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Project aims to tag county's favorite assets

BY TIMOTHY LAROCHE tlaroche@eagletimes.com May 2, 2018



The historic Sullivan Machinery Company smokestack in Claremont is one of the iconic areas of the built environment tagged in the LoveSullivan Project's interactive mapping tool.

TIMOTHY LA ROCHE

CLAREMONT — On a clear day, the summit of the Unity Mountain Trail gives a near-panoramic view of the surrounding valley.

After the trail drew crowds for its October opening day, the site was quickly named one of the areas of noteworthy natural or built beauty.

As part of an initiative to drive economic development and improve quality of life in Sullivan County, representatives from the University of New Hampshire's

Cooperative Extension say they want residents to share more of their favorite areas in the county.

The extension announced this week the launch of the LoveSullivan Project, an interactive mapping tool that allows users to tag their favorite sites in the county.

Residents and visitors to the county can use the tool at the extension's website to tag exceptional areas of the built and natural environments with photos and accompanying descriptions.

The map can be viewed at the extension's website as a tourism guide to the area.

As the project takes hold, representatives say the data will help the extension learn about what the county's greatest assets are.

"Once we know what our strengths are, we can then leverage those distinctions to develop a strong identity that inspires locals as well as visitors, new residents, developers and businesses," UNH Field Specialist Penny Whitman said.

Whitman developed the project to run in concert with the development of an economic profile of the county. Since August 2017, representatives from area businesses, nonprofits and municipal and regional government have been working to draft the profile, a document which would be used as the basis for future economic development efforts.

During group meetings as early as September, participants identified the lack of a defined identity for the region as a potential barrier to growth.

In launching the Love Sullivan Project, members of the group say they will use the data to better understand the region's assets.

"We're not the North Country, we're not the Lakes Region, we're not the Seacoast," County Manager Derek Ferland said. "Who are we? We decided the best way to find out is to ask the people who live here."

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While northern reaches of Sullivan County lie within the loosely defined Upper Valley, the county's eastern communities fall into the Lake Sunapee Region. However, little of the remainder of the county fits into such neat categories. Overlapping distinctions pull communities between the Monadnock Region, the Dartmouth Region, the Connecticut River Valley and the outer reaches of the Lakes Region.

By some definitions, parts of Sullivan County are also included in the Precision Valley region, an ode to the area's history as a manufacturing center along the Connecticut River. In fact, the county was the only region in New England to measure growth in the manufacturing sector in 2017. Of the top 30 biggest employers in the county, 12 are in areas related to manufacturing.

The Regional Identity Task Force, a subsection of the economic profile group, will meet on May 22 at the Sugar River Valley Regional Technical Center in Newport to discuss the newly gathered data and continue conversations on the region's identity.

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