

# Blairstown first in N.J. to be named an Appalachian Trail Community

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BLAIRSTOWN -- It was only fitting that on the 47th anniversary of Earth Day, Blairstown was designated an Appalachian Trail Community.

Despite the threat of rain -- which fell intermittently throughout the day on Saturday -- hundreds came out to take part in a community-wide celebration that featured a street fair, live music, food, vendors and walking tours.

Blairstown is the first Appalachian Trail Community in New Jersey. The trail covers 72 miles through New Jersey, entering the state at the Delaware Water Gap before heading north along the Kittatinny Ridge and up to High Point then east through the Pochuck Valley.

The Appalachian Trail Community program recognizes those places that take extra steps to help promote and protect the trail.

The designation, which is awarded by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, means the Greater Blairstown Area Community Partnership -- which includes Blairstown, Knowlton, Hardwick, Hope and Frelinghuysen -- will be highlighted online, in trail guidebooks and on hiking maps, meaning more economic opportunity for local businesses from hikers and travelers of the Appalachian Trail.

"Being an Appalachian Trail Community is a great thing for our small businesses," said Jeanette Iurato, vice president of the Greater Blairstown Business Association and co-owner of the Blairstown Museum. "It now makes our town accessible to these trail hikers, several thousand of them, that come through the Blairstown-Hardwick area every year. I think it's a great boost."

Iurato said hikers will now have information about the economic areas of the municipalities, including where to get supplies, lodging, food and anything else they may need while traveling through northwest New Jersey.

"This is wonderful for our small businesses," she said. "Some of them are struggling really hard, and I think any boost in tourism is great."

Blairstown Mayor Herman Shoemaker, in between sample bites of some tasty-looking desserts from Cozy Cabin Bake Shoppe, offered a similar take on what the designation could mean for the community.

"I think it's going to draw a lot of people in off the trail," Shoemaker said, "but people will be coming to the trail because of the publicity of (the Appalachian Trail Community program designation) and they'll have to come through Blairstown to get there and we've got all of this to offer them. I think it's wonderful."

Shoemaker said the economic benefits stretch beyond the township borders and reach all of Warren County, which is heavily focused on economic development.

"I'm very excited about it," he said.

State Sen. Steve Oroho, R-24th Dist., was on hand during the designation ceremony at Blair Falls on Saturday morning. Afterward, Oroho said the pristine setting of the falls was an ideal location to celebrate the designation.

"We are very fortunate to have so many beautiful areas in northwest New Jersey where families can spend time in the great outdoors and still be close to home with so many different amenities to enjoy," Oroho said.

He added that other communities in the Sussex and Warren county region are in the process of applying to become an Appalachian Trail Community.

"We are hopeful that such a designation will help many adventuring, fun-seeking and all other outdoor enthusiasts visit our beautiful area and enjoy the many, many small businesses and activities this whole area has to offer," he said.

For more information about the Appalachian Trail Community program, visit: [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org).

David Danzis can also be contacted on Facebook: [ddanzisNJH](#), on Twitter: [@ddanzisNJH](#), or by phone: 973-383-1274. You can find out more about all of the goings on that day at the Blirstown Museum's [WEB SITE](#) and their Facebook page for the [EVENT](#).