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Rock Hill plans to open cycling center Jan. 1

City leaders hope velodrome on par with Olympic standards will attract big events

By Nicole E. Smith - nsmith@heraldonline.com

ROCK HILL -- City officials predict that a world-class cycling center opening early next year at Riverwalk will attract national events and create millions of dollars in economic impact for Rock Hill.

The Giordana Velodrome, a 250-meter cycling track, is expected to be "substantially complete" and open by Jan. 1, said John Taylor, operations supervisor for the city's Parks, Recreation and Tourism department.

Gita Sporting Goods, a Charlotte-based bicycle equipment distributor, agreed to pay \$20,000 for a decade after the track opens for the Giordana name and also plans to donate bicycles to the city for use at the center.

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Melissa Cherry, mcherry@heraldonline.com -- The Giordana Velodrome is under construction as part of the Riverwalk development in Rock Hill. City officials hope to open the cycle racing track on Jan. 1.

The \$4 million center represents "another piece of the amateur sports tourism puzzle" for the city, Taylor said.

The center will appeal to the community, but officials hope it also will follow the example of Manchester Meadows and Cherry Park, bringing in visitors who will use Rock Hill restaurants and hotels, Taylor said.

City officials announced last month the soccer fields at Manchester Meadows will be the host of the 2012 U.S. Youth Soccer National Championships, July 25 through 29.

"We hope to get those national events, and we're working closely with USA

Cycling to make sure our buildings are up to Olympic standards," Taylor said.

Ideas for the track were first pitched in 2002, but construction did not begin at Riverwalk until this year.

"There were a lot of velodromes at the turn of the (20th) century," Taylor said. "With the

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invention of automobiles they went away."

The velodrome will be an outdoor track set into the ground with 40-degree embankments.

The center of the track will feature grass and concrete areas for visitors and cyclists to work on their bikes, similar to the infield of a NASCAR speedway, said Taylor said, adding that the center of the track could attract other types of events, such as small concerts or flea markets.

A building at the finish line will overlook the track, featuring bike storage, offices and a jury room for judges presiding over competitions.

Laurie Helms, marketing coordinator for the city's PRT department, said they are chipping away at the Riverwalk project in stages.

The Giordana Velodrome will be part of the larger Rock Hill Outdoor Center, 250 acres' worth of trails, athletic complexes, a mountain bike course and BMX/Supercross and Cyclocross tracks at Riverwalk, located off Cherry Road near the Catawba River.

The only project completed is the Riverwalk Trail, a 2.25-mile trail, a feature Taylor said attracts at least 9,000 visitors per month.

Residents can reach the trail through Duncans Ferry Road, off Cherry Road near the Catawba River bridge on U.S. 21.

The outdoor center will be a draw for the \$600 million Riverwalk, a 1,000-acre development that will include townhomes, businesses and a business park.

Riverwalk is expected to be completed in 20 years.

"It's great to have such exciting things for the residents," Helms said.

Kim Deacon, treasurer for the Rock Hill Bicycle Club, said the velodrome will be a nice facility for Rock Hill residents, and it will attract people from around the world.

"Every time we go to an event - some of us race regionally - someone asks, 'How's that velodrome in Rock Hill doing?'" Deacon said. "We already have the eyes and ears of the cycling community open, at least on the East Coast.

"They're just waiting to hear when they can come."

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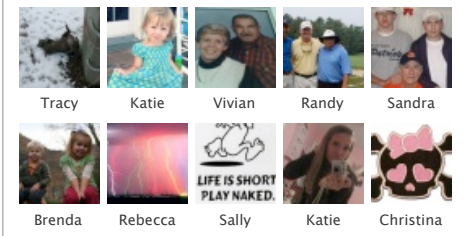


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