

rails to trails

Fall.15

Inspiring Movement

THE RABBIT REVOLUTION

Massachusetts
Gets in Motion

Texas Trail
Prescriptions

Autumn Vistas
from *Trail
Traveler*

Burning Calories, Not
Coal: GHS Swamp
Rabbit Trail Leads
Greenville's Battle for
Health and Wellness



rails-to-trails
conservancy



I SUPPORT

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Name: Al Gerhardstein

Where I live: Cincinnati, Ohio

Age: 63

What I do: I'm a civil rights attorney. I enjoy cycling to work, bird watching and spending time with my wife, kids and grandchildren.

Greatest accomplishments: I am excited that a civil rights case I filed was decided by the U.S. Supreme Court this year and resulted in marriage equality for same-sex couples in all 50 states. I am also pleased that the police reforms we developed in Cincinnati 12 years ago serve as a model for cities across the country, and that we are part of the national conversation now underway regarding police reforms.

As for cycling, I am grateful that I have had the health to do several long cycle tours, including the 1,350-mile unsupported tandem ride I completed this year with my daughter, Jessica Gingold, from Cincinnati to Ferguson, Missouri, to New Orleans (pedalingjustice.com).

I am also happy to have been married 43 years to my wife, Mimi Gingold, and to have three fabulous kids: Adam Gerhardstein, who works with me in our civil rights law practice; Jessica, who is a third-year law school student and a juvenile justice advocate; and Ben Gerhardstein, a public health officer for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in San Francisco. All three kids commute by bike and love to bike!

A personal goal: I'd like to take a long bike tour with my grandkids. They are toddlers now, so I need to stay healthy!

A meaningful life story: My dad was a loyal worker for a large corporation. For decades, he accepted whatever position he was asked to fill; he was a conscientious truck driver, dock manager and then chicken farm manager. One day the corporation decided to close the chicken farm and buy eggs from a different provider. My dad was fired. No pension. No good job prospects, given his age. No thank you for years of loyal service. He never recovered from the disappointment. I was in college. I knew then I needed to help hold those in power to the principles we all share, like fairness and honesty, and I needed to ensure that all people were treated with dignity.

A person I admire: My sister Kathy lives with severe physical limitations imposed by multiple sclerosis, but she inspires me every day with her energy, creativity and curiosity.

My vision for biking and walking in America: As we proceed with urban redevelopment, I hope we will continue to make cycling easily available, with well-marked bike lanes and sharrows and with bike share options. Greater density promotes walking and cycling, and that makes us healthier. Longer bike trails will encourage more folks to try touring, and that would be great.

Why I support Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: It's common sense. We need to take advantage of all the rights of way that are available and repurpose them to encourage more safe options for walking, running and cycling. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy works toward those goals. Thank you!

Add your unique voice to the rail-trail movement by becoming a member of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Learn more at railstotrails.org, or call 202.331.9696.

8 The Rabbit Revolution
Burning calories, not coal: A former rail corridor once known for the coal engines that “hopped” along its marshy, uneven route, the 20-mile GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail is focused on a new kind of energy as a flagship for Greenville, South Carolina’s walking and biking revolution.

BY CAM TERWILLIGER



features

14 Trail Prescriptions

Physician, city commissioner, trail builder: Dr. Rose Gowen takes us through the evolution of her Rio Grande community in Texas from trail desert to “biking capital.”

BY AMY KAPP

16 Healthy Momentum in Massachusetts

In motion: It’s all hands on deck in the Bay State as it moves forward with an ambitious set of plans to fight obesity, create new trail connections and triple active-transportation use by 2020.

BY HEATHER BEASLEY DOYLE

20 A View From ... Trail Traveler

Harvest the autumn glory of these four stunning rail-trails recently featured in *Trail Traveler*, RTC’s new digital tablet magazine.

BY LAURA STARK



IAN CURCIO

KATY SILBERGER

departments

2 Point of View

3 Members Network

4 Tracks 'n' Ties

- Eye On: Georgia’s Firefly Trail
- Trail Tales: Tackling the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame

6 Greetings From ...

Pennsylvania, Illinois, Georgia and New Hampshire

On the cover: (left to right): Clark Gallivan and Rob Howell
Photo by Ian Curcio

24 Community Connections

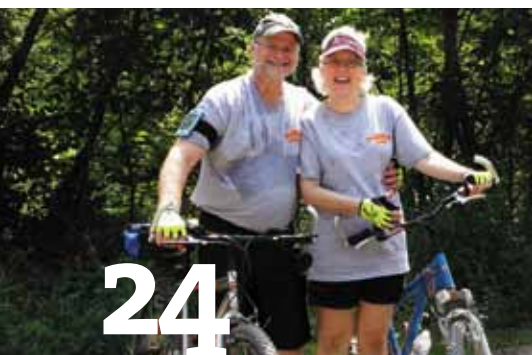
- Iowa: An unexpected moment on the High Trestle Trail
- Pennsylvania: Trails repair broken hearts in Pittsburgh
- Washington: Retirement brings new adventure to Anacortes couple

26 Rail-Trail Report

27 Destination: Pennsylvania

Anchored by historic Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, known as the “gateway to the Poconos,” the Lehigh Gorge Trail is an immaculate 26-mile route offering beautiful scenery and outdoor adventures of every kind for trail users.

BY SCOTT STARK



KARA LAUS



SCOTT STARK

Pride and Excitement

Looking back on this summer, two milestone events in June stand out. The first caused me to look back with pride, the second to look ahead with excitement.

On June 5, I was honored to speak at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Elroy-Sparta State Trail in Wisconsin, widely acknowledged as America's first rail-trail. During the program, speaker after speaker glowingly described what the trail has meant to the health of the people and the economies in the communities along its path. I swelled with pride when I thought about what has been accomplished in the decades since the opening of the Elroy-Sparta in 1965. What began with 32 miles in Wisconsin has now grown to more than 22,000 miles of rail-trail in all 50 states that are used by tens of millions of Americans every year.

But this is not time to declare our mission complete; this is when it gets exciting. With more than 22,000 miles of rail-trail on the ground, we now have the opportunity to connect these trails into regional trail systems. The vast majority of existing trails are well loved and heavily used. But we have not yet realized their full potential to improve the health of our communities because they were originally conceived as individual trails, not as segments of larger systems designed to facilitate active transportation, recreation and bicycle tourism.

When trail connectivity improves in urban or suburban settings, usage soars as more local people can safely and conveniently reach more nearby destinations by foot or bike. When connectivity improves on trails that link small towns in a scenic rural area, the trail itself can become a destination that attracts bicyclists—and their tourism dollars—from far and wide.

To seize this opportunity to create regional trail systems, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has launched an ambitious research project, the Trail Modeling and Assessment Platform (T-MAP). This initiative is creating a suite of innovative tools to inform future trail investment. We achieved an exciting milestone in June when we completed the first-ever national trail count. We collected data from 42 high-tech trail counters in 12 locations across the United States over a 365-day

period. This first-of-its-kind database will be used to create forecasting models that will permit us to project trail use on trails that have not yet been built. This new set of tools will permit us to conduct our work with a sophistication unimaginable just a few years ago.

While proud of all that our movement has achieved in the past, I am even more excited about what we are poised to accomplish in the future. And I will admit that I'm also proud that we are utilizing cutting-edge 21st-century technology to preserve priceless 19th-century rail corridors that might otherwise be lost forever.

Happy trails!



Keith Laughlin, President
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Elroy-Sparta
trail



DAVE JONASSEN

rails to trails

The magazine of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors to build healthier places for healthier people.

PRESIDENT

Keith Laughlin

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Guy O. Williams, Chair; M. Katherine Kraft; Gail Lipstein; John P. Rathbone; Chip Angle; Mike Cannon; Kenneth V. Cockrel Jr.; Matthew Cohen; David Ingemie; Rue Mapp; Frank Mulvey; Charles N. Marshall; Doug Monieson; Tim Noel; T. Rowe Price; Tom Petri

MAGAZINE STAFF

Editor-in-Chief Amy Kapp

Director of Communications Elizabeth Striano

Staff Writers Laura Stark, Katie Harris

Editorial Consultants Wendy Jordan, Sharon Congdon

Design/Production Manifest

Art Director Jeffrey Kibler

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy was incorporated in 1985 as a nonprofit charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and is a publicly supported organization as defined in Sections 170(b)(1)(A)(vi) and 509(a)(1). A copy of the current financial statement, or annual report, and state registration filed by RTC may be obtained by contacting RTC at the address listed below. Donations to RTC are tax-deductible.

RAILS-TO-TRAILS CONSERVANCY

Headquarters

2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20037-1213

Phone 202.331.9696

Email info@railstotrails.org

Websites railstotrails.org
trailink.com

Field and Regional offices:

Midwest Canal Winchester, Ohio
614.837.6782, midwest@railstotrails.org

Northeast Camp Hill, Pa.
717.238.1717, northeast@railstotrails.org

Western Oakland, Calif.
510.992.4662, western@railstotrails.org

Florida Tallahassee, Fla.
850.942.2379, rtcflorida@railstotrails.org

Rails to Trails is a benefit of membership in Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Regular membership is \$18 a year, \$5 of which supports the magazine. In addition to the magazine, members receive discounts on RTC gifts and publications. *Rails to Trails* is published four times a year—three in print, one digital—by RTC, a nonprofit charitable organization. Copyright 2015 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. ISSN 1523-4126. Printed in U.S.A.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to *Rails to Trails*, 2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20037-1213.



The Mark Twain Experience

I very much enjoyed the article “Rolling on the River.” I am an avid cyclist and use the [Shelby Farms] Greenline all the time. The article spoke of the Big River Crossing, the bike lane/cantilevered bridge next to the Harahan Bridge. Not only will the Big River Crossing let bikers and walkers off on the other side of the river, but the Mississippi River Corridor is working with the counties’ levee districts to take all the cattle gates and property gates off the levee on the western side of the Mississippi so that, in the near future, you can mountain bike all the way from Memphis to New Orleans on top of the levee, making for a bicycle version of the Mark Twain/Huck Finn Mississippi River experience. This has never ever been done before along the Mississippi.

James S. Gilliland
MEMPHIS, TENN.

Thanks, James! We continue to be impressed by the ways trails in Memphis are creating new connections—and new adventures—for residents and visitors.

But If You Want to Bike ...

The Fall 2014 magazine had a wonderful story on visiting the Chessie Nature Trail and the surrounding area of Lexington, Virginia. It was written from the standpoint of a walker, but there are a couple of pointers for bikers using the trail. There are a number of fences and gates that are not easy to get a bike over. Additionally, the eastern half of the trail runs through a cattle pasture with lots of items on the trail to try to avoid with your bike tires. The review section of **TrailLink.com** has more information on these issues.

Bob Youker
ROCKVILLE, MD.

Thank you for your comments! RTC always encourages users of all types to do their research to ensure their experience is safe and fun!

Proof Is in the Trail

I just read the new issue of the magazine with letters and an article commenting about crime coming along a proposed trail being the heart of people’s objections.

Several decades ago, when the Burke-Gilman Trail was proposed near my house in Seattle, people worried about crime coming along the trail. Then it was noticed that a disused, overgrown trackway invited mischief anyway, like kids sneaking there to smoke or, even more dangerous, to set off fireworks. The fire department was called in about twice a year.

The trail was built and paved, and it is well used. Now volunteer labor is removing alien vegetation and planting natives along the edges to create a ribbon of urban forest.

Margaret Holton
SEATTLE, WASH.

As always, we’re pleased to have another example of the incredible benefits trails bring to their local communities.

Trail Travelers by RV

We look forward to each issue of the magazine and really like the articles in the new app, *Trail Traveler*. My husband and I spend our summers traveling America and Canada and “collecting” rail-trails. These publications are our inspiration.

We wish, however, that you would add local RV-compatible campgrounds in your “Where to Stay” suggestions at the end of the destination articles.

We live full time in a 40-foot motorhome, carrying our bikes on back and towing our Jeep. We are always hunting for RV campgrounds that accept big rigs and are near the trails. This is not always easy to do, which is why we’d love to see you add this item. Perhaps doing so would encourage local communities to include us RV travelers when they plan access to their trails.

Jan Lincoln
SIOUX FALLS, S.D.

Survey Says

Many thanks for the survey results in Keith Laughlin’s column [Spring/Summer 2015] that show voters of all political persuasions favor higher funding for new bike trails and “Complete Streets” design concepts intended to make biking and walking in urban and suburban areas much safer. Spending \$27 out of every \$100 in transportation funds for them sure sounds better than \$1.50 or \$2!

Many people will object to higher funding for non-highway transportation systems as long as Congress refuses to raise fuel taxes high enough to pay for urgently needed upgrades to roads and bridges. It would take “only” 60 cents per gallon more to restore the highway trust fund enough to fix ALL of the bridges and roads considered deficient in the most recent national civil engineering report. With fuel prices much lower now than a year ago, we are missing a golden opportunity to solve this funding shortfall and make it easier to sell higher funding for biking and pedestrians from other fund sources.

Michael Burrill
CINCINNATI, OHIO

Thanks, Michael! Interested readers can access extensive details about RTC’s recent national transportation poll at railstotrails.org/poll.

