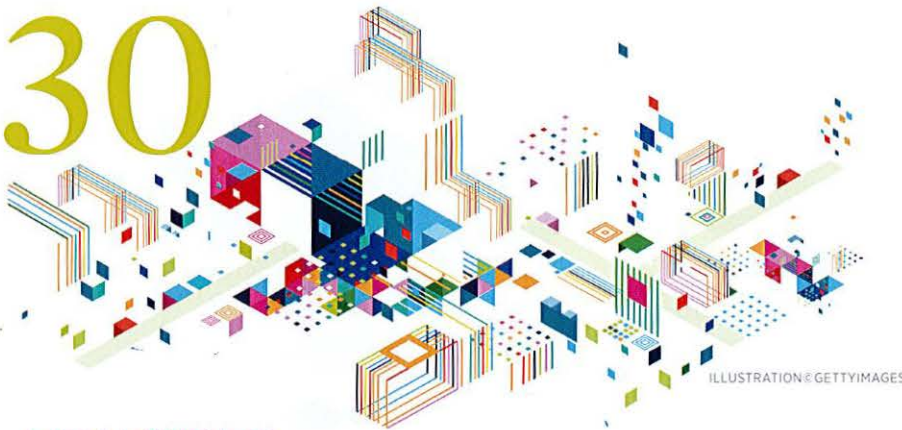


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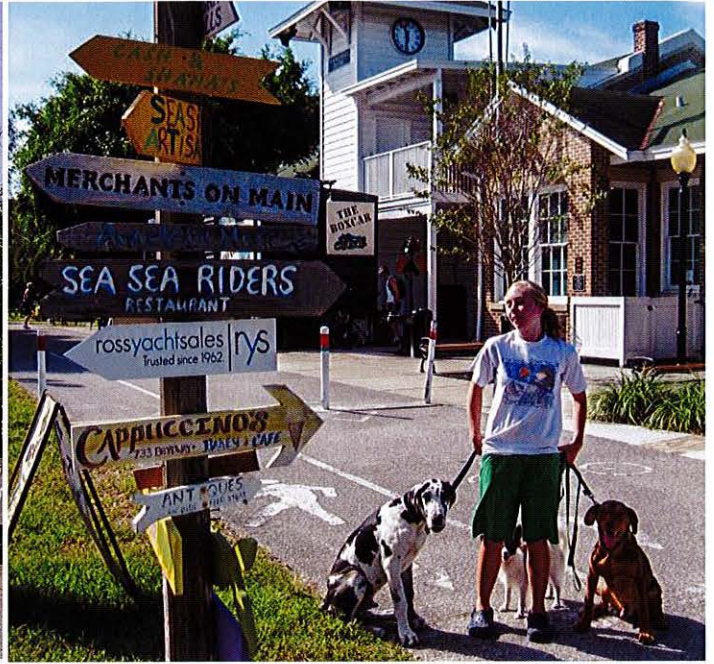
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ON THE COVER:
Photo by Stewart Nelson,
Florida League of Cities



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF DUNEDIN

NATURE TOURISM

New Program Recognizes Communities Where Trails Lead to Success

Dunedin designated as Florida's first 'Trail Town'

by Joy Dickinson
Florida League of Cities

“A goal of the Florida Trail Town program is to acknowledge successes such as Dunedin with the hope that other communities will be inspired to follow suit.”

~ Doug Alderson, Office of Greenways and Trails



PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF DUNEDIN

Florida has a new program that is sparking interest among cities that have trails connected to their community or nearby.

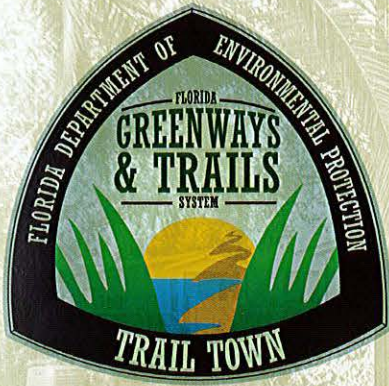
The **Florida Trail Town** program, administered by the **Office of Greenways and Trails**, is available to communities that are near rail, equestrian, hiking and/or paddling trails. Cities can apply for a Trail Town designation that can be used for promoting the community, the trail and businesses.

