December 2003 - In a groundbreaking move to increase awareness and thus, impact prevention of obesity and heart disease in Arkansas, two dozen physicians with the state's largest cardiology clinic agreed unanimously to support completion of the Arkansas River Trail by fundraising $350,000 over two years to create a "medical mile" in the heart of downtown Little Rock. The inspiration was born of a collaboration between the National Park Service River Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, Heart Clinic Arkansas, and Little Rock Parks and Recreation. The Medical Mile became the focal point for a unique health and trails partnership that created the nation's first outdoor linear health museum.

The "Medical Mile" has become an artistic expression of health designed to inspire, delight, and motivate people to make wellness-oriented lifestyle changes. It includes a 1,300 foot three-dimensional mural wall, a wellness promenade with artful displays, as well as, a Body-Mind-Spirit entry plaza that encourages trail users to remember that a healthy mind and spirit are the key steps toward a healthy body.

The project theme, developed by the Arkansas Department of Health, a project partner, focused on an "Exercise + Smoking Cessation + Better Nutrition" formula that signals a 70% reduction in chronic disease. By using varying spacial and interpretive perspectives, each of the three key features provided something unique and inspiring for trail users.

The Medical Mile winds along the river through the most prominent commercial and recreational district in Arkansas. Riverfront Park, the location of the Medical Mile is the hub of the...
The park is adjacent to the Clinton Presidential Library and numerous other venues like the Arkansas Statehouse Convention Center. Over two million people from around the world visit the area each year. The Medical Mile gives a positive impression of a city dedicated to the health and wellness of its citizens.

"Our participation in this project is a way of saying 'Thank you' and represents an effort to give back to the community by offering our citizens a safe and accessible place to exercise and by encouraging a more healthy lifestyle." said Dr. Eleanor Kennedy, Heart Clinic Arkansas

The Medical Mile can be experienced from either direction, on foot, roller blades or wheels. Created for the physically fit and physically unfit, young and old and in-between, the Arkansas River Trail Medical Mile is a resounding statement about the need to focus national attention on preventable chronic disease through lifestyle changes.

Supported by major hospitals, coalitions, the Arkansas Department of Health, numerous individual physicians and medical practices, the fundraising program exceeded the $350,000 goal in the first three months of the campaign. By the end of the promised two years, the project had raised $2.1 million.

The Medical Mile is only one dazzling piece of the Arkansas River Trail. Making a fourteen mile loop with an additional ten mile extension to Pinnacle Mountain State Park, the trail will eventually connect with the 225-mile Ouachita Wilderness trail. In the words of Mayor Jim Dailey:"Over 24 key tourism destinations, including 5,000+ acres of federal, state, and local parkland will be connected by the trail. Developers use the trail's proximity to sell high-rise condominiums, housing and commercial developments. From the perspective of the City of Little Rock, the trail is an economic, health, and environmental conservation stimulator."
How do trails help make a healthier community?

Trails create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible, and low – or no – cost places to bike, walk, hike, jog, or skate. They provide natural, scenic areas that cause people to actually want to be outside and physically active.

According to the Surgeon’s Report on Physical Activity and Health, 60% of Americans are not regularly active and 25% are not active at all. Almost half of persons aged 12-21 are not vigorously active on a regular basis. This report also suggests that creating safe places for people to bicycle and walk will be critical to persuading sedentary people to become more active.1

Statistics tell us that Arkansans are a much more unhealthy population than elsewhere in the United States. One of our physicians, Dr. Robert A. Lambert summed up our position perfectly. He said, “We live in a state of engaging natural beauty, and it flows right through the middle of our city. Our population is overweight and needs encouragement to exercise. That’s why Heart Clinic Arkansas doctors want to complete the Arkansas River Trail.”

We, at Heart Clinic Arkansas, thank you for improving health and fitness in our community. Premature mortality is often caused by coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, colon cancer and diabetes. The Arkansas River Trail allows us the opportunity to reduce these risks, and that is a gift that benefits everyone at every age.

For more information on the Medical Mile visit these sites.

Visit the Medical Mile Art Work
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