Sharing the Trail

Special shout-out to Clifford Miles of Mountain Lakes, New Jersey, for sending us this great photo from last year’s Pedal for Preservation on the Columbia Trail (Chester, New Jersey), sponsored by the New Jersey Land Conservancy.



We’d like to hear from you. Write to “Members Network,” Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2121 Ward Ct., NW, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20037. Or e-mail: magazine@railstotrails.org. Letters may be edited for publication.

EYE ON:

Georgia's Firefly Trail

By Laura Stark

In the late 1800s, when Georgia Railroad trains rumbled through the rural darkness between Athens and Union Point, embers from the wood-burning engines would flicker in the night sky. Farmers began calling the line "Firefly." Today, locals are hoping to spark interest in a 39-mile multi-use trail along that old rail corridor.

Mike Hall, president of Firefly Trail, Inc., says the group is busy planning the trail's first section in Athens. "We want to get something on the ground so people can start seeing the benefits of it and see it as a catalyst for getting the rest of the trail done. We hope it will bring a lot of momentum."

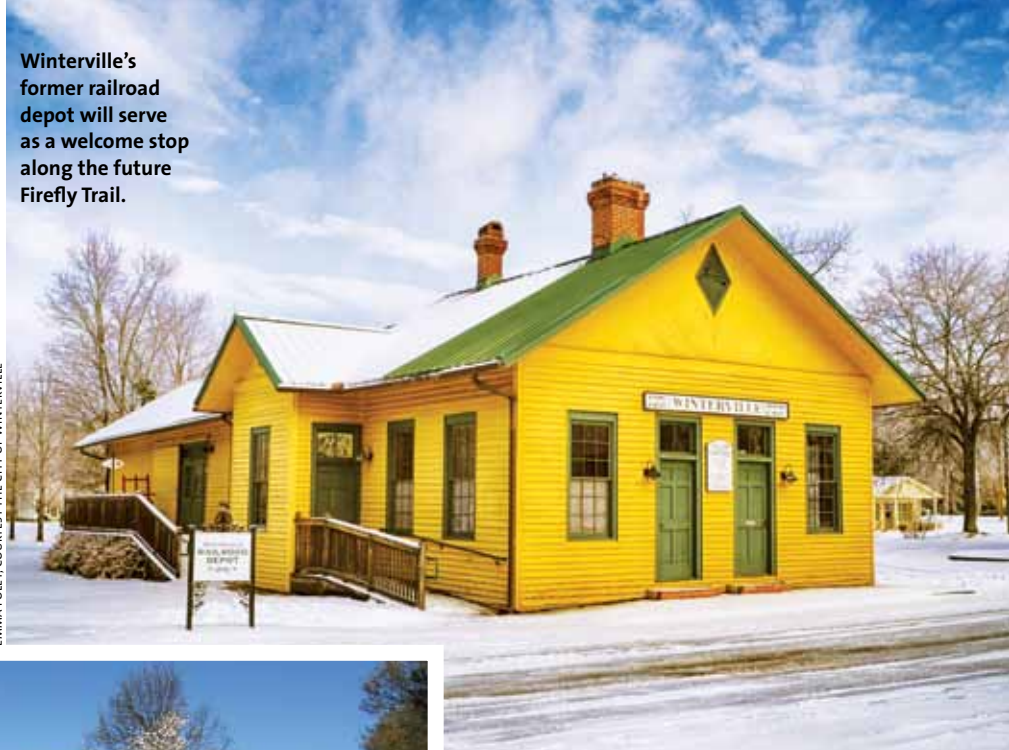
Athens, a thriving college town that is home to the University of Georgia, will be the northern gateway to the trail. Construction of the Firefly Trail here is anticipated to begin in January 2016 and be completed by year's end.

"Currently, we're focusing our efforts on the northernmost eight-tenths of a mile, from East Broad Street near downtown to Old Winterville Road," says Nancy Denson, Athens-Clarke County mayor. "This is the most expensive and difficult portion of the entire trail, but it will be incredibly scenic. Almost immediately, trail users will cross the North Oconee River and Wilkerson Street on a bridge about 40 feet high and some 600 feet long. The trail will then enter Dudley Park, where trail users can connect with the North Oconee River Greenway trail and also see the historic Trail Creek trestle, which R.E.M. made famous on the back cover of its 'Murmur' album."

From Athens, the trail will head east to Winterville and then south through

Winterville's former railroad depot will serve as a welcome stop along the future Firefly Trail.

EMMA FOLEY, COURTESY THE CITY OF WINTERVILLE



Downtown Maxeys, a charming community along the future rail-trail, as seen from the remnants of the rail corridor

COURTESY FIREFLY TRAIL, INC.

Trail under construction: Firefly Trail

Location: Athens to Union Point, Georgia

Used railroad corridor: Athens Branch of the Georgia Railroad

Length: 39 miles

Surface: Athens-Clarke County will pave the northern end of the trail with concrete; the rural sections of the trail in Oglethorpe and Greene counties will most likely be gravel.

a handful of small towns—many of which began in the railroad heyday—to end at Union Point. The rail-trail will roll through open fields, pastures and forested areas, where deer, opossums, armadillos, coyotes and a variety of birds might be spotted.

"I think the Firefly Trail will be a really good shot in the arm for Winterville," says Emily Pennington Eisenman, Winterville's mayor. "It will bring recreational opportunities, economic development and tourism. It's really exciting."

In the quiet countryside, the past still lingers. In Winterville, the trail will pass through a concentration of historical buildings, including a former train depot that has been renovated and painted a welcoming yellow, and is now used as a community center, and the Carter-Coile Country Doctor's Museum, which provides a rare glimpse into a rural medical practice from the late 1800s. But the trail also will offer something new to the area: a safe place for residents to walk and bike.

"I live in a small town of 220 residents that lies almost in the middle of the old rail corridor," says John Stephens, former Maxeys mayor and past president of Firefly Trail, Inc. "We have streets, but no sidewalks. Presently, if one of our young mothers takes her children out walking, it's in the street. The trail would be a safer alternative."

Although much more needs to be done to complete the trail's entire 39-mile length, Denson says the effort to build the Firefly Trail enjoys strong community support.

"I know almost every trail ever built has had to deal with opposition, but I have heard very little opposition to this trail in Athens-Clarke County," she says. "I think most people are looking forward to the trail and its promise to breathe energy and investment into our community."

For more information, visit fireflytrail.com.

trail tales

Tackling the Rail-Trail Hall of Fame

By Laura Stark

While working at Georgia's Clayton State University near Atlanta, Joyce Swofford and Martha Wicker found they had a lot in common: Both enjoy biking, hiking and skiing. In 2011, their friendship and passion for the outdoors blossomed into one of the biggest undertakings of

trails independently before, but a chance conversation in late 2010 set in motion the concerted effort to do them all. "While attending my uncle's funeral in West Virginia, my cousin introduced me to a member of her church who told me about the Hall of

Fame trails," Wicker says. "I was so inspired by his stories that I researched the trails when I got back home and convinced my friend Joyce that we should bike all the Hall of Fame trails in the country."

Unbeknownst to the two friends, the church-member—Chris Bracknell, a 20-year

trails, especially liked the Virginia Creeper Trail and Missouri's Katy Trail, which transverses nearly the entire state. Wicker, who loves tunnels, got a kick out of Idaho's Route of the Hiawatha, which has nearly a dozen of them, including the 1.6-mile-long Taft Tunnel in the Bitterroot Mountains.

"One thing about crossing the country doing rail-trails is that you see parts of the country that lots of people don't see," Bracknell says. "Rail-trails take you into these little towns and away from big tourist areas. You really get the feel of where you are."

For those who want to follow in their footsteps, Swofford recommends, "Plan in advance, at least two months ahead. Get trail maps, and find out what hotels there are. Plan your logistics and know where you're going. See how you can group trails together, and do a bunch at once."

Bracknell seconds the need for research and notes that he uses **TrailLink.com** to plan his trips, finding the firsthand reviews from other travelers especially helpful.

"We read a lot of blogs from people who have ridden on those trails," Wicker adds. "We like to mix ice cream places with our trail riding, and we find out about those on blogs. One time we heard

about a creamery that was a mile from the Little Miami Scenic Trail, but we almost missed that turn." She says with a laugh, "If we had, we would have been devastated!" The friends have their own blog of their trail adventures at **georgiapedalpushers.wordpress.com**.

Joyce Swofford (left) and Martha Wicker (right) enjoy Vermont's Island Line Rail Trail.



COURTESY MARTHA WICKER AND JOYCE SWOFFORD

their lives—to bike all 27 trails in the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) Rail-Trail Hall of Fame.

As these exemplary rail-trails are located all around the country, and several stretch 100 miles or more, this was no easy feat. Says Swofford, "When I get tired, I just think of what my son, also a biker, says: 'Just push and pedal, push and pedal; you can do it!'"

And indeed they can. By the end of September, the two friends, one turning 60 this year and the other 69, will have crossed off the last trail on their list.

Both women had been on some of the Hall of Fame

RTC member who lives in Virginia—also wrote a letter to RTC to announce the completion of his Hall of Fame trail goal. During the interview process for this story, the connection among the three of them was revealed, and the trio hope one day to meet for a ride.

With such diversity—from New York City's famed High Line to the George S. Mickelson Trail through South Dakota's Black Hills—the list offers something for everyone. Swofford, who favors rural



COURTESY CHRIS BRACKNELL

Chris Bracknell (right) explores Alabama's Chief Ladiga Trail.

"When you're riding these Hall of Fame trails, you see the U.S. in a way that you couldn't in a car," Wicker says. "It's like the whole rest of the world has stopped, and you're just back to nature."

When asked what he would recommend travelers pack for their trail trips, Bracknell is quick to say, "Definitely a camera!"

For more information about RTC's Rail-Trail Hall of Fame, visit: **railstotrails.org/halloffame**.

Share Your Trail Tales with RTC



[Facebook.com/railstotrails](https://www.facebook.com/railstotrails)



[Instagram.com/railstotrails](https://www.instagram.com/railstotrails)



[Pinterest.com/railstotrails](https://www.pinterest.com/railstotrails)



[Twitter.com/railstotrails](https://www.twitter.com/railstotrails)

► GET YOUR TAIL ON THE TRAIL IN PENNSYLVANIA

D&L Trail: Get Your Tail on the Trail! (tailonthetrail.org) was designed as a fun way to combat the high rates of obesity, diabetes and coronary heart disease in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L) and St. Luke's University Health Network teamed up to establish the program, which promotes healthy lifestyles and outdoor fitness through special activities, such as the 165 Mile Challenge. Participants in the challenge register online to log their miles walked, run or biked over a six-month period, from May 1 to Nov. 1. The goal of 165 miles is in recognition of the D&L Trail, which will one day span that length in its journey from Wilkes-Barre to Philadelphia. Another activity, the Fall Frolic Along the Towpath, will take place Saturday, Oct. 17, on the D&L Trail segment through Walnutport. Frolic attendees will learn creative ways to improve their health, how to properly fit a bike to their body, tips for finding the best running and walking shoes, and more.

Length & surface: 13.9 miles; ballast, cinder and crushed stone ♦ **End points:** Near Riverview Drive at the river's bend (Walnutport) to Bridge Street (Weissport)

► RAISE THE (BARN) ROOF IN ILLINOIS

Fox River Trail: For old-fashioned fun on the western outskirts of modern Chicago, plan to visit the Fox Valley Folk Music & Storytelling Festival (foxvalleyfolk.com) on Labor Day weekend, Sept. 6–7. The event is Illinois' largest folk festival, with musical and storytelling acts running continuously on eight stages from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday and Monday. One highlight is a community barn dance; attendees also can enjoy music and dance workshops, entertainment for children, and a sale of folk art including stained glass, tin ware, pottery and woven goods. Musicians are encouraged to bring their instruments to join impromptu jam sessions all over Geneva's Island Park, where the event takes place; folks are welcome to picnic while they listen. The park is smack dab in the middle of the picturesque Fox River Trail, which closely follows the river as it continues north to Algonquin and south to Oswego.

Length & surface: 43.4 miles; asphalt, concrete, crushed stone ♦ **End points:** Bolz Road at Sandbloom Road (Algonquin) to Washington Street at Oswego Village Hall (Oswego)

COURTESY DELAWARE & LEHIGH NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR



To learn more about these and other trails, check out TrailLink.com, a searchable database of more than 30,000 miles of trails nationwide. The website and TrailLink apps include detailed trail descriptions, interactive maps, photographs and first-hand ratings and reviews.

TrailLink
By Rails-to-Trails Conservancy



◀ A BOUNTY OF BEAUTY IN GEORGIA

Atlanta BeltLine: Already a beauty, the developing Atlanta BeltLine, which connects several parks and neighborhoods around the city, will get even more showy this fall. The city's largest temporary public art exhibition—Art on the Atlanta BeltLine (art.beltline.org)—will kick off with a whimsical Lantern Parade on Saturday evening, Sept. 12. Thousands will participate in the glowing procession of lanterns and large lighted puppets along the Eastside Trail, one of the beltline's completed segments.

