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The Bottom Line

The green along the trails -- as well as all the green it generates

by Rhonda McBride - Monday, September 12, 2005

Anchorage, Alaska - Tourists will say that Anchorage's trail system is the city's best kept secret, but another one may be the impact on the economy. The city's trails keep Anchorage green -- in more ways than one.

One thing you can find at REI is a lot of bicycle stuff. From bells to bottles, helmets to hand gear, bicycles move people down the trails and cash into Anchorage's economy. All many Anchorage residents have to do is look in their garages to see how much they've invested to play.

REI says it's hard to put an exact number on how much business Anchorage's trail system generates, but they know it's substantial.

"I don't think this store would be nearly the store it is if we didn't have access to the outdoors that we have in this town," said Andrew Cutting of REI.

For access to the outdoors and to the trail system, tourists turn to Pablo Castaneda. Two years ago, Castaneda was a cook at the Copper Whale Inn. He started with two bicycles, and by the end of that first summer, his rental business grew to 12 bicycles. Now he has 42.

"Some people come back the next day because they love it -- just to be out there, is so beautiful," said Castaneda of Pablo's Bicycle Rentals.

"Before I even mention the Coastal Trail, they mention it to me," said Susan Darling, the manager of the Copper Whale Inn.

As manager of the Copper Whale Inn, Darling says it's amazing to see how economic benefits from the trail system flow from one business to another. She says the trail draws tourists into city life, so they stay longer and spend more.

"They realize that it's a place with wilderness and city combined, and it's really amazing how you put those two together through the trail system," Darling said.

The trail system has also helped to develop winter tourism. Races like the Tour of Anchorage bring up people from the Lower 48.

"Also they bring friends and relatives with them. Also they come in for just more than the athletic experience. They're in Alaska," said Bruce Bustamante of the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Concerning the amount of money trail-related events bring into the economy, look at the Mayor's Midnight Sun Marathon. The Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau says it generated more than \$2.5 million in local spending.

The Kristoffersons are in Alaska, up from northern Wisconsin, where a new network of bicycle paths connecting communities there has turned out to be a real boom to the economy.

"It draws families to these communities like you wouldn't believe. So I think it's really a smart move on the

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part of the community to do that," Tom Kristofferson said.

"In our brochures, in our Web site and everything, we talk about Anchorage, we emphasize how many trails, how many miles of trails we have," said Bob Poe, of the Anchorage Economic Development Corp.

Poe's job is to attract industry to Anchorage. He says the city's overall quality of life is what draws companies to Anchorage, and the trail system is part of the package.

"I don't think the trail is a luxury," Poe said.

And for many of those who use the trail every day, it's necessity that you can't put a price tag on.

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2 YOUR HEALTH

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In the United States, breast cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in women. In Alaska, the rates are equally high. However, a new study hopes to help heal breast cancer -- and it all begins with the mind.

2 ON YOUR SIDE

Local BBB merges with regional office

There's a new force in town. It's a one-stop place for consumers and businesses to get help in improving dealings between the two. The local Better Business Bureau has merged with the regional office, and local officials say they're already seeing positive results for both the consumer and business, especially at a time when the state has cut most consumer protection services.

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ASSIGNMENT ALASKA

At the Alaska State Fair, it's all about the food

While the giant veggies turn some heads, who wants to eat there veggies while at the Alaska State Fair? After all, there are many tastier choices, from cotton candy and funnel cake to hot dogs and corn fritters.

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