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In for a rough ride

New trail recreates mountain biking conditions

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Brad Riley often notices fellow bikers cruising along the city Parkway when he rides the tree-lined trails near Corby Pond.

One thing he sees that many others don't, however, is that most of the Parkway riders use bikes that are better-suited for rougher land.

"I'd say at least nine out of 10 people are riding mountain bikes out on the Parkway sidewalks, if not more," said Mr. Riley, who avidly traverses St. Joseph's mountain biking trails. "There's nothing wrong with the Parkway, but people should know there are other places to ride, too."

Shawn Force, owner of Forces of Nature Bicycle Cycling and Outdoors, speeds down the new Corby Pond mountain bike trail on May 22. Mr. Force made the trail over the winter just north of Corby Pond. (DARREN BREEN/St. Joseph News-Press)

While he knows the toilsome terrain behind Krug Park turns many cyclists away from trail riding, Mr. Riley is telling sidewalk bikers to put their mountain bikes to good use on a new trail northeast of Corby Pond and east of Northeast Parkway.

Shawn Force, owner of Forces of Nature outdoor sports shop, and five or six compatriots have built almost three-fourths of the gently curving five-mile trail that serves as a solid primer for novice bikers. Although the trail is on city-owned land, Mr. Force's group did nearly all of the work once the path was set.

The trail begins near a solitary green bench on the city Parkway about a quarter-mile west of the intersection of Ashland Avenue and Corby Parkway. As riders wind through the tightly constructed trail, they will find an occasional tree root sticking up out of the dirt or a thin, drooping tree branch attempting to block their progress. Remnants of vegetation lurk on patches of the pathway, but the trail is marked by a single dirt lane that has already begun to take shape.

Mr. Force says the trail is just right for novice riders. The absence of more challenging obstacles like large logs, fallen tree trunks, or steep elevation eases riders into mountain biking, he said.

"We built this trail to develop more attention for the sport here in St. Joe," Mr. Force said. "All of us have a passion for biking. We want to get others interested, and they need to start on a course that won't scare them away."

Mr. Force is continuing to search for land to build more trails - he wants to connect a total of 20 to 30 miles of trails by the end of 2009. He and others wish to name the trail network after fellow rider Mark Reynolds, a Central High School graduate who was attacked and killed by a mountain lion while biking on a California trail in 2004. Parks Director Bill McKinney said the City Council will have to approve the name, since the majority of the trails are on city land.

For those interested in mountain biking, a group of riders usually meets Tuesday and Thursday evenings at the stretching station on Corby Parkway. Anyone interested in learning more can contact Mr. Force at 279-1500, or visit stjmtb.blogspot.com.

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