

Veterans Park trail wins national honor

By VAL WALTON

News staff writer

Twice a week, DeAnna Scott walks the trail at Veterans Park off Valleydale Road.

The Hoover resident likes that the trail is graveled, which makes the course more challenging to maneuver.

"It gives you quite a workout," she said last week after finishing her walk.

Another benefit, Scott said, is the trail's location next to Jefferson State Community College, where she is majoring in biology.

"That way, I don't have an excuse to go home to change clothes and end up staying," she said.

The 4.8-mile trail was designated recently by Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar as one of 31 trails in 15 states to be part of the national recreation trails, a program designed by the federal government to promote fitness and conservation. Nine of the trails are in Alabama.

The program recognizes trails that provide opportunities for all people to enjoy the outdoors and improve quality of life. Nationally, more than 12,500 miles of trails are in the system, which began in 1971.

Hoover Mayor Tony Petelos said the city applied for the distinction. In the lengthy application, the city detailed what makes it special.

The Department of Interior noted that

the trail connects a middle school, high school, community college, a 2-acre lake, park amenities, recreation areas, two playgrounds and a large veterans memorial, which is the focal point of the 82-acre park. It said the multi-use nature, running and boardwalk trail winds through diverse open fields, wetlands and forested areas, while a connector tunnel allows the full length use of the trail without having to cross a road. The trail, the department said, provides many opportunities for individual fitness programs for all ages and is used as a cross-country running course for major events.

Hoover has been host to the Great American Cross Country Festival at Veterans Park. In December, Veterans Park will be the site for the USA Track and Field Junior Olympics National Cross Country Championships, which is expected to attract more than 3,000 runners.

Petelos said over the years the course at Veterans Park has become well known in the national running community. He said he has received letters and calls from visiting track coaches applauding the trail.

Petelos said the city will likely display a monument and recognize the trail designation at next year's Celebrate Hoover Day.

"It's a very special trail, and we're glad to have it in our community," Petelos said.

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Wednesday, June 9, 2010

SHELBY NEWS