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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Get Fit Challenge kicks off at Main Street trailhead ceremony**

Calling the Riverwalk Trail one of Danville's greatest assets, Danville leaders gathered on Friday to mark the completion of a new trailhead. The trailhead, which begins at the intersection of Patton and Bridge streets, provides trail users with another access point to the trail on the south bank of the Dan River, and it directly connects the river with the River District.

Danville leaders also praised the trail as a "beautiful place to get healthier." Toward that goal, Get Fit Dan River Region used the ceremony to launch a 50,000-pound weight loss challenge. Events are planned for the next 90 days to encourage citizens in Danville, Pittsylvania County and Caswell County, N.C., to integrate physical activity as a fun part of life.

"This (trail) is one of Danville's greatest assets. We are encouraging you to get out and use it," Danville Vice Mayor Dr. Gary Miller said in opening remarks at the ceremony. "Winter is over. ... No more cold weather. No more ice. You have no excuse to not use this trail."

The trailhead was part of the streetscape project that led to the design and construction of the JTI Fountain and Main Street Plaza. A celebration was held on Wednesday to reveal the fountain and give the community its first opportunity to enjoy the plaza.

The new trailhead is located just below the fountain and plaza.

Karl Stauber, president of the Danville Regional Foundation, said the new trailhead is important because "it is what connects the river and the district. This is the gateway. ... It allows us to talk about the river and the River District as assets – building on the past but creating the future."

In addition to the streetscape improvements that have taken place along Main Street, Stauber pointed to the recent the opening of the Digital Dome Theater and the new Danville Family YMCA that will be completed later this year.

“This trail is a great symbol of our region,” Stauber said. “We didn’t start off and do it all at once. We’re not done yet.”

Later this month, the city expects to solicit bids for continued expansion of the Riverwalk Trail. This expansion involves construction of a pedestrian lane on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge to connect the walking trail on the north side of the Dan River to the Main Street Plaza and the walking trail on the south side of the river. Construction could begin as early as July.

The Riverwalk Trail, currently spanning 8.5 miles, has long served as a popular amenity for residents and visitors who walk, jog and ride bicycles along the trail on both banks of the river and through parks, historic sites and businesses.

“It is also a beautiful place to get healthier,” Stauber said. “Our region has major health challenges. There is no question about that.”

The purpose of the Get Fit Challenge is to establish a vision for a healthier community and to pursue that vision in a fun way.

Stephanie Ferrugia directs the Get Fit Dan River initiative. She said a new report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shows two-thirds of local residents are overweight and one-third of that number are obese.

Ferrugia says the region ranks near the bottom of the list in terms of obesity. Over the past four years, Pittsylvania County “has been slipping steadily, ranking at 91 out of 133 localities.” Danville ranks 121st on the list, while Caswell County placed 62nd out of about 100 localities in North Carolina.

The group’s goal is for area residents to sign up and lose a total of 50,000 pounds over the next three months. Anyone can participate.

As part of the challenge, the organization will provide workout videos featuring celebrities in the community. These celebrities, along with local fitness trainers, will demonstrate step by step how to practice basic exercises that can be done anywhere anytime. No equipment is required.

To participate or learn more about the challenge, go to [www.getfitdanriver.org](http://www.getfitdanriver.org).

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The City of Danville on Wednesday revealed the JTI Fountain and gave the community its first opportunity to enjoy the new Main Street Plaza located in the heart of the River District at the intersection of Main and Craghead streets.

An estimated 350 people took advantage of the opportunity, gathering in the plaza to listen to ceremonial remarks and then to watch officials officially put the decorative, multi-stage fountain into operation. Afterwards, they remained, mingling in the plaza, listening to the live band, and enjoying a patio bar service sponsored by the Downtown Danville Association.

“Through a Virginia Department of Transportation revenue sharing grant, we were able to convert this space into a breathtaking pedestrian plaza,” said Vice Mayor Dr. Gary Miller, speaking about the \$2.6 million project. “This is the gateway to the city starting officially today.”

In addition to use of the state funds for the project, Japan Tobacco International donated \$465,000 to show its commitment as a corporate citizen to the future prosperity of the region. That gift paid the full cost of the design and construction of the fountain and the purchase of the lighting. JTI operates a state-of-the-art tobacco processing facility on Stinson Drive in Danville. Nearly 50 full-time workers and more than 250 seasonal employees work at the facility.

Steve Daniels, president of Japan Tobacco International, Leaf Services U.S.A., said, “This is a project that is very close to us. Today is the day we get to see the fountain come to life. This fountain in this location is significant to us. It sits in the gateway of the historical tobacco district. That is important to us. Danville has a rich tobacco heritage. We hope this fountain will stand for many years to represent that heritage.”

Amid cheers, applause, and a countdown led by company and state and local officials, the fountain roared to life, with its seven water jets shooting water vertically into the air.

The fountain and the plaza are the centerpiece of the second phase of streetscape improvements in the River District. They serve as a signature or focal point.

A walkway or promenade traverses the full length of the plaza, allowing pedestrians to stroll from Main Street to Bridge Street. The promenade is composed of brick pavers that match the brick pavers used in the widening of the Main Street sidewalks.

The plaza’s most notable amenity, however, is the multi-stage fountain that is 40 feet in diameter. In the upper stage, seven water jets shoot water vertically. The seven jets represent the Tobacco Warehouse District’s seven blocks, from the Carrington Pavilion to the new fountain.

Below the jets are scuppers that allow the water to flow into the lower stage. Spills also are in place at each end of the fountain.

Construction began in April 2013.

Wednesday's event was the third ceremony highlighting the River District Development Project. In February, a ceremony was held to celebrate the availability of free, public Wi-Fi in the River District. Four hotspot locations on the 300, 400, and 500 blocks of Main Street now provide outdoor Wi-Fi connections. .

In early December, a ceremony was held to mark the close of construction in the first phase of streetscape improvements, which included the 300, 400 and 500 blocks of Main Street and the block of Union Street between Main and Spring streets.

Activity in the first phase ranged from widening sidewalks and installing brick pavers to creating more visible and safer pedestrian crossings, upgrading utilities and providing amenities such as trees, benches and new lighting.

The River District Development Project is in its fourth year. As part of the project, the city has adopted design guidelines for the look and feel of buildings in the district. A seven-member commission has been appointed to oversee compliance.

In addition to developing design guidelines and undertaking streetscape projects, the city has converted Patton Street to two-way traffic in order to provide better access to businesses and parking lots serving stores on Main Street; opened a new parking lot at 500 Main St.; and conducted a parking study for the full district.

The city has received state money to create a pedestrian lane on the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge to connect the walking trail on the north side of the Dan River to the Main Street Plaza and the walking trail on the south side of the river. This project is in the design phase, with construction expected to begin in the spring.

The River District has attracted \$86 million in private investment, with much of the activity having taken place since the start of the River District Development Project. That figure outpaces public investment by threefold.

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