

By [Dirk W. Kaufman](#)
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Eight neighborhood and community parks in Murrysville have walking or bicycling trails. At least one of those paths leads right to a resident's back door.

Kevin Geiselman discovered that path recently when he was walking the trails in Townsend Park as part of a trail mapping project.

The community is seeking volunteers to assist mapping the trails. Volunteers use Global Positioning System devices to generate data for the maps. Betsy Aiken, who is overseeing the volunteer project, said two people, Geiselman and a Boy Scout working toward an Eagle Scout designation, have stepped forward.

"In one of our parks, Duff Park, there are several miles of hiking trails," Aiken said. "This is an optimal time to view spring wildflowers in bloom."

story continues below

An accurate map would help such a hike, Aiken said.

While the Boy Scout is still settling the details to ensure he'll have a worthy Eagle Scout project, Geiselman has provided data to the municipality from his recent walk at Townsend.

"I spent about six hours and hiked all the trails. I'll probably go out again," he said. "The more data you have, the better picture you have of what you're looking at and if you go out more often, you can create an average that will result in a more accurate map."

Geiselman, 40, of Churchill, has mapped more than 80 trails in the region. He posts the information on a Web site: localhikes.com.

On his recent trek, Geiselman said, he followed every path he could find in Townsend Park.

"One trail followed back to somebody's house," he said. "They probably head out their back door and into the woods and created their own trail that way. Not that that's an inherently bad thing. But if you're new to the park, it's good to know that's a path that won't really take you anywhere."

Aiken said the volunteer mapping effort is only one of a range of projects coordinated by volunteers to improve the parks. Another significant project is work to remove invasive, non-native plants.

She said while many projects involve volunteers working together, the mapping work can be done at any time, by anyone.

"They could do it independently of each other," she said. "It would be worthwhile to touch base with the municipality to confirm there is compatibility."

Geiselman said he started mapping walking and bicycling trails after developing an interest in global positioning devices through a grassroots sport called geocaching.

In geocaching, participants use a hand-held global positioning unit to locate buried caches of treasure.

The longitude and latitude coordinates of the caches are posted on an Internet site, and participants follow the coordinates -- transmitted to the GPS from satellites -- to the cache. In many cases, a notebook is left with the item so that those who find it can record their find, including who they are and when they found the item.

Geiselman said his wife, Heidi, first expressed interest in geocaching, which ultimately led to the mapping projects. He said he most often uses his bicycle, as he can cover more ground.

He said the global positioning device he uses -- called the Magellan Meridian Platinum -- cost about \$230. You can spend more, or less, depending on the features you want.

He found out about the Murrysville project through an Internet site run by the Three Rivers Information Geocaching Organization, also called TRIGO.

"Someone had made a posting on a discussion group," Geiselman said. "It's really just a group of people who do this kind of thing. It said, 'Hey, these people from Murrysville are looking for volunteers.'"

The group recently participated in a more extensive project at Moraine State Park.

"The park property borders have markers," Geiselman said. "We essentially volunteer to go up and search for these markers, so that the park managers can record where they are. This is something that would have cost them thousands of dollars. We had a bunch of people go out there, and we got like 80 percent of the markers in one day."

Geiselman said the border markers consisted of everything from a metal pole sunk into the ground to a pile of rocks that designated the border.

"We were able to do a lot of work for these guys," he said. "The director of the park was there. He said, 'When I talk about this with the directors of other parks, their eyes light up.'"

Aiken said there is not set deadline for completion of the mapping project in Murrysville. Leaf cover on the trees can impact the connection between global positioning devices and the satellites that provide location information. The Boy Scout may not be doing his work in Duff Park until the fall, after the leaves drop.

Anyone interested in participating in the mapping project can call Betsy Aiken at 724-325-4026.

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