For several weeks (September–November), murals and other art-work will be on display along the trail, and performances by musicians, dancers, actors and acrobats will take place trailside over three weekends: Sept. 12–13, Sept. 19–20 and Oct. 10–11.

Length & surface: A total of 33 miles are planned for the Atlanta BeltLine; currently, 6.8 miles are concrete paved and open in four disconnected segments. ♦ **End points:** The trail will form a loop around the city, from Lindbergh Drive in the north to Lee Street in the south and from Marietta Boulevard in the west to DeKalb Avenue in the east.



◀ VIE FOR PIE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Northern Rail Trail: This Labor Day, let your labors on New Hampshire's Northern Rail Trail be rewarded in the best way possible: with pie! Participants in the Rail Trail Ramble (headrest.org/rail-trail-ramble) can walk, run or cycle along an 8-mile section of the trail from Lebanon to Enfield on Monday, Sept. 7. While only the first 50 people who reach Enfield get pie, everyone can enjoy a delicious barbecue lunch afterward in Lebanon's Colburn Park. Water will be available all along the course. This scenic stretch of the trail includes beautiful trestles, rock cliffs and lake views, though the adventurous may want to explore the trail's full length of 50-plus miles.

Length & surface: 58 miles; cinder, crushed stone ♦ **End points:** Spencer Street (Lebanon) to River Road near Hannah Duston Park & Ride (Boscawen)

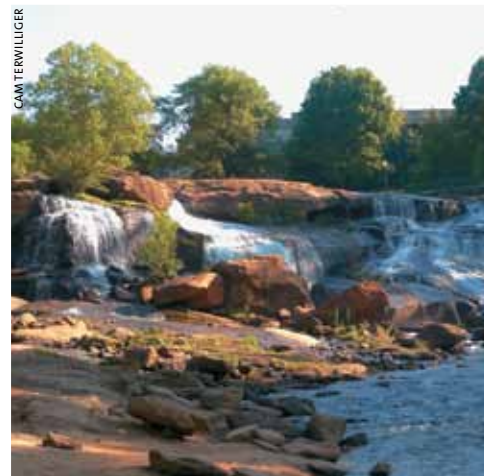
Do you have a perfect rail-trail "postcard" for **Greetings From ...**? Send a photo and event information, along with how we can contact you, to: magazine@railstotrails.org or Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Magazine/Greetings From, 2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20037.



Swamp Rabbit Station, a pocket park (built by the Leadership Greenville program), was created to give an identity to the Berea community. The park was purposely designed to accommodate the large turning radii of hand cyclists.



IAN CURCIO
CAM TERWILLIGER



IAN CURCIO

The bbit Rev



olution

By Cam Terwilliger

Nestled in the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the city of Greenville, South Carolina, has a history as up-and-down as the peaks and valleys it borders. In the late 1800s, the city surged to prominence as the beating heart of the South's textile industry, with a parade of red brick mills along the Reedy River spinning cotton into valuable fabrics. In the 1960s, however, the city fell on hard times when residents fled to the suburbs and left the urban core to languish with vacant storefronts and crumbling warehouses. A couple of decades later, the 1980s saw the city roll up its sleeves to embark on a revitalization effort that would ultimately give birth to the Greenville of today: a forward-looking town bustling with condos, restaurants, cafés and festivals.

By now, this urban revitalization is a familiar story, but that doesn't mean the revolutions have ceased in Greenville. In fact, this revitalization has made way for a brand-new kind of change: a revolution focused on healthy recreation and transportation through walking and biking.

The flagship of this revolution is the Greenville Health System (GHS) Swamp Rabbit Trail. A nearly 20-mile greenway that opened in 2009, the GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail begins just north of the town of Travelers Rest, winds south along the Reedy River through downtown Greenville and then continues farther south to reach Greenville Technical College. After 15.7 miles, the trail takes

a few "hops" farther south in a series of noncontiguous sections. On the other side of a residential neighborhood, a 1.4-mile segment follows the Reedy River to connect to the northern part of Lake Conestee Nature Park, a 400-acre preserve of wetlands and forests. After a short on-street connection, another 1.8-mile segment runs through the southern portion of the park. Finally, a 1-mile section can



be found in the town of Fountain Inn, South Carolina, still farther south.

When I visit the trail the first weekend in May, it is crowded with walkers, running-club members in matching T-shirts and cyclists of every age, all pacing themselves along the path, which offers views of riverbanks lush with hardwood forest laced by leafy green vines. Some cyclists ride in athletic gear, vigorously hunched over their handlebars. At the other end of the spectrum, many walkers simply stroll in their weekend attire: sandals, T-shirts, jeans and sunglasses. As the trail enters downtown, it threads through Falls Park, where the nation's only natural urban waterfall tumbles over tawny brown rocks at the park's center. Falling from a powder blue sky, light glints off its current.

"Most people don't like to go to the gym," says David Owens, a librarian at a local college. He's out for a walk on the Falls Park trail section with his friend Morgan Borja, a courier at a nearby law firm. "This is a much more fun way to get exercise. It's so much more beautiful."

As Owens and Borja recount their weekly usage of the trail, they shoot glances toward a festival setting up on the lawn behind them. Band members are tuning their guitars, and conversation is everywhere as people mill among the booths of food vendors. The swelling crowd shouldn't come as any surprise, given that the most recent study of the trail found that a half-million people used it in 2012–2013, up 20 percent from the year before. Greenvillians are already speculating that the numbers will be even higher in 2014–2015.

"On lunch break at my office, literally everyone is out on the trail to get the blood flowing," Borja says. "It's nice that there are restaurants and things to do



along the trail too. There are plenty of reasons to get out and use it."

As its name suggests, the GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail owes much of its success to the sponsorship of Greenville Health System, a local hospital network that has focused increasingly on promoting general wellness in the region in addition to treating acute illnesses and injuries. In 2007, GHS recognized the trail as a rare opportunity to boost this endeavor. The network pledged \$100,000 per year for 10 years to develop and market the GHS Swamp Rabbit, an effort to reduce the Greenville County population's physical inactivity and all the risks associated with it—which are substantial. Analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found inactivity linked to more than 9 million cases of cardiovascular disease, resulting in approximately \$24 billion in medical costs. Other risks include diabetes and obesity. These issues are particularly urgent in the United States, since it is estimated that 48 percent of adults here don't meet the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services' recommended levels of activity.

"Being healthy doesn't have to be expensive when you have parks and trails right outside your door," says Rebecca Cooper, GHS community and customer relations coordinator. "The greenway opens up an avenue to fitness for families that might not have had access in the past, or to people who wouldn't have felt safe exercising outdoors before."

Left to right: William Houston, Cameron Townes and LaQuan Priest





Left to right: William Doyle and Ty Houchand

IAN CURCIO

A resident of Travelers Rest, Cooper has seen several people using the trail to get in shape or to rehabilitate after knee or hip surgery. “We couldn’t be more pleased with how it’s turned out. We see the Swamp Rabbit Trail as one of the best investments that GHS has ever made,” Cooper says. “I even met my husband on the trail,” she adds with a laugh. “So it’s certainly changed my life.”

The GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail inherits the second half of its colorful name from the fact that most of its length is built on the bed of the old “Swamp Rabbit” railroad that followed the basin of the Reedy River, its uneven tracks giving the train a distinct “hopping” quality. However, the soot-covered engines that once churned along this marshy stretch of ground are long gone. Now the corridor focuses on human energy: Instead of burning coal or diesel, it’s burning calories.

Game Changer

An expert in public health, Furman University Professor Julian Reed has studied the trail for three years and has concluded that it’s been a successful “public health intervention.”

“According to the CDC, the most common physical activity is walking, so to have a built environment like this

enables people to do that very conveniently,” Reed says. “At the end of the day, our bodies don’t care how we expend calories, they just want us to expend them. If you do it through active transportation, it’s a great way to increase your physical activity at the same time that you can get from point A to point B.”

If our bodies don’t care how we burn calories, then the trail makes thoughtful use of that fact. In addition to the walking and biking it enables, the GHS Swamp Rabbit connects to football and baseball fields, tennis and volleyball courts, golf courses, hiking trails and a local YMCA. Recently, it’s even been connected to a Travelers Rest bike skills course, a series of reddish dirt hills that allows people to hone their mountain biking or BMX (bicycle motocross) expertise. But ultimately, the trail’s most important function isn’t about becoming a high-caliber athlete or shedding as many pounds as possible. Rather, it offers a way for those who wouldn’t normally be active to get moderate exercise—like a brisk walk.

“Just being moderately active is much more important than people used to think,” Reed says. “Low levels of cardiorespiratory fitness have been identified in the last three to four years as one of the greatest contributors to mortality.” A 2012 study reported in *The Lancet*, one of the world’s leading medical journals, estimates that 5.3 million deaths around the world can be attributed to lack of physical activity—a rate that suggests it may be just as hazardous as smoking.

One reason the Swamp Rabbit Trail has been embraced so intensely is that it provides an outlet for healthy recreation that is unique in Greenville County. In 2014, Smart Growth America ranked the Greenville Metro area as one of the top three cities suffering from urban sprawl, making opportunities for walking and biking rare. Viewed in isolation, this statistic might seem daunting to overcome, but there’s a change in the air in Greenville County; you can feel it.

No place has caught Swamp Rabbit fever more intensely than Travelers Rest, which was once nothing more than a dusty “drive-through town.” Thanks to all the visitors brought by the GHS Swamp Rabbit, it’s now become a hot destination, with a flurry of restaurants and bars cropping up along the bike path. Many are named in honor of the trail, such as the Swamp Rabbit Brewery & Taproom. Others have monikers that refer to bicycles or the old railroad—Whistlestop at the American Café, for example, and Tandem Creperie and Coffeehouse, with a tandem bicycle hanging outside the door. Greenville County estimates that its economy was boosted by \$6.7 million from 2012 to 2013 because of the trail. And most of those dollars came to the businesses through travelers on foot or bicycle.



The GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail has spurred the creation of new restaurants and bars in Traveler’s Rest—now a popular destination for trail users.

“When people saw what was happening with the trail, it got a broad conversation started about what was possible from a community standpoint,” says Ty Houck, director of Greenways, Natural and Historic Resources for the Greenville County Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. “After other towns saw what a trail could do, everyone said, ‘Hey this works. We want it in our town.’”

Trail fever has spread through the region like wildfire. Greenville has earmarked \$2.5 million for a new 4.2-mile southward extension, and the next two towns to the south—Mauldin and



Adaptive cyclists, trainers, physicians and the president and CEO of the Greenville Health System frequent the trail for work and pleasure.

IAN CURCIO

Simpsonville—have begun raising funds to build northward to connect to it. Hoping to duplicate the results seen in Travelers Rest, the western towns of Pickens and Easley arranged to build their own 7.3-mile path, the Doodle Rail Trail, which opened Memorial Day weekend. Demand for green transportation has even been high enough to support a nascent bike-share program, Greenville B-Cycle. So far, the program has eight stations throughout the city; it aims to reach 15 stations by 2017. Thanks to GPS monitors attached to the bikes, B-Cycle is able to report that the GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail is one of the most popular routes taken by users.

Given all this enthusiasm, it's difficult to recall that establishing the GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail was a 10-year battle that was anything but a guaranteed victory. Financial issues, legal challenges and concerns over crime on the trail all presented obstacles that had to be overcome. Yet, if there were a lot of skeptics in 1999 when the railroad corridor was first purchased, there aren't many left. "Now people just want to know how soon we can extend it," Houck says. "There's no debate about whether we should."

A Trail for Everyone

If you take the trail north from downtown, you'll follow the Reedy River into a landscape that's half natural and half industrial. It's an in-between zone of the city that not many people visited before the existence of the trail, but now is going

through its own transformation. Not far from switchyards, warehouses that once were abandoned now offer homes to local businesses including Swamp Rabbit CrossFit and Swamp Rabbit Cafe & Grocery. Farther north, the trail continues into the low-income community of Berea, which recently gained its own distinct identity on the trail, thanks to a park containing a refurbished locomotive.

As a result of its proximity, many disadvantaged youth from areas such as Berea have begun hitting the trail, notably through the Momentum Bike Clubs program organized by Clemson University. Through four clubs in the area, the program uses weekly, mentor-guided cycling trips as a way to build healthy habits, confidence and discipline among middle school students from underprivileged areas. Every year, a new crop of students receives loaned bicycles, and if they participate in the club throughout the year, they get to keep the bikes for good.

"All of our clubs have been positioned to take advantage of the Swamp Rabbit, and 90 percent of our miles are biked there," says David Taylor, the program's director. "We would not exist if it were not for the Swamp Rabbit Trail. It allows you to explore downtown or Travelers Rest or Cleveland Park. If the trail weren't there, I don't think we'd ever be able to get those kids safely on bikes to all those destinations."

The club based at Berea Middle School has earned a reputation as a par-

ticularly dedicated group. It won the first annual Momentum Bike Clubs contest in 2014 as the club that rode the greatest total distance: 700 miles, including all the pedaling done by students and mentors. Developing healthy habits like this among South Carolina's youth is particularly important. In a collaborative study, the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that the state's percentage of obese youth between the ages of 10 and 17 is the second highest in the nation at 21.5 percent.

