

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 23, 2019

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**OCMULGEE HERITAGE TRAIL'S
 WALNUT CREEK CONNECTOR OPENS TO THE PUBLIC**

Macon, GA –On Thursday, May 23, NewTown Macon celebrated the opening of the Walnut Creek Connector Trail along the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail, named in honor of previous NewTown Macon President & CEO Mike Ford. Over 60 donors gave nearly \$129,000 to complete this important connector in honor of previous NewTown Macon President and CEO Mike Ford. Major funders to this campaign were Dr. Kirby Godsey, Peyton Anderson Foundation, Bibb Distributing, E.J. Grassmann Trust, James H. Porter Charitable Trust, Community Foundation of Central Georgia, the James S. and John L. Knight Foundation, and Cox Communications.

“Mike was recruited 21 years ago to help develop the trail, which then was still only a concept,” said Chris Sheridan, NewTown Macon Board Member and Chair of the Ocmulgee Heritage Trail Committee. “Because of his steady and tireless efforts ever since, it is entirely fitting that this section of trail that connects 17,000 years of Middle Georgians be memorialized as the Mike Ford Trail. It is a small reminder of the even bigger community connections he has made as a wonderful citizen of Macon.”

The Walnut Creek Connector Trail connects the existing trail from the Otis Redding Bridge to the River Trail in the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. NewTown Macon has raised and expended approximately \$300,000 to date on this project. Several years ago, interchanges were added to connect the sidewalks of the east side of the Otis Redding Bridge (Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd) to the existing trail that runs underneath the bridge. This project extends this connection approximately one and a quarter miles south to Walnut Creek along the east bank of the river.

“The Ocmulgee Heritage Trail is a testament to how successful public-private partnerships can transform communities,” said Josh Rogers, CEO and President of NewTown Macon. “Cooperation and funding from both the public and private sector resulted in a scenic recreational space that’s an amenity for all our citizens.”

GDOT awarded Macon-Bibb County \$600,000 from the Transportation Enhancement (TE) program to construct the trail. NewTown Macon raised over \$300,000 in matching private donations to complete the fundraising necessary for the project. In mid-2017, the project received final approval from the National Park Service. After a public bidding



process, Sam Hall and Sons were awarded a contract to construct the trail in July 2017, with support from the TE grant and Macon-Bibb SPLOST.

In addition to local public and private funding, the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park won a \$75,000 grant from the National Park Service to pave existing portions of the Walnut Creek Trail Connector within the park bounds. This improvement makes the entire Walnut Creek Connector Trail ADA compliant, and one of the longest such accessible trails in the National Parks system.

“This trail is another link in the very successful and popular Greenway Trail system,” said Jim David, Superintendent of Ocmulgee Mounds National Historic Park. “Making this connection to the Ocmulgee River from the Great Temple mound is a vital part of the park’s story since the mounds are here because of the river.”

The public is encouraged to use the trail but should access the new connection from the entrance at the Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park or the entrance in East Macon at the Mill Hill Community Arts Center.

Bike Walk Macon’s Trail-o-bration Bike Party that will take place tonight, Thursday, May 23 from 6pm to 8pm, will take the public on the newly completed connection using the preferred entrances and exits.

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About NewTown Macon

For over 20 years, NewTown Macon has led the revitalization efforts of downtown Macon. NewTown’s mission is to attract, leverage, and invest in self-sustaining transformation with the vision of a vibrant and authentic city experience unparalleled in the South. For more information, please visit www.newtownmacon.com. NewTown Macon’s headquarters is located at 555 Poplar Street, Macon, GA 31201 and can be reached at (478) 722-9909.

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