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Steelmaker dedicates environmental restoration, trail project



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BURNS HARBOR | A group of ArcelorMittal employees took a walk in the woods Tuesday morning.

And, they didn't even have to leave the steelmaker's property to do so.

The steelmaker and its conservation partners dedicated the Deerfield Woods Fitness Trails and Habitat Enhancement project Tuesday morning, a project aimed at restoring and preserving the natural dunes ecosystem within the mill as well as providing employees a place to walk in nature to improve and maintain their health.

Madhu Ranade, vice president of ArcelorMittal and general manager of the Burns Harbor plant, said the project has been two years in the making.

"It is a wonderful way to support health and wellness," said Ranade, standing under the canopy of trees. "This is not the kind of setting you expect to see in a steel mill."

The project was initiated to restore a parcel of land adjacent to the Deerfield Training Center and evolved to include the walking paths.

Once completed, there will be nearly two miles of trails through the wooded area. Informational signs will inform walkers about the flora and fauna.

The project was completed with ArcelorMittal and conservation partners including Wildlife Habitat Council, Shirley Heinze Land Trust, Northwest Indiana Restoration Monitoring Inventory and Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission. The American Heart Association became involved in the fitness trails aspect of the project by providing informational signs along the trails about the benefits of walking.

"This demonstrates the unique coexistence between steelmaking and the dunes ecosystems," said Daniel Goldfarb, regional director of the Wildlife Habitat Council.

Paul Quinlan of the Shirley Heinze Land Trust helped design the trails which, he said, will provide an important connection to other natural areas outside the mill. He added that the restoration of the Black Oak Savanna and adjacent wetlands will continue, and those using the trails will see a greater diversity of plants and animals in the area.

