it this year,” Pollock said. “It’s different from the Swamp Rabbit (Trail), but it’s going to be every bit as big.”

There’s still work to be done.

“We’ve got to promote it and we’ve got to build the rest of it out,” Pollock said. “We’ve got to connect it to the rest of the Palmetto Trail in Oconee County all the way over to the Pickens County line as well. So there’s a lot of work to do, but we’ve got a good group working together. We just need to raise some more money and keep building trails.”

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