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KENHORST

FLOWING TRIBUTE

Rabbit Run creek gets its signs to honor John Updike



BEN HASTY — READING EAGLE

Terry Mohler, left, Kenhorst public works employee, and Dwayne Hart, a supervisor, put up one of the Rabbit Run signs on Route 625 in the borough. The creek was named after the character Rabbit from the novels by the late acclaimed author John Updike, who was raised in Berks County.

By Lisa Scheid

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The small stream named for one of Berks County's most famous natives now has official signs.

This week workers from Kenhorst installed Rabbit Run signs at the stream that begins in Shillington, the hometown of celebrated author John Updike. The stream cuts through Cumru Township and continues through Kenhorst, where it empties into the Angelica Creek.

The stream was named Rabbit Run a few years ago as part of an Earth Day contest. It is also the title of a novel that launched the career of Updike, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner who once worked as a copy boy at the *Reading Eagle*.

Updike, a prolific 20th-



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The section of Rabbit Run that flows to Angelica Creek along Governor Drive in Cumru Township.

century novelist, poet and essayist, lived in the home of his birth along Philadelphia Avenue from 1932 until 1945, when he and his family moved to Ploverville. Updike's upbringing in the Reading suburb influenced much of his writings, including the

novel "Rabbit, Run" and its sequels.

Rabbit was the main character. Updike died in 2009.

Updike Society president James Plath said he thought the new creek name might interest pilgrims on the Updike trail.

Many are expected to visit Berks next month when a historical marker is dedicated at his childhood home and the biennial Updike conference is held. The two-day conference is being held at Alvernia University and Gov. Mifflin High School.

The conference also will feature walking tours of Shillington Updike sites and a bus tour of the area, with stops at the Pagoda, Robeson Evangelical Lutheran (Plow) Church and Cemetery, and Weaver's Orchards to see the Ploverville farmhouse.

"Updike wasn't necessarily an environmental writer, but he loved Berks County as much as anyone can love a place," Plath said in a news release.

Updike's first four novels

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were set in Berks County, and all his award-winning fiction has a Pennsylvania landscape.

Plath said society members from as far away as Japan, Brazil, Serbia and France who come to Reading for the Updike house dedication will want to see the Rabbit Run signs, too, and maybe pose by it for a photo.

"It's a fun name for a serious project," Plath said, adding that the society is happy to pay for the signs as a show of its support.

The John Updike Childhood Home will host a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker dedication ceremony at 1 p.m. Oct. 2. The site's National Registry of Historic Places plaque also will be unveiled at the house on 117 Philadelphia Ave.

The Mifflin School District donated items pertaining to Updike that will be on display as people tour the house for the first time. Mifflin is also providing meeting space for the morning academic sessions and afternoon panel for the conference on Oct. 2.

How it happened

The idea to name the



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The John Updike Childhood Home will host a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker dedication ceremony at 1 p.m. Oct. 2 at Updike's childhood home at 117 Philadelphia Ave., Shillington.

creek was born in 2016 through conversations between the newly formed Angelica Creek Watershed Association's founding members and Mifflin high school biology teacher Jennifer Stinson, who was faculty adviser to a student environmental club.

Once the name Rabbit Run was selected, to get it officially named the watershed association had to obtain permission and support letters from the

three municipalities involved.

The association also sought and received a similar letter of support from the Berks Planning Commission. All the documentation was submitted to the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, an office in the U.S. Geological Survey, which approved the naming in May 2018.

The watershed association, a program of Berks Nature, removed more than 120 tires and tons of trash

from the creek's edge. Naming creeks can make a difference, say environmental experts, even with small tributaries such as Rabbit Run.

"We are so excited about the signage being placed on New Holland Road," said Jill Kemp, president of the watershed association, in a news release. "Rabbit Run is a really special stream, and many people don't even know it's there. But with these signs it'll be hard to miss."