However, if you talk to the kids in the Berea club, they'll say they're simply having a good time. "I joined the club mainly so I could make new friends and travel to new places," says 13-year-old



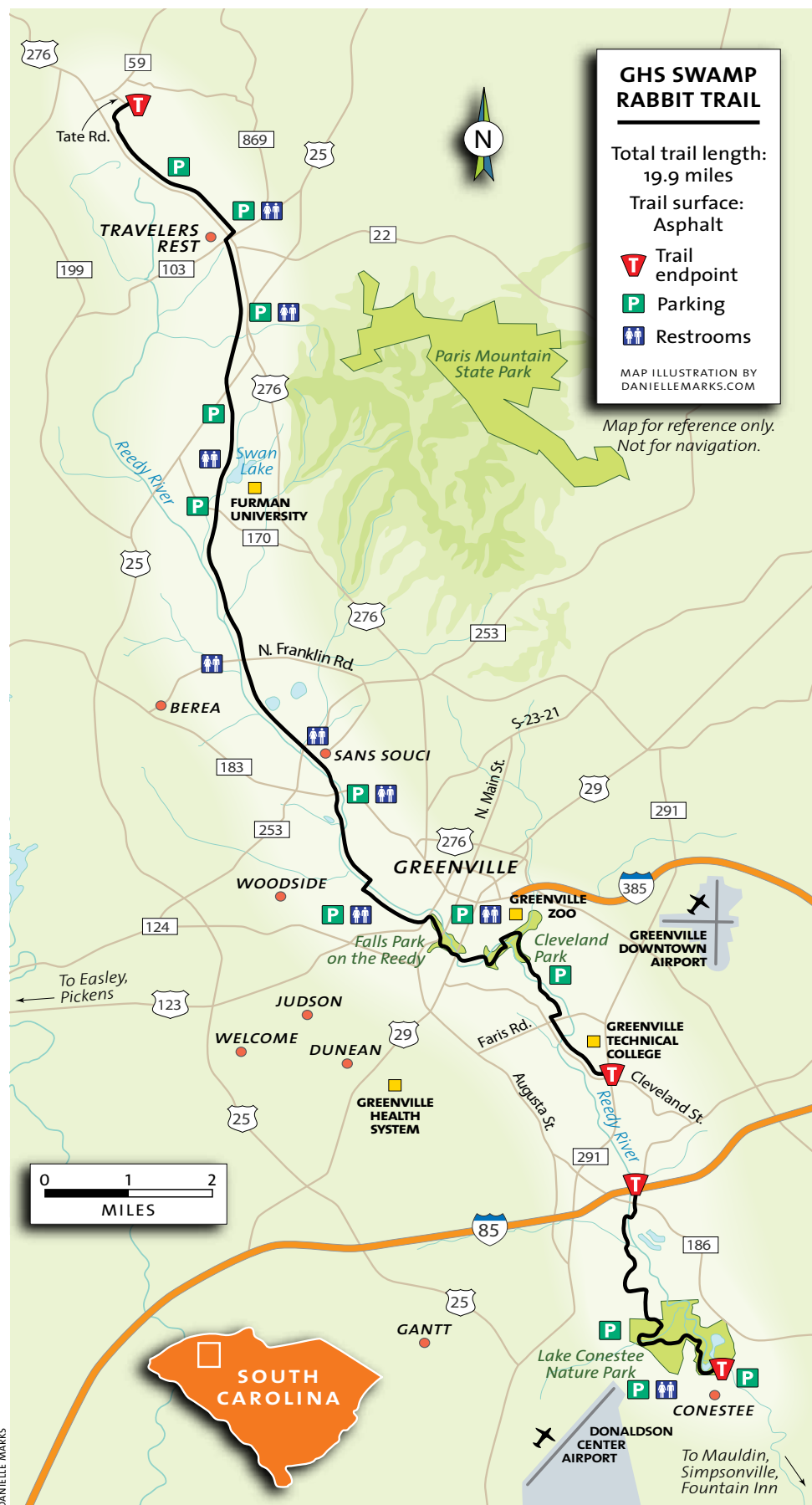
CAM TERWILLIGER

Lelya Powell. “The trail is really fun, and it’s not too far from my house. As soon as I get my bike, I’m going to be on the trail every day!”

But perhaps there’s nothing that demonstrates the wide-ranging appeal of the GHS Swamp Rabbit Trail more than the annual Swamp Rabbit 5k in Travelers Rest. With 6,000 registered racers, the event effectively doubles the town’s population. Set along the trail, the inaugural 5k officially opened the GHS Swamp Rabbit six years ago, the runners “cutting” the ceremonial ribbon by gleefully crashing through it. Though the event attracts competitive runners, what is unique about the race is that it is heavily marketed to people who wouldn’t normally run a 5k. Its modest \$6 entry fee is meant to attract even the most trepidatious racers. After the starting gun fires, a wave of the swift-of-foot bolts down the trail and into the forest. Next comes a second wave: those who are walking, pushing strollers or gliding along in wheelchairs. The racers range from 4-year-olds to those well over 80, and for many, this is their first introduction to walking, running or rolling for recreation. Chad Carlson, who coordinates the race for GHS, has received hundreds of emails from people saying that the Swamp Rabbit 5k has inspired them to take control of their fitness.

“Some people will just barely be able to walk the trail one year,” Carlson says. “Then they’ll email me next year to say that they’ve gotten more active and that they were able to run the whole thing easily this time. The race takes about an hour and 15 minutes, but the last 15 minutes is my favorite part. That’s when you see people crossing the finish line who’ve never walked that far in their lives. The smiles on their faces are incredible, and we’re just cheering for them like crazy. It just shows people what’s possible. It just shows you that you *can* do it.”

Cam Terwilliger is a freelance writer living in Baltimore, Maryland, where he enjoys riding his single-speed bicycle around town.





DR. ROSE GOWEN

Prescribing a Healthier Brownsville Through Trails

By Amy Kapp

In the mid-2000s, the City of Brownsville, Texas, began a massive effort to improve the health of its 185,000 residents when studies showed an extreme prevalence of obesity and chronic disease among children and adults. Leading this charge is Dr. Rose Gowen—city commissioner since 2009 and a physician of more than 20 years—who is dedicated to transforming her hometown into a more active place to live.

Through collaboration with the University of Texas (UT) at Brownsville School of Public Health, Dr. Gowen was instrumental in developing the city's first farmers market, which was recognized as a model of excellence by the Texas Department of Health and the U.S. Mexico Border Health Commission.

She also helped pass the city's first commercial sidewalk and Complete Streets resolutions, the latter of which reserves 10 percent of street development funds for the creation of walking and biking infrastructure. In 2011, she was elected to the Brownsville Community

Improvement Corporation (BCIC), which completed a 1-mile rail-trail through one of the most disadvantaged areas of the city in 2013. Brownsville now is embarking on a five-year plan to complete 23 miles of new trails in a low-income area in the southernmost part of the city.

In June 2015, the Texas Legislature passed a House resolution recognizing Brownsville as the Bicycling Capital of the Rio Grande Valley. We recently spoke with Dr. Gowen to learn about Brownsville's health-trail transformation.

How did your work as a physician motivate you to get involved in a community-wide health and wellness effort?

In 2006, the UT-Brownsville School of Public Health came knocking on my door to ask if I'd write articles on the importance of nutrition and healthy food choices. They presented me with data showing that 80 percent of Brownsville residents were overweight, and one in three was

diabetic. I was blown away. I thought, "If I see one patient at a time, 20 to 25 per day, in a community of 185,000 people, I'm not even making a dent."

Many of the issues my female patients had—diabetes and certain cancers—were very much related to the fact that they were overweight. I knew I couldn't treat those issues without addressing their diet and exercise habits. But what really influenced me to get involved on a larger level was when I talked to patients who were 20 to 30 pounds overweight about the importance of a healthy living weight. In a community where 80 percent of the people are overweight, that's on the small end. They would go home to people who viewed them as [healthy]; why would they follow my direction?

I realized that unless we shifted the definition of health community-wide, doctors were going to have a difficult time changing individual behaviors.

How did Brownsville's wider community health initiative get off the ground, and

what made the Belden rail-trail project a priority?

The initial driver was the school of public health in the early 2000s. They developed a community advisory board made up of representatives from grocery stores, hospitals and clinics. We started writing newsletters and sending community health professionals into the neighborhoods to talk about health and wellness.

As time went on, and more information came out, the Brownsville Community Improvement Commission [BCIC] started listening more. And where BCIC really built momentum was on the issue of trails. The Belden Trail was the first big push. [The project was first conceptualized in 2009 and completed in 2013.] It's located in West Brownsville, in one of the lowest-income areas of our city. There was a big opportunity to prove how a trail could improve safety and increase property values in a low-income area. We were determined not just to make a trail, but to make it a model for other neighborhoods.

What made it possible to get this project off the ground? Were there any major challenges, and how did you overcome them?

The conversation at the city level prior to 2009 was not about building trails or sidewalks. We had only one trail, 8 miles long, funded by the Texas Department of Transportation [TxDOT]. Brownsville had passed a sidewalk ordinance and a Complete Streets ordinance, but this was the first trail anybody tried to fund without a big funder like TxDOT.

A lot of people ask us how we did it all in such a short time with very little money. The answer: We had to get really creative and leverage people's dollars.

Because this project was led by BCIC and not the city, it was more off the radar. The BCIC had more leeway in its design and in recruiting funding partners. We started with a \$150,000 Texas Parks and Wildlife Grant and reached out to our local bus system, which had

some grant funds to improve access to bus stops. They used the funds to create sidewalks to connect local neighborhoods to the trail—and connect those sidewalks to bus stops. It was the first sidewalk project West Brownsville had seen in 30 years.

We also reached out to the federal Community Development Block Grant [CDBG] program. We worked out an even swap with the city; we gave them the CDBG funds for their street projects, and they gave us funds for the trail's development. With all that, we were able to put together \$800,000 to complete the trail.

We approached BuildingCommunity Workshop, a nonprofit design firm in Dallas that was working on a Ford Grant with one of the city's largest housing developers to improve housing and transportation. We asked them to design the trail in order to improve transportation. Ford liked the idea, and we got an excellent designer for free.

How did the community respond to the trail plans?

The design firm's mantra is to never design anything without first going to the community. They hosted several community meetings, and the rooms were packed. From the outset, people embraced the project.

At the far end of the trail corridor is an elementary school and three small homes that are separated from the corridor by a fence. The homeowners came to the sessions and said, "We can't let our children out to play." After the rail was taken up, that part of the corridor became a dirt alleyway. Teenagers would go and race cars and do donuts, and they would regularly knock into the fencing. The families were afraid their kids would get hit by a car.

We started extra police patrols until we could block the alley off for trail construction. Now those houses have brand-new bicycles out front, and you can see the kids walking on the trail to school.

What's the overall impact you've seen since the trail's development?

We don't have counters on the trail yet, but it's used a lot by the community.

A stadium used by the public school district is directly accessible from the trail. On Friday evenings, you see people of all shapes and sizes walking to the football game instead of driving. You can also see houses that have fresh coats of paint that didn't before.

A community garden was created at the far end of the trail. There's life in an area that was once just an alleyway where people would race cars and dump tires and trash. Along many parts of the trail, what once were little more than parking lots are now vibrant places to walk and bike.

The trail has given people pride in their community.

What's next for Brownsville?

Through a plastic bag ban fund, we were able to put \$200,000 toward creation of a Hike and Bike Trail Master Plan. Twenty-three miles of trails along a drainage canal in another low-income area have been planned and funded and are starting construction.

What advice would you give other communities seeking to improve health and connectivity through walking and biking infrastructure?

Find out what your biggest community needs and risks are. In our case, it was diabetes. Then focus on building a group of like-minded people that can build a foundation [for action]. Then do something. It doesn't have to be a huge pie-in-the-sky thing. When you do something simple that is well received, you gain momentum and drive to do the next thing, and the next thing, and votes begin to turn. We started with something small and began to layer things on top of it. Now we have a network across the city for walking and bicycling that connects to our bus system.

Amy Kapp is editor-in-chief of *Rails to Trails* magazine.

HEALTH

On a spring morning near Boston, the Minuteman Bikeway pulses with activity. Nearly all of winter's punishing, relentless snow has melted; only a few dirty patches remain in shadowy corners. Trees heavy with blossoms filter sunlight as dog walkers, joggers and spandex-clad bikers interweave with parents and children en route to school and commuters biking or walking to public transportation.

The Minuteman is not a new rail-trail, but its usage has doubled since 2011. Though estimates vary, more than 1 million people flock to the bikeway each year, making it one of the country's most popular rail-trails. The Minuteman stands out in part because it symbolizes what trail enthusiasts, active-transportation advocates and policymakers all describe as a "sea change" in support of health, fitness and car-free transport in the Bay State. Boston boasts the highest walk-to-work percentage in the country—14.5 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community

Survey—and Massachusetts placed fourth on the League of American Bicyclists' 2015 Bicycle Friendly State ranking, up six spots from 2014.

