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Local Officials Hammer Ceremonial Golden Spikes at Glacier Rail Park Opening

Laborers putting the finishing touches on new rail park this week

BY JUSTIN FRANZ // OCT 8, 2018



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One-hundred-and-twenty-six years after a ceremonial silver spike was driven into the ground in downtown Kalispell to mark the arrival of the Great Northern

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Railway in the Flathead Valley, local officials hammered down 10 golden spikes to celebrate the completion of the new \$12.2 million Glacier Rail Park in Evergreen.

While some landscaping and paving work still needs to be completed, the majority of the rail park's construction has been completed allowing officials with the City of Kalispell and Flathead County Economic Development Authority to throw a grand opening celebration on Oct. 8. Joining them was U.S. Sen. Jon Tester and representatives from the U.S. Department of Commerce, BNSF Railway, and Watco Companies' Mission Mountain Railroad.

The completion of the rail park and eventual relocation of CHS Kalispell's grain elevator and Northwest Drywall will allow for the removal of two miles of railroad track in downtown Kalispell, clearing the way for a new trail and development.



**I CAME,
I SAW,
I stayed.**

DAVID FETVEIT BROKER/OWNER

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“This project will transform Kalispell,” Tester said.

Construction began on the Glacier Rail Park in August 2017 and since

then contractors have been busy building roads, railroad track, and water and sewer systems. Earlier this year, CHS Kalispell broke ground on its new facility and the fertilizer plant is being built at a feverish pitch. Construction has also begun on Northwest Drywall's new warehouse. If everything goes according to plan, both companies will be operating out of the 44-acre rail park by next summer. Once that happens, the rails in downtown Kalispell will be abandoned and removed.

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The rail park was funded in part by a \$10 million TIGER grant the City of Kalispell and Flathead County Economic Development Authority received in 2015.

Jerry Meerkatz, president of Montana West Economic Development, the non-profit that helps operate the economic development authority, said while CHS Kalispell and Northwest Drywall are taking up the majority of the park, there is still seven acres of land ready for development. The rail park also features a team track, where multiple businesses can load and unload rail cars.

“We’re already getting a lot of calls from people and businesses that are interested in moving to the park,” he said.

Monday’s event featured speeches from local officials before they stood along the recently completed railroad track to hammer in 10 golden spikes — a ceremonial gesture that harkens back to the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad in 1869. When the railroad arrived in Kalispell in 1892, a silver spike of melted silver dollars was driven into the rail. That original spike is now on display at the Stumptown Historical Society Museum in Whitefish and it was brought down to Kalispell under glass for the grand opening celebration.

City officials and community members are currently determining what the rail trail through Kalispell will look like. When the rail trail and rail park are fully developed, the project is expected to have cost more than \$30 million.

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