

## New markers will add to trail safety

Andy Thompson outdoors@timesdispatch.com | Posted: Sunday, July 21, 2013 12:00 am

Stacy Rogers started advocating for an emergency locator system in the James River Park after attending a meeting of Richmond MORE, the local mountain bike advocacy group, nearly four years ago. Rogers, a Richmond patrol officer and one who often makes his rounds in the park by bike, listened to a lady tell the story of breaking her leg in the JRPS.

“She said, ‘I didn’t call police or fire because I knew they didn’t know how to get to me,’ ” Rogers remembered. Instead, she said, “ ‘I called my friend, and he came down and got me.’ My thought was, ‘I’m glad he was home.’ ”

Rogers brought the idea up to Ralph White, then the JRPS manager.

But White, Rogers said, was worried that too much signage would take away from park-goers’ wilderness experience.

Then, not long after, Rogers had firsthand experience that really got him on the emergency locator bandwagon.

“I was riding with my former partner on North Bank,” he said.

“She broke her finger, a really nasty one where it was sticking out 90 degrees, and we were right at the back of Calvary Cemetery, so we crawled up there.

“I knew exactly where we were and it took 45 minutes for an ambulance to get back there. I’m thinking, ‘OK, that’s fine; it’s a finger, but what if it’s a compound fracture?’ ”

Soon, however, that kind of wait — and the need to call a friend instead of 911 — will be a thing of the past. If you’ve been on Buttermilk Trail on the south bank of the James recently, you may have seen some new signs. They’re brown and are made of Carsonite, a fiberglass-reinforced composite material that’s flexible. At about waist height, the narrow signs have a sticker reading something like “BM10.”

James River Park superintendent Nathan Burrell said the goal is to finish installing the markers on Buttermilk, North Bank Trail, Belle Isle, the Dogwood Dell trail and the Forest Hill Park singletrack in the next couple of weeks.

Burrell said the markers, as well as some new trail kiosks, will cost somewhere between \$15,000 and \$20,000 and were paid for by the Sports Backers, Richmond MORE and the parks department.

On Tuesday, Rogers and Burrell will meet with the city's Department of Emergency Communications to begin getting the locations of the trail markers uploaded into the department's computer database.

"You'll say, 'I just passed BM5,' " Burrell said. "The emergency personnel folks will be able to pull that up. They'll see the whole trail system. They'll see where BM5 is and see where the closest entrance is, and they'll be able to send responders directly to that point. Instead of now where it's, 'I just passed the big oak tree or the big rock outcropping.' "

Rogers said that having a recreation area such as the JRPS in the heart of a city can be deceiving. If a jogger were to be injured on top of Belle Isle, he or she could almost see VCU Medical Center, but it could take much longer than the distance would indicate to get there and receive care.

"When you go on Buttermilk (Trail) right now, you are entering a wilderness area, and I mean that in that you are more than one hour from medical care," Rogers said. "This should be leaps and bounds for response times for helping somebody in the park. It'll probably be one of the proudest things I've done because...I think it really could save a life one day. That's how important it is.

"It'll be this invisible safety net that you won't see, and it won't change your experience in the park until you need it."