At the heart of these changes was the commonwealth's recognition that its population follows a national trend: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 59.3 percent of Massachusetts residents were overweight and 23 percent were obese in 2010. This raised a red flag for public health officials, while another flag went up for environmental policymakers concerned about greenhouse gas emissions.

With some nudging from advocates, the state first paired health with transportation about six years ago.

"We've made the connection between transportation and health," says Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition Executive Director Richard Fries.

Healthy Transportation

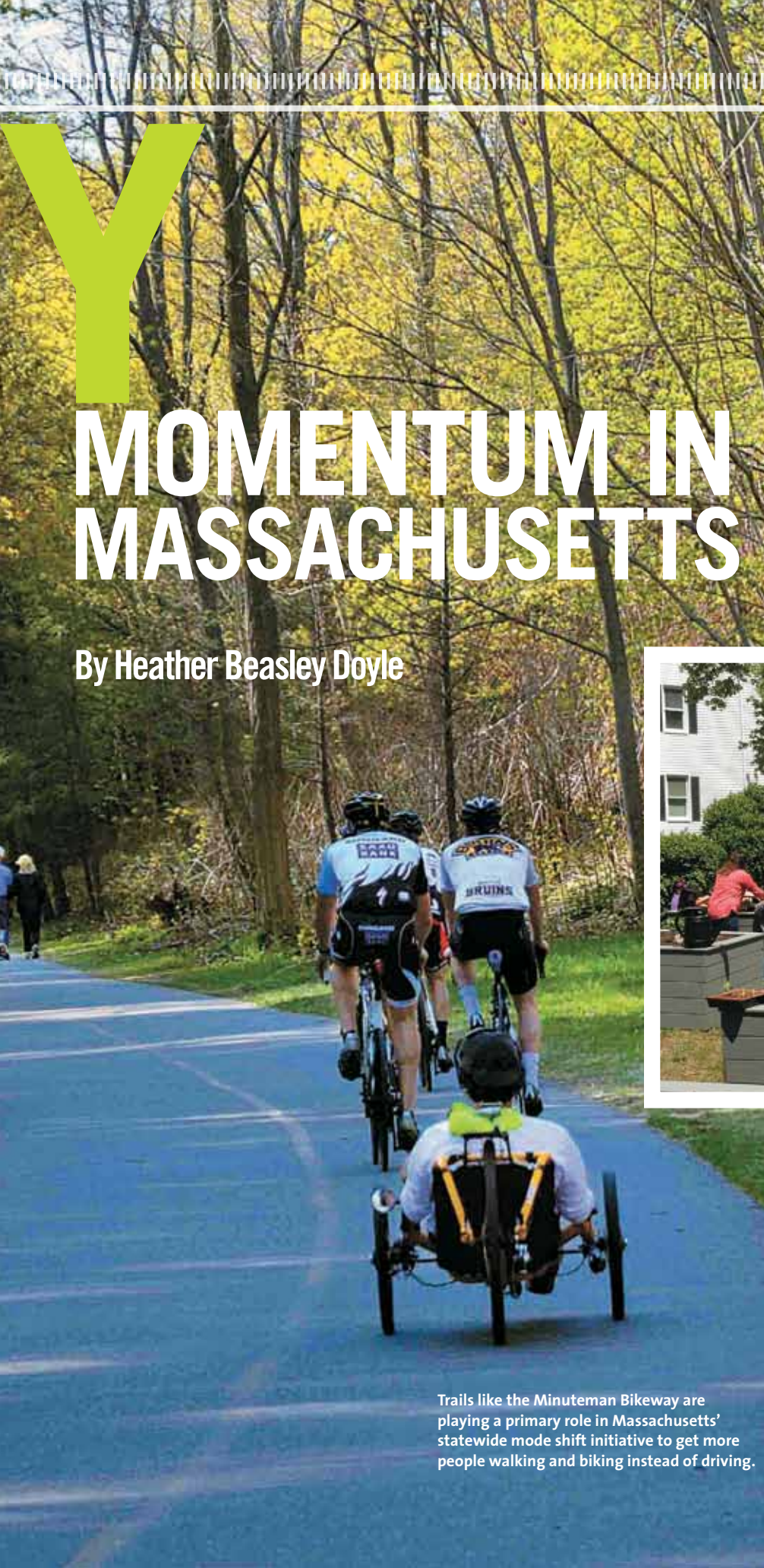
The synergy of this critical connection has engendered a new level of cooperation between the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the state Department of Health and Human Services, most often under the Department of Public Health. At the heart of this marriage is the Healthy Transportation Compact, also signed by the Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs. With the compact, the departments pledged in 2009 "to achieve positive health outcomes through the coordination of land use, transportation and public health policy."

The state clearly supports this vision with MassDOT's sustainability framework, known as GreenDOT. Three years ago, MassDOT set a more concrete goal, known as the mode shift goal: to triple the number of people who walk, bike or use public transportation—



Y MOMENTUM IN MASSACHUSETTS

By Heather Beasley Doyle



Trails like the Minuteman Bikeway are playing a primary role in Massachusetts' statewide mode shift initiative to get more people walking and biking instead of driving.

instead of driving—by 2030. Last year, Massachusetts communicated the seriousness of such stated intentions by passing a Transportation Bond Bill allocating \$377 million to create, build, repair or improve multi-use pedestrian and bicycle pathways. “This is really pushing, I think, the envelope at MassDOT,” says Stephen Woelfel, director of strategic planning in the MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning. “We’re interested in that we’re really integrated,” he adds, noting that Massachusetts’ mode shift goal is the first of its kind in the country on a state level.

With MassDOT doing its part to encourage physical activity, in 2009 the commonwealth’s Department of Public

Health tackled the obesity problem head-on in 14 communities through a new program, Mass in Motion (MiM). Funded by a shifting combination of state funds, CDC grants and money from federal and private coffers, MiM is now a presence in 60 municipalities throughout Massachusetts.

One of the 14 original MiM

communities is New Bedford, a coastal city 60 miles south of Boston with a population of 95,000 and a thriving fishing industry. New Bedford became an MiM site thanks to above-average obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure rates. The city’s median household income is just \$35,999; the state median is \$66,866. Many townspeople live in poverty, according to MiM New Bedford Director Kim Ferreira.

New Bedford’s MiM program remains strong. Over the past six years, the program has sparked many positive changes in health behaviors. Ferreira radiates enthusiasm



COURTESY MASS IN MOTION NEW BEDFORD

COURTESY TOWN OF ARLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS



Minuteman Bikeway in
Arlington, Massachusetts

for the web of programs she oversees. “It’s about changing the culture; it’s shifting the mindset,” she says. To that end, MiM New Bedford has supported a program replacing juice with water at the local YMCA; established a healthy weight clinic at the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center (GNBCHC); and helped increase the availability of fruits, vegetables and whole grains at convenience stores. “We’re the catalyst for amazing projects in the city,” Ferreira says.

Raised beds made of two-by-fours signal the city’s community gardens. More than a dozen restaurants now offer locally sourced, hand-prepared foods in place of processed fare. And Ferreira recently paired nearby Apponagansett Farm with GNBCHC to offer patients subsidized, organic, community-supported agriculture shares.

In 2011, MiM helped organize the New Bedford Bicycle Committee (NB Bike). A top-notch bike network is not simply for recreation or “alternative” transportation here; many residents can’t afford a car, according to NB Bike Vice President Larry Langlois. For now, the city has decided not to establish a trail alongside the city’s active railway. Instead, NB Bike has successfully advocated for 13 new miles of on-road bike lanes and focused on paths connecting New Bedford to neighboring cities. It recently began creating the corridors with the addition of a multi-use path atop a hurricane dike overlooking Buzzards Bay, a “bold” project Mayor Jon Mitchell hopes will entice people to exercise.

Enticement to Exercise

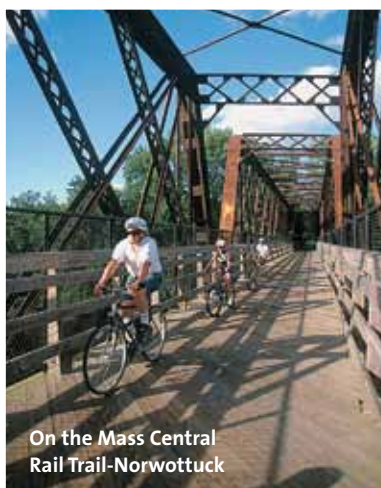
Just 15 miles from New Bedford, Fall River shares that hope for its residents. The city’s median income, unemployment levels and health problems uncannily resemble New

Bedford’s. Julie Kelly, MiM Fall River coordinator, describes the city’s “high, high, high rates of diabetes.” She directs a roster of programs similar to Ferreira’s, encouraging exercise and healthier food choices.

Nonetheless, Fall River differs from its neighbor. Though the city is densely populated, almost half comprises green space, with 14,000 protected acres in the Southeastern Massachusetts Bioreserve. Multi-use trails crisscross the bioreserve, which connects to the city center in part via the Quequechan River Rail Trail. Construction began in May to extend the trail after years of planning. The new section will traverse densely populated urban neighborhoods, according to Brian Pearson, chairman of Bike Fall River. The extended rail-trail will make getting to the popular Fall River waterfront much easier. “This will be a great urban path,” Pearson says.

Far to the west of Fall River, residents of Northampton, a vibrant college town nestled in the hills of the Pioneer Valley, regularly get out on the Mass Central Rail Trail–Norwottuck. The town’s longtime support of rail-trails has spawned additional trails and allowed on-street bike paths to replace some parking spaces. The resulting environment encourages “regular old people not wearing Lycra to bike in a way that’s very matter-of-fact, safe and enjoyable,” and to walk, according to Nicholas Horton, president of Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways.

Northampton even relies on Pedal People, a bicycle-powered delivery and hauling cooperative, to transport some of



On the Mass Central
Rail Trail–Norwottuck



Mass in Motion
New Bedford
community garden

its garbage, and supports more bicycle usage in other ways. “We’ve chosen to be aspirational

for bicycle parking,” says Wayne Feiden, the city’s director of planning and sustainability. “It sends a message when people see the racks.” The city also wants a bike share program and protected bike lanes, or cycle tracks. To encourage year-round use, Northampton plows most of its multi-use paths and rail-trails through the winter.

In fact, Northampton and the other towns in Hampshire County enjoy above-average public health, says Sarah Bankert, coordinator of Healthy Hampshire, the county’s MiM program. “There’s a very vibrant, well-organized infrastructure around healthy food,” she says, adding that MiM chose Hampshire to participate “because we do exhibit some of the best practices of what you can do in a small city.” (Northampton’s population is 28,495; Hampshire County’s is 160,000). “They want us to focus on health inequities and underserved populations,” says Bankert.

Access Is Key

Bankert says Healthy Hampshire’s efforts resemble those in other MiM communities, such as getting insight from WalkBoston and MassBike, and helping corner stores and farmers increase healthy food access. But she maintains that regardless of how



COURTESY MASS IN MOTION NEW BEDFORD

good the trails are or how regularly people intend to use them, access is key to promoting exercise and active transportation.

Near Northampton, in Amherst, one neighborhood lacks easy access to the Mass Central–Norwottuck. Many who live there don't own a car. Walking on the street isn't safe—the narrow road lacks sidewalks—and at certain times, getting to the closest supermarket by bus can take an hour and a half. The safest, most direct

route is the rail-trail, even though people must first cross through private property, climb a hill and pass through a narrow fence opening. “You have to be very able-bodied” to navigate this route, explains Bankert.

Healthy Hampshire worked with the health department to understand such problems by surveying residents, including a visually impaired couple that got stuck while negotiating the route with their children and guide dog. The resulting report, *Getting Around Amherst*, details neighborhood needs, including better trail access. Looking ahead, Bankert says Healthy Hampshire has “new tools in the works” to encourage physical activity throughout the county.

This is a goal supported by Anne Lusk, a research scientist in the Department of Nutrition at Harvard University's School of Public Health. “We know that routine activity needs to be part of life,” says Lusk, adding that people are more likely to use trails with destinations or connections to other paths. Because much of Massachusetts is densely populated and built, trails such as the Mass Central–Norwottuck and the Minuteman are peppered with amenities. “This is the advantage to Massachusetts as opposed to, say, Iowa,” she explains. Compounding the effect, Massachusetts is marbled with an “unbelievable buffet, a labyrinth of rail,” as Fries describes it.

Trail Popularity

If support for active transportation continues, then several of Massachusetts' old railway corridors will likely become trails. Many people in the state see the Minuteman Bikeway as a model to emulate. Located 8 miles from Boston, the 11-mile rail-trail isn't epically long, but it runs through an economically robust area without an MiM program; locals choose the path without prompting, and weekend enthusiasts drive to it from farther afield. From Cambridge's Alewife transportation hub, the trail passes through Arlington and Lexington into Bedford. It was completed more than 20 years ago, has been honored for urban design excellence and is in Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's Rail-Trail Hall of Fame.

