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Blue Fund backs Buffalo's DL&W Trail & Park

On Wednesday, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York President and CEO Dave Anderson announced support for Buffalo's exciting urban rail trail project on the DL&W corridor through the Blue Fund. The Western New York Land Conservancy will receive just over \$245,000 to take this project to the next level. This linear park will be a ribbon of green that runs through the Old First Ward, Valley, and Perry neighborhoods, connecting City of Buffalo youth and families to downtown and the waterfront, and to the health benefits of spending time in nature.

The Land Conservancy will work with local partners who have expertise in environmental education and nature programming to increase community-centered activities, participation in nature, and in the development of the trail. Partners in this project include Buffalo Audubon, Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper, Groundwork Buffalo, the Old First Ward Community Association, and the Valley Community Association. This grant will allow additional partnerships and connections to be developed. Blue Fund's support will also allow the Land Conservancy to hire Anthony Armstrong, of Make Communities, to be the DL&W project manager. Anthony has more than 15 years of community development experience in Western New York and has worked as the consultant for the community vision plan for the DL&W corridor.

"There are many examples of places around the country where urban linear parks are making communities better places to live and visit," said Nancy Smith, Land Conservancy Executive Director. "We are excited to create a place like this for our residents. The DL&W corridor will be a place where all of the benefits of nature, are accessible to everyone."

"The new trail and linear park on the former DL&W rail corridor will support enhanced health outcomes for our community by expanding access to the physical and mental health benefits of immersion in nature, walking, and biking," said Michael Ball, Director of Blue Fund.

For more than a year, the Land Conservancy has been leading a community engagement process to spark conversation about the future of this corridor. Hundreds have participated, including neighborhood residents, business owners, and community leaders. A vision is emerging with the goal of creating a mile-and-a-half long trail system for walking and biking that celebrates our industrial and railroad heritage; creating a place that connects people with nature and people with people.

"The community is excited about having a place to relax and enjoy the beautiful green paths," says Sara Heidinger, a community leader who grew up alongside the rail corridor. "We believe this project will strengthen our community connections and provide a place for people to get outside and enjoy the outdoors all year round."

"With this investment from Blue Fund, the DL&W trail could become the healthy urban greenspace that the community strongly supports," said Congressman Brian Higgins. "Our region is seeing incredible revitalization thanks to investments along our waterfront, and the Western New York Land Conservancy

has the vision and expertise to bring a natural element that will also honor and highlight our historic neighborhoods.”

The next big step for the DL&W project will invite design professionals from around the world to submit their ideas for the corridor to the Land Conservancy and a carefully selected jury of community leaders and design professionals. The Land Conservancy has retained Kishore Varanasi, an award-winning urban designer, strategist, innovator, teacher, and writer to advise the Land Conservancy during the design ideas competition. Kishore is the Director of Urban Design at CBT in Boston, MA, and his work has shaped countless cities and communities around the country and the world. In addition to the Blue Fund, the design ideas competition is possible thanks to generous funding from M&T Bank, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Fund at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, NYS Conservation Partnership Program, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy through the Doppelt Family Trail Development Fund, and contributions from individual Land Conservancy members.

If you are interested in learning more about the DL&W project or the Western New York Land Conservancy, please reach out at (716) 687-1225 or info@wnylc.org. You can also support the Land Conservancy’s work by making an online donation at wnylc.org or by sending a check to P.O. Box 471, East Aurora, NY 14052.

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Blue Fund, funded solely by BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, awards major grants in Western New York, totaling approximately \$1 million to \$3 million annually, to organizations and initiatives that have a positive impact on key health areas and will demonstrate enhanced measurable outcomes for community health metrics. These include behavioral health, cardiovascular health, diabetes, health care workforce development, healthy children, and the opioid epidemic. Blue Fund complements BlueCross BlueShield's current corporate giving program of partnerships and sponsorships which saw community investments of more than \$2 million in Western New York in 2017.

The **Western New York Land Conservancy** is a regional, not-for-profit land trust that permanently protects land with significant conservation value in Western New York for current and future generations. The Land Conservancy envisions a future in which open spaces, working lands, wildlife habitat, and scenic beauty are cherished and protected as part of the landscape and character of Western New York. The Land Conservancy is accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and is one of 1000+ land trusts nationwide, including 90 in New York State. Land trusts have protected 56 million acres of land. For more information on upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of the Land Conservancy, please call (716) 687-1225 or visit www.wnylc.org.

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