The idea behind the program is that people using the trails can visit connected communities to enjoy the heritage and services there. People using the trail might venture into restaurants, grocery stores, local shops and lodging. Residents also use trails to cross through their communities and to exercise.

“A Florida Trail Town is a vibrant destination where people come together,” said **Doug Alderson, assistant bureau chief of the Office of Greenways and Trails**.

Achieving the designation of Trail Town benefits the city and its trail, Alderson said. For those who use the trail, the designation alerts them to the fact that there is a nearby community with amenities that they can access. The city benefits economically from the increased traffic on the trail.

In terms of dollars and cents, a visitor using a trail for the day will spend four times the amount that a local user will spend



Characteristics of a Successful Trail Town

- » Enticing trail users to get off the trail and into your town
- » Making clear and safe connections between your town and the trail
- » Welcoming trail users by making town information readily available
- » Educating businesses on the economic benefits of meeting trail tourists' needs
- » Promoting the "trail-friendly" town character
- » Integrating the trail into the town's culture with annual festivals and events drawing people to the trail who may not normally be trail users
- » Connecting residents safely to work, schools, parks and shopping
- » Working with neighboring communities to promote the entire long-distance trail as a tourist destination

Source: Office of Greenways and Trails, Florida Department of Environmental Protection

PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF DUNEDIN

and is likely to return to the town, according to the Office of Greenways and Trails. An overnight visitor will spend twice as much as a day user.

Once a city is designated, it can add a logo with the Trail Town designation to its website and marketing materials. A sign can be erected at the city entrance. Dunedin recently was designated as Florida's first Trail Town.

"A goal of the Florida Trail Town program is to acknowledge successes such as Dunedin with the hope that other communities will be inspired to follow suit," Alderson said

The trail revitalized downtown Dunedin, according to **Bob Ironsmith, AICP, the director of economic and housing development and the Community Redevelopment Agency** for the **City of Dunedin**. The **Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail** runs through the heart of Dunedin's downtown on an abandoned CSX railroad corridor. The trail has been lit and landscaped. There are restaurants, a grocery store and a bike repair shop downtown that trail users can access.

Julie Ward Bujalski, mayor of the **City of Dunedin**, said, "Our downtown has thrived around the trail and attracted folks from all ages and abilities. We like to think of the trail as the main artery of our community."

Dunedin has an average of one thousand people coming through town on the trail daily. The trail is "a special ingredient that ties in with the whole downtown, and we're connected to it," Ironsmith said.


In a world of online shopping, people need more than stores to bring them downtown. They need an experience, and a trail offers that experience, Ironsmith said. "We wouldn't be where we are today without the trail," he said. "The trail is part of a quality-of-life ingredient that you want to build on when you're trying to revitalize your downtown."

The city plans to market the designation with signs, including a banner over a railroad trestle that goes across the trail. Dunedin will hold a ribbon cutting on April 19 to recognize the trail designation and a new gazebo that will serve as a music pavilion.

Sarah Carroll Glassner, chair of the **Greenways and Trails Council**, said, "Cities are leading the way by engaging active citizens and are experiencing the economic benefits that trails

bring. The council looks forward to engaging and promoting more trail towns."

Details about the Florida Trail Town program and a presentation about Dunedin's economic transformation are available at floridadep.gov; search for "Trail Town." To become a designated Trail Town, see the "Questionnaire" and "Self-Assessment" at floridagreenwaysandtrails.com. For more information, email Christine.Small@dep.state.fl.us.

Joy Dickinson is assistant editor for the Florida League of Cities. 

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