The bikeway is simply an integrated part of the community in a way that's distinctive. “Nobody anticipated in their wildest dreams how popular [the path would be],” says Jack Johnson, founding member and former chair of the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee. Joey Glushko, a planner in Arlington's Department of Planning and Community Development, explains this popularity: “The bikeway fits into many people's program of well-being. It accommodates every age group, it accommodates many aerobic activities, it provides a safe and extended length for walking ... and [accommodates] simply being out-of-doors.”

But the Minuteman's positive effects transcend physical health: “The bikeway has kind of become the Main Street for the community,” says Johnson. “It's where I see my neighbors.”

The Minuteman's popularity supports Lusk's view that trails with destinations attract more use. “The Minuteman Bikeway is kind of unique in that it connects a lot of densely populated areas,” Johnson says. Locals willing to bundle up and brave the elements use the path year-round to navigate between these areas. Like Northampton, Minuteman towns plow their trail; sometimes it is an easier route than streets narrowed by ample snowbanks, “a godsend,” Johnson says. Moreover, its link with Alewife subway and bus station makes the trail a

critical connection to the area's public transportation system. The Minuteman defines active transportation.

As a planner at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, David Loutzenheiser hopes to increase greater Boston's active-transportation network far beyond the Minuteman. Ultimately, Loutzenheiser aims to create a connected network of greenways—rail-trails, cycle tracks and multi-use trails, filling in gaps with connectors such as low-traffic streets—to link Boston via 200 cyclist- and pedestrian-friendly miles. Originally dubbed Green Routes, the idea now is called Land Line and reflects the Healthy Transportation Compact's goal of health-promoting transportation.

Inspired by Quebec's 3,100-mile *Route Verte*, Land Line is already 40 percent complete. So far, reactions have been positive; more than 40 organizations and elected officials already support the project. “There's a large group of people who are scared to bike on streets,” Loutzenheiser says. “If there's a trail system, they're likely to try it. We've put together the concept and now ... we have to sell it to the people and politicians. The political side is coming soon.”

Amidst the perpetual ebb and flow of political attentions and public funding, Massachusetts' health workers, trail advocates and active-transportation proponents sound confident when discussing the future. Synergy is afoot. The sea change has begun. The commonwealth is abuzz with energy for getting active and staying healthy by making movement just another part of everyone's day, and for creating the system that makes that happen. As more paths connect, so do more people, and that energy has just begun to gather.

Fries, for one, can't wait to see how it all unfolds: “Come back in five years,” he says, “because Massachusetts will blow you away.”

Heather Beasley Doyle, a freelance writer, lives close to a Boston-area rail-trail where she happily runs and bikes every day. While living near Delft, the Netherlands, before moving to Boston, she developed a deep appreciation for active transportation.

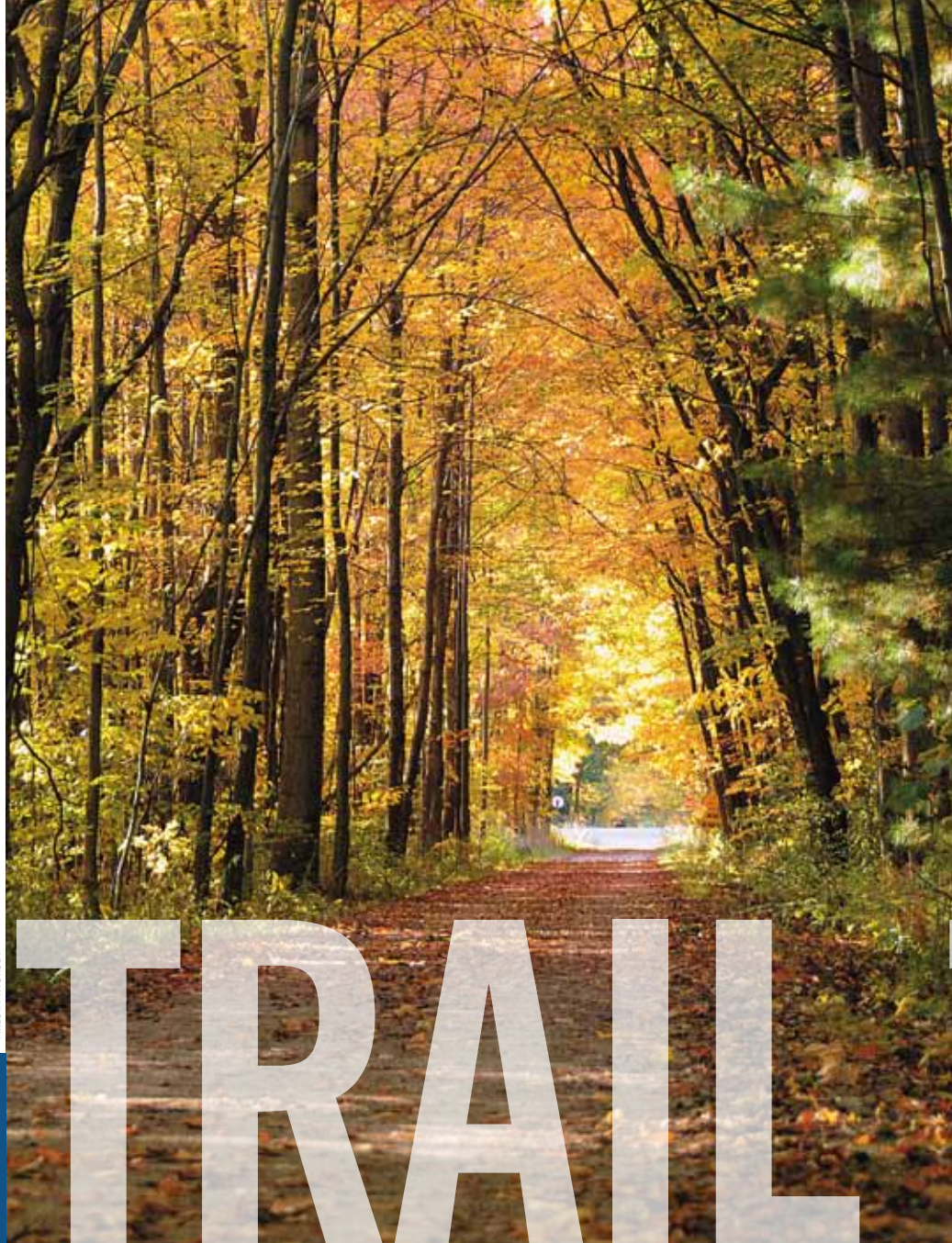
Kal-Haven Trail, Michigan ▶◀

An easy way to remember the name Kal-Haven is to think “Fall Heaven,” because the trail’s autumn views are simply spectacular. Winding under a canopy of orange-leaved maples, fiery red sumacs, and bright yellow sassafras and oak trees, the 34.5-mile rail-trail is a visual feast, especially in early to mid-October.

Two delightful attractions that bookend this southwestern Michigan trail add to its charm: a cherry-red caboose at its eastern trailhead in Kalamazoo (hence the “Kal”) and a covered bridge within a half-mile of South Haven on its western end.

In between, the crushed-stone pathway is dotted with friendly rural towns and vistas of golden brown fields of corn and wheat. Apples, plums and pumpkins (of course!) are in season in the fall, and you’ll find many pick-your-own fruit farms along the way. Rounding out the vivid palette is the deep blue of vast Lake Michigan at South Haven’s doorstep.

Rail-trails have beauty in any season, but there’s something especially alluring about them in the fall. It’s that electric feeling of anticipation that perhaps has its roots in the excitement a new school year brings. The trees, decorated with the brightest hues in Mother Nature’s crayon box, add to that sense of wonder. The rustling of their leaves sounds like a secret language between trees. Here is a glance at peak fall foliage along four rail-trails around the country; they are featured in *Trail Traveler*, our new digital tablet magazine. For more great trail photos, download the inaugural issue in the App Store or Google Play.



ARLETA THURSBY

TRAIL

By Laura Stark



RUSSELL COOPER



SHERI HOUCK (2)

Bizz Johnson National Recreation Trail, California ▲◀

The buzz on the Bizz is that this rail-trail has it all: trestles, tunnels and tons of autumn color. Orange oaks and golden aspens dot the pine-covered hillsides and rocky slopes of the Susan River Canyon, through which the 25-mile Bizz Johnson trail courses, while yellow cottonwoods and willows brighten the riverbanks.

Here, in northeastern California, the gravel pathway gives hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians a premium view of the showy foliage, most picturesque typically from mid-October to early November. But the trees don't provide

the only photo op; on the west end of the trail, get your cameras out for selfies with a 22-foot-tall sculpture of the legendary lumberjack Paul Bunyan and his trusty sidekick, Babe the Blue Ox, in Westwood.

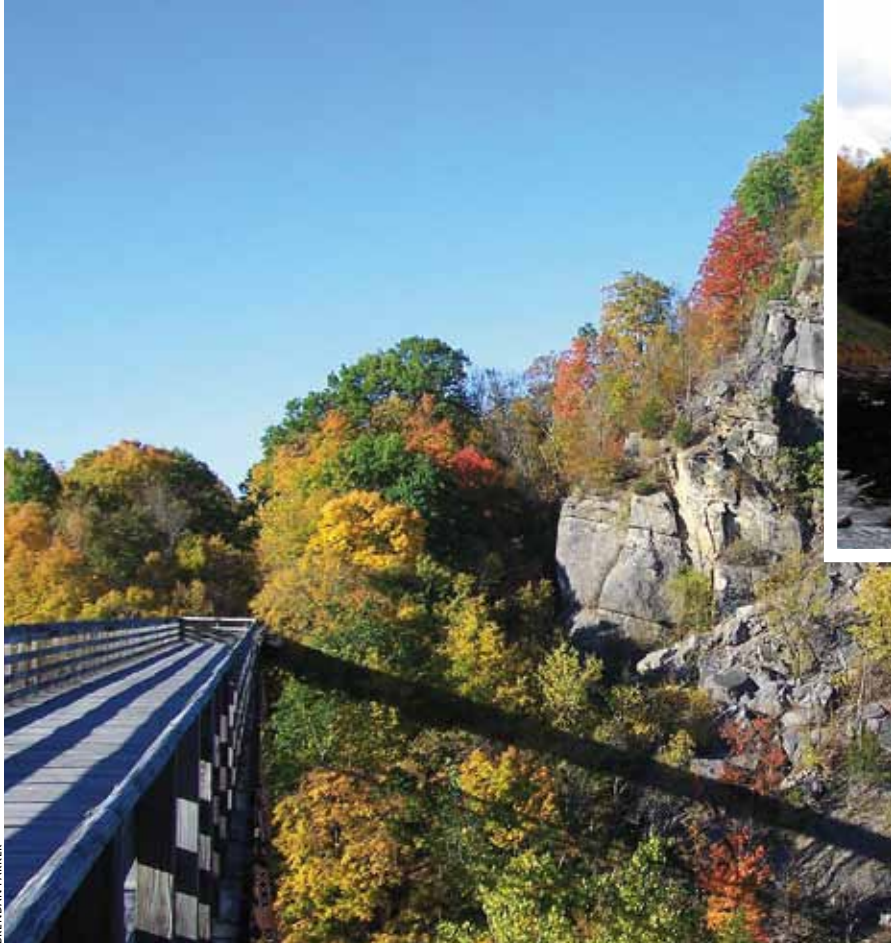
You won't want to miss the annual Rails to Trails Festival on Columbus Day weekend, which features live music, a chili cook-off and old-fashioned railroad handcar races. The event takes place on the trail's east end at the Susanville Railroad Depot, now doubling as a visitor center that offers a treasure trove of historical relics and information about the region.

Elroy-Sparta State Trail, Wisconsin ▼

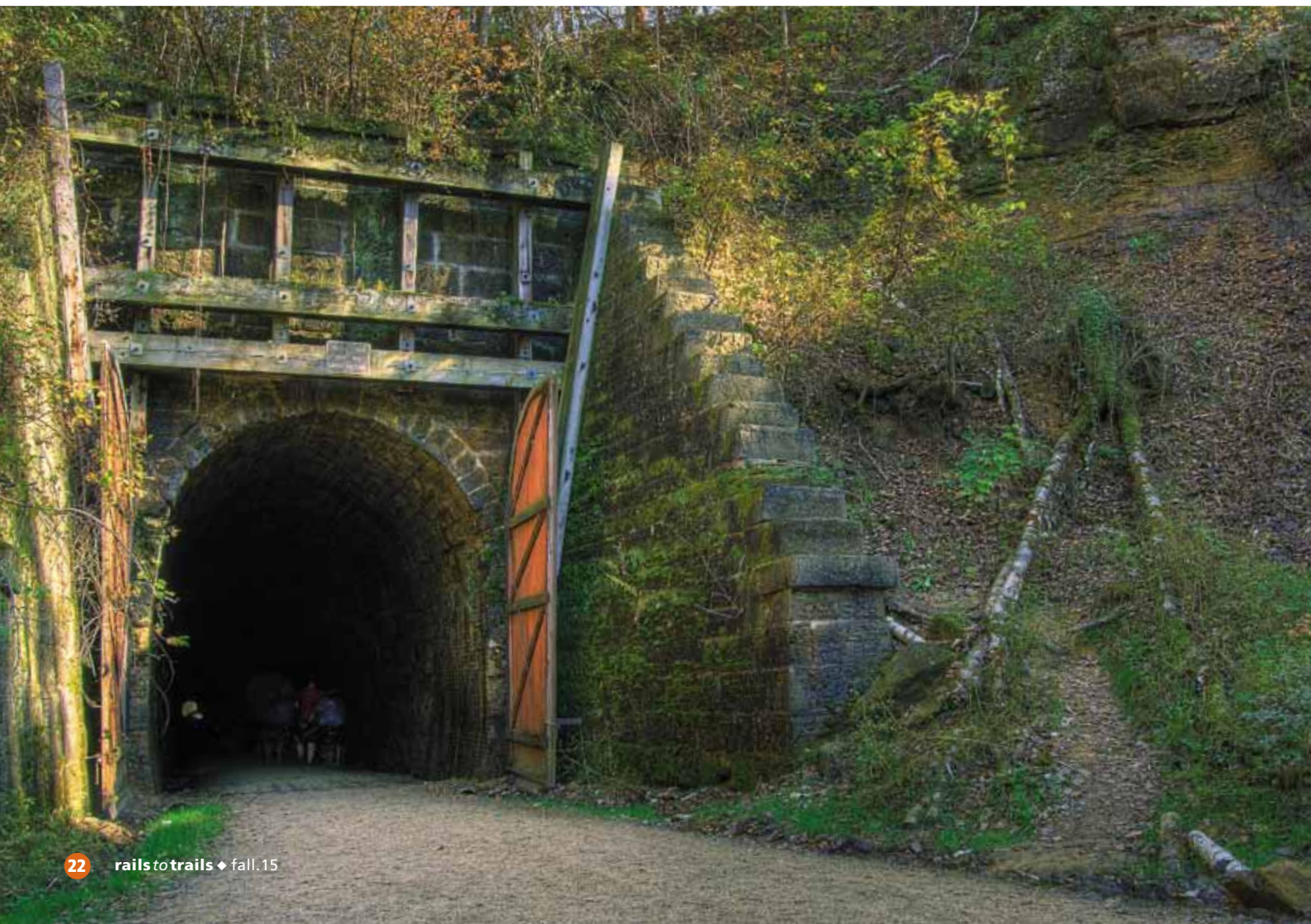
The best features of the Elroy-Sparta trail are undoubtedly its three 1860s tunnels, ranging in size from one-quarter to three-quarters of a mile. If you're planning a fall trip here, be sure to visit before November, when the tunnels are closed until May. Because of the harsh Wisconsin winters, each tunnel was fitted with large doors (still in place today), which helped to seal in warm air and prevent damage from extreme freezing and thawing.

On the remainder of the crushed-stone trail (which totals 32 miles), travelers will enjoy a variety of scenery, including picturesque farms, woodlands, rocky bluffs and welcoming rural towns. In Kendall, be sure to stop at the red brick depot, constructed in 1900, which serves as a museum and trail headquarters (open May 1 to Oct. 31).

Generally, the best time to see this region's fall colors is mid-to-late October. Celebrate the season on the north-western cap of the trail with Sparta's Fall Fest; the event's pie contest, pumpkin decorating, farmers market and other activities take place downtown.



BRENDAN PARKER





Wallkill Valley Rail Trail, New York ▲

Just 90 minutes from the Big Apple, the 21-mile Wallkill Valley Rail Trail winds through apple country in eastern New York's Ulster County. The trail follows the route of the old Wallkill Valley Railroad, which, in the late 1800s, carried produce from the county's farms to New York City.

The region's apple season, typically running September through October, coincides nicely with autumn colors, making for a splendid outing featuring a crisp fall trail ride and apple picking. The best vantage point for leaf peeping is the trail's Rosendale Trestle, which rises 150 feet above Rondout Creek. The bridge, spanning 940 feet, is more than 100 years old and has been beautifully restored. Savor the bird's-eye view of the creek as well as the surrounding wooded hills.

New Paltz, centrally located on the trail, makes for a good starting point, allowing travelers to head south to the trail's end in Gardiner or north toward Kingston. New Paltz itself is quite charming; the trail is paved in town (the remainder is packed cinder and gravel) and runs adjacent to Huguenot Street, a National Historic Landmark District lined with historical buildings and archaeological sites from the community's settlement by Europeans in the 17th century.



A Legacy *That Connects Us All*

John Ellicot is leaving a legacy for future generations with a generous bequest to
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

By designating a portion of his IRA to RTC,
John will ensure that his grandchildren and
others will enjoy a healthier, safer future on the
pathways he cherishes.

.....
Learn more about how you can include RTC in your legacy plans.

Contact:

Orhan Belding – 202.974.5118
orhan@railstotrails.org

railstotrails.org/heritagecircle



You can provide a healthy and safe future for American trails by naming RTC as a beneficiary in your will, trust or IRA. These gifts are non-binding, and your assets remain with you.

The stories in this issue's Community Connections demonstrate how trails connect people and inspire us—for health and renewal, for love and forever after.

Want more great inspiration? Check out RTC's TrailBlog (railstotrails.org/trailBlog).

IOWA

A Perfect Backdrop

Sometimes it only takes one moment on a trail to change lives forever. Just ask Ali and Tyler Sloan, who experienced an unforgettable, life-altering moment on Aug. 20, 2013, when, after several years of dating, Tyler proposed to Ali on the High Trestle Trail in Iowa—and she said yes!

"It was a moment I will never forget, with a beautiful backdrop," said Ali.

According to Ali, she and Tyler, who live and work in Des Moines and are 27 and 29, respectively, had planned to ride the High Trestle Trail since diving into biking several years ago. So when Tyler called her at work and asked if she'd like to go to the trail with his brother and a few mutual friends later that evening, she agreed. And that was that.

Until they made the trip, that is, and Tyler surprised her with a question of a lifetime. The 25-mile High Trestle Trail is named for a revamped, 2,530-foot bridge that rises 13 stories above the Des Moines River Valley between Madrid and Woodward. Arching over the bridge decking are 43 steel "cribbings" lined with LED lights that come on at night, creating the sensation of moving through a mineshaft—and honoring the region's coal-mining heritage. And of course, both

the lights and the valley view are sights to behold.

"The first time seeing the bridge and view was breathtaking," said Ali. "He timed our arrival perfectly, and when the bridge lit up he asked his brother to take a picture of us underneath the lights. The next thing I knew, Tyler got down on his knee and asked me to marry him. I was completely shocked, as you can tell in our photo. That is a genuine photo, not a reenactment!"

"I chose [the trail] because it is a one-of-a-kind location," said Tyler. "Also, I wanted to get a photo of the special moment, and it was a perfect place to capture that. I knew that Ali wouldn't expect me to propose that night, and it would take her by surprise."

He continued, "I was so nervous the whole bike ride, I kept looking down and feeling inside my pocket to make sure the ring was still there!"

The Sloans, who were married on Sept. 27, 2014, still visit their favorite trail whenever they can. And they look forward to a time when they can share the trail—and the memories of that day—with their own family.

"We will always look back and cherish the rail-trail because that's where the journey of our marriage started," said Ali. "The trail and the view are absolutely beautiful; it's a really unique place here in Iowa."

PENNSYLVANIA

Broken Hearts Repaired

RTC is pleased to share this story by Marcia Laus of how, after losing a son to epilepsy and battling their own health problems, she and her husband Rick are renewing their health and repairing their hearts on America's trails.

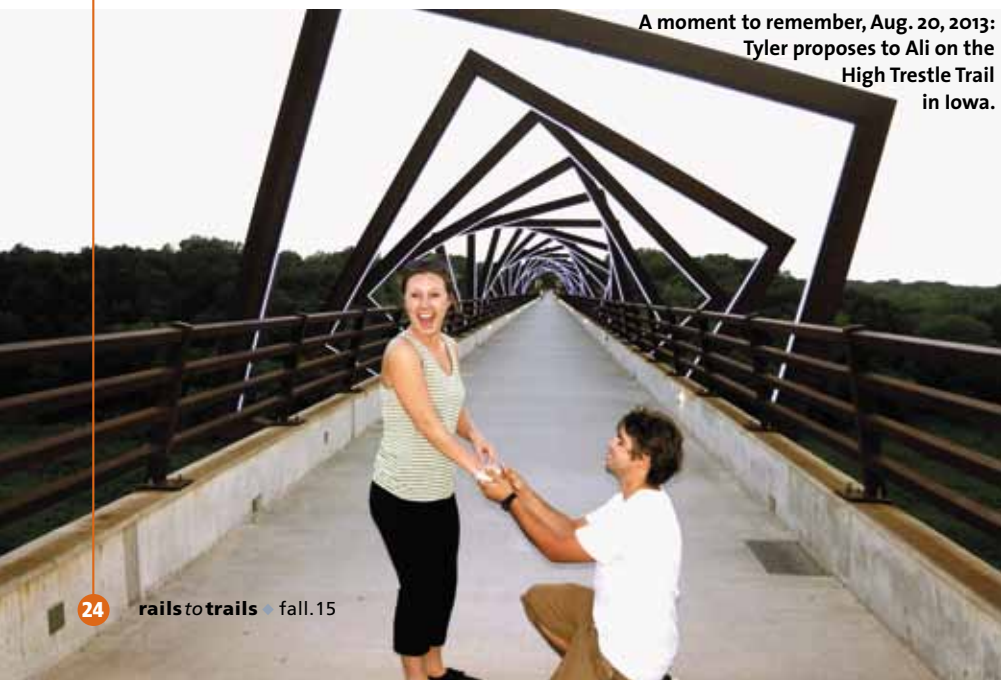
The 1990s and early 2000s were very difficult for our family. Our beautiful son Kevin developed severe epilepsy, causing a significant cognitive disability. My husband, Rick, quit his full-time job to take care of Kev. I would get home from my job in the evening, and Rick, a musician, would head out the door to teach or perform percussion.

Kev was just a baby when Rick underwent triple bypass surgery—broken heart number 1—and the next several years after Kev was diagnosed, we'd find ourselves again making frequent trips to the hospital. Kev improved for a time when he was 10; however, in October 2005, he lost his battle with epilepsy, and we lost our joy. Broken heart number 2.

For a long time afterward, our evenings consisted of me sitting in front of the television and Rick staring at the computer. Then, in 2008, we had another scare when Rick had a mild heart attack and had to have stents placed in his veins via a heart catheterization.

In 2012, we had an epiphany that we better get our act together and get healthier. We changed our eating habits and upped our exercise significantly. We walked on the Panhandle Trail, which happens to run through our Pittsburgh area neighborhood in Pennsylvania.

After many walks on the same portion of the trail, we decided to walk the whole length of the trail in 2- or 3-mile segments. Each day, we would drive a little further along the trail and start out on a new segment that we hadn't walked before. And as the weather got better, we also started biking. We would go about



A moment to remember, Aug. 20, 2013:
Tyler proposes to Ali on the
High Trestle Trail
in Iowa.

COURTESY TYLER AND ALI SLOAN

Marcia and Rick Laus have reclaimed their health and their happiness on local rail-trails.



KARA LAUS

2 miles out and 2 miles back at that point; we were so proud of ourselves! We started to increase that distance gradually, and in April, we made a deal that we would ride the whole 28 miles by Labor Day.

And we did even better than that.

It's not often that you get a 90-degree Memorial Day near Pittsburgh, but that year we did, and we spent it on the trail. It took us 3.5 hours with several breaks—but we did it! Oh—and we walked the whole trail that year, as well.

Rick has lost 50 pounds, and I've lost 20. Besides our almost daily rides on the local trails now, we plan vacations around where we can find new ones. Our rides have taken us to so many unique and historical places in Pennsylvania and Maryland (one of our all-time favorites is the Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath). In 2015, we rode the entire length (round trip) of the Greenbrier River Trail, one of West Virginia's premiere (and very picturesque) corridors.

Our physical hearts and our emotional hearts are repairing with the time we spend together on the trails. I think you'll find us on a rail-trail every summer for many years to come.

WASHINGTON

Retirement and Adventure by Rail-Trail

After years of running a household and raising their children, and a long career as a veterinarian, Ann and Bill

Testerman are starting a new life in retirement together by biking the United States, one rail-trail at a time.

The Testerman's adventures began when Bill retired 10 years ago. Their first foray led them on a hike of the Appalachian Trail, which they did in two trips over two years. Ann said this trip was key to helping them

learn how to pack light for their bike trips.

The Testerman's first overnight bicycle trip took them south along the Pacific Coast on a series of multi-use trails from near their home in north-west Washington (Anacortes) to the California–Mexico border. The following year, they took a series of trails through the southern tier of the United States from San Diego, California, through Texas, finally ending in St. Augustine, Florida.

Ann said that although she enjoyed the trip, it required too much road riding and not enough on trails, which she prefers!

Locally, in addition to day trips to nearby San Juan Island, which is known for both its beauty and robust bicycling culture, the Testermans can often be found on the Tommy Thomson Trail. Ann said this trail is a particular favorite of theirs because of its half-mile long railway trestle, which provides a beautiful view of Mount Baker as they cross Fidalgo Bay. The couple also takes frequent day trips on the nearby Olympic Discovery Trail, which crosses trestles over creeks and rivers, and passes through forests and prairie.

Most recently, however, Ann and Bill could be found on the East Coast, biking from Washington, D.C., to Pittsburgh via the 185-mile-long Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park (C&O Canal) and Great Allegheny Passage, and then along the Erie Canalway

Trail though upstate New York.

According to Ann, because the trails do not all connect, their trip required careful planning. Regardless of the logistics involved, however, the couple thoroughly enjoyed the trip. "We absolutely loved it," said Ann. "We stopped at every lock on the C&O and Allegheny canals and read all about the history at each stop."

In particular, she said they were surprised by how quickly they felt that they were far away from civilization, riding under the dense canopies of East Coast forests. She also notes how impressed they were with the work that had been done to preserve those trails. "It's very impressive that somebody has managed such a large effort, the local communities and the states and federal government, to preserve these trails," said Ann.

Bill and Ann said that these trips help to keep them active and healthy while allowing them time to enjoy the beauty of nature. They are also happy to spend this time together and have an opportunity to explore a hobby they both enjoy. They both agreed, however, that one of the best parts of their trips is the people they meet along the way.

"A friend of mine said that bicycling is like a magic carpet that takes you places to meet wonderful people and see beautiful things," said Bill. "These experiences with the people we meet and with nature are what keep us going."



Ann and Bill Testerman (pictured here on the Great Allegheny Passage) are meeting their retirement—one rail-trail at a time.

COURTESY BILL AND ANN TESTERMAN

What We've Been Up To

■ RTC held its first Rail-Trail Sojourn in West Virginia, April 24–26, 2015.

Centered in Morgantown, this three-day, 122-mile ride featured the Mon River, Deckers Creek, Cheat Lake, Marion County and Sheepskin rail-trails.

Unlike RTC's longer sojourns in Pennsylvania, this mini sojourn was designed with an "out-and-back" format, in which riders pedaled 20 miles in a new direction each day, enjoyed lunch in a scenic area or small town and returned to a base hotel in Morgantown. The ride highlighted for local decision-makers the need for and benefits of completing the 30-mile Sheepskin Rail-Trail, which would unite the West Virginia trail network with the Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania and result in more than 500 miles of continuous rail-trails. Contact: Tom Sexton, tom@railstotrails.org.

■ In May, RTC's Midwest Director of Trail Development, Eric Oberg, was a featured speaker at the **2015 Miami Valley Bike Summit in Piqua, Ohio**. In a presentation to more than 400 participants, Oberg shared information and results from the recently released **Central Ohio Impact of Trails study, which RTC helped to develop**. Using a new data research approach that emulates the transportation industry's traffic engineer vehicle miles traveled (VMT) metric, it was found that Central Ohio trail users traveled 13 million miles on the regional trail network in 2014.

RTC was pleased to have Oberg join a prominent group of speakers, which included Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, Andy Clark of the League of American Bicyclists, Andy Williamson of the International Mountain Biking Association and Amy Camp of Cycling Forward. Oberg's featured presence underscores RTC's continued leadership of the trails/bike/ped movement in the Midwest. Contact: Eric Oberg, eric@railstotrails.org.

■ Also in May, RTC staff participated in the **2015 biannual International Trails Symposium, hosted by American Trails in Portland, Ore.**, where more than 750 trail professionals and advocates from around the world convened to share and learn about "Solutions for Success" in trail planning and development. RTC organized sessions and workshops on a variety of timely topics, including regional trail networks, trail counts and surveys, economic development, rails-with-trails, trails in agricultural areas and the role of federal investment in trail development. For more information, go to americantrails.org.

■ RTC's national office staff completed a **rail-with-trail feasibility study for a potential 2.5-mile corridor in northeast Washington, D.C.** The trail would connect several neighborhoods and provide a safe and seamless bicycle and pedestrian connection from downtown to the U.S. National Arboretum, while utilizing a former railroad tunnel and an active railroad right-of-way. The study was delivered to the D.C. Department of Transportation in June. Contact: Kelly Pack, kellyp@railstotrails.org.

■ In May, RTC launched a new grant program to support organizations and

local governments that are implementing projects to build and improve rail-trails. **Under the Doppelt Family Trail Development Fund, RTC will award up to \$85,000 per year for the next five years to qualifying projects through a competitive process.** The fund was established with an \$80,000 grant from Jeff Doppelt of Great Neck, New York, a long-time supporter of RTC and development of rail-trails in the United States, and a \$20,000 donation.

This year's grant awards include: \$40,000 to the Allegheny Trail Alliance for renovation of the Pinkerton Tunnel on the Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania; \$7,500 to Missouri Rock Island Trail, Inc. to support trail development on a 145-mile segment of the inactive Rock Island Line in Missouri (an additional \$7,500 will be used for trail consulting services); and \$10,000 to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to engage communities along 126 miles of undeveloped corridor to complete the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail in Northwest Nebraska, and create strategies for economic development.

Applications for 2016 funding will be accepted in December 2015. More information will be posted on [rails totrails.org](http://rails-totrails.org) as it becomes available.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

RTC Launches Share the Trail Campaign

Good news ... trail use in the United States is booming! More and more Americans are recognizing the incredible value of trail networks nationwide—for transportation, recreation, connecting to nature and connecting with each other.

As trails flourish in popularity, RTC has recognized a growing need for centralized messaging to educate trail users of all types—including pedestrians, bicyclists, hikers, horseback riders, inline skaters, runners and more—on how to share the trail with each other and ensure a safe, enjoyable experience for all.

In the summer of 2015, RTC launched a nationwide "Share the Trail" campaign to educate people of all ages and abilities on trail etiquette and safety. Focusing on six themes of good trail use practices, RTC will lead the discussion on responsible trail use, reminding users that trails should be safe and fun venues for everyone. Contact: Katie Harris, kathryn@railstotrails.org. For more information, go to railstotrails.org/sharethetrail.



DESTINATION: PENNSYLVANIA

The Beautiful Lehigh Gorge Trail

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SCOTT STARK

As I rounded a final corner and caught sight of the aptly nicknamed “Switzerland of America,” nestled among the Appalachian Mountains, I could tell that the town’s accolades were no mere hype. Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, has been deemed one of the Top 50 Places to Live and Play, one of the Most Beautiful Small Towns in America, a Top 100 Adventure Town and one of the country’s Most Fun Small Towns in various publications, including those sponsored by Rand McNally and *National Geographic*. “Like driving into a postcard” is how one promotional video describes the town.

Jim Thorpe isn’t the only award winner in the area; it anchors the southern end of the Lehigh Gorge Trail, a 26-mile rail-with-trail through the Appalachians that *Outside* magazine named one of America’s 50 Sweetest Rides. “There are bike trails, and then there are *bike trails*,” says Amie Cornelius, who rides the trail whenever she’s in the area visiting her uncles. “It offers such a beautiful and unique experience that you can’t help but want to return again and again to experience it in a new way.”

Plenty of other users might agree with this sentiment: The Lehigh Gorge Trail is far and away the most viewed trail on the entire **TrailLink.com** network and sports a perfect five-star rating from users. It is

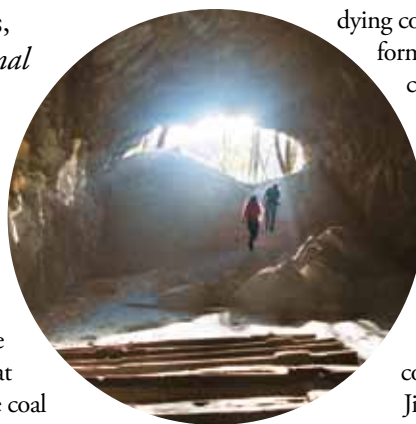
part of the larger D&L Trail (named for the Delaware and Lehigh rivers that it parallels), the 165-mile canal and rail route that once carried anthracite coal from mine to market.

On a beautiful fall weekend, I’d loaded my bike onto the roof rack for a road trip to see what makes this trail and town so beloved. Plenty of places are named for a notable person, but Jim Thorpe is one of only a few in the country to have a first name to go along with its last. This town in east-central Pennsylvania was formed in 1953 by the merger of Mauch Chunk and East Mauch Chunk when they agreed

to host the remains of Jim Thorpe, the legendary Native American Olympian (and professional football, basketball and baseball player) and build a monument to him. Further honoring his legacy, the new town adopted his name, too.

Over the next two decades, the two dying coal towns were transformed into what is today considered the gateway to the Poconos, a world-class tourist destination offering beautiful scenery and access to outdoor activities like mountain and trail biking, hiking, white-water rafting and cross-country skiing.

Jim Thorpe was in the midst of its popular autumn harvest festival when I visited, and the Halloweenie in me was delighted to see that the town also embraces the harvest festival’s spooky cousin; not only were Halloween decorations abundant throughout town, but overlooking the historic downtown is the Harry Packer Mansion, the inspiration for Disney World’s haunted mansion. And if that’s not enough to spook anyone, the historic jail at the end of town where ▶



four activist Irish coal miners accused of murder were hanged in 1877 is reputed to be haunted; nighttime walking ghost tours of the town prominently feature this stop.

With parking scarce due to the festival, I unloaded my bike about a mile from the Lehigh Gorge trailhead and admired the funky quirkiness of Jim Thorpe as I coasted downhill through town. Built along a mountainside, seemingly no two buildings are at the same elevation. Among the residences and museums are bookstores, antique shops and eateries, as well as businesses that cater to outdoor enthusiasts. Nikki Hurley of Pocono Biking, one of two bike rental shops within a hundred



paces of the town square, says the shop sees increasing numbers of riders on the trail each year, something she attributes in part to the rail-with-trail's dramatic scenery. "We rent bicycles and provide shuttle services, but our product really is a picturesque, enjoyable historic ride on the trail with family and friends."

Near the town square is a visitors center that was once the town's railroad depot. Tracks running beside it carry the trains of the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway, which has been voted—and this becomes a running theme around Jim Thorpe—the Best Scenic Railroad in the United States. The railway has several seasonal sightseeing options, but I was most interested in taking the bike train, an hour-long trip to White Haven, the northern terminus of the trail, followed by a 26-mile bike ride back to Jim Thorpe.

While the White Haven-to-Jim Thorpe route is nominally downhill, regular riders of rail-trails will recognize that that means it's nearly flat. The grade is so slight that

the flow of the nearby Lehigh River is the only reliable indicator of which way the trail slopes. The minimal grade combined with the crushed gravel surface robs riders of momentum, so coasting isn't an option. I managed around 12 mph downhill and about 10 mph when I turned around and tested my speed uphill. The Lehigh Gorge Trail is immaculately maintained, so tackling it with a road bike is doable in good weather but, as with any crushed gravel trail, not really advisable after heavy rain or snowstorms.

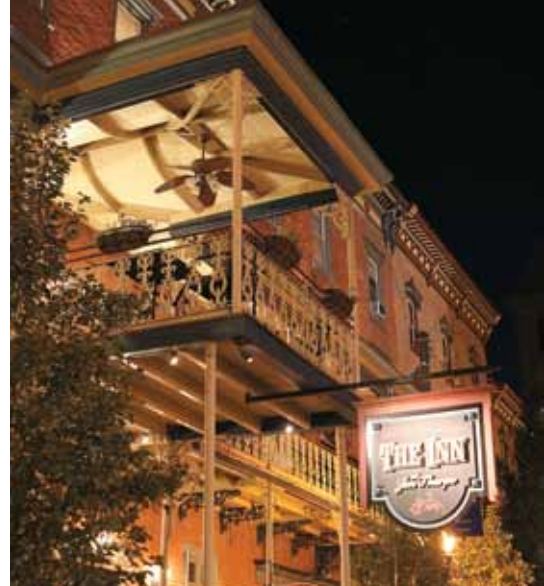
With the Appalachians surrounding the trail, the scenic beauty of the Lehigh Gorge is everywhere you look. The Lehigh River, full of whitewater adventurers during warmer months, varies between a placid burble and turbulence sufficient to drown out the hum of your rolling tires. The trail twists and turns enough that it's easy to lose sight of other trail users on all but the busiest days and feel that you have the place to yourself.

It was a bit outside of the access point at Rockport that I met Amie Cornelius, her mother and two uncles making a one-way trip down to Jim Thorpe. Her uncle Ed Bolish is a local and says the trail is "a great way to introduce this scenic area to others—especially my family."

With just four family members along for this particular ride, it was one of the smaller groups Bolish has led. "Only this past summer we had a group of 11 family members plus my niece pulling her 2-year-old son in a caboose."

For the first 16 miles out of White Haven, freight trains can be spotted on the other side of the river, but at Penn Haven Junction, the tracks cross over an iron trestle to join you on the trail side of the river. Here, trail users have to navigate an at-grade crossing, but good sightlines and a complete lack of urban noise pollution mean that trains aren't going to sneak up on you. As you ride the final 8 miles to Jim Thorpe, a twin set of tracks slowly rise up along an embankment of rough-hewn stones until they tower some 18 feet overhead.

Picnic tables found here and there



along the trail make for great places to rest and recharge, but you'll need to bring along—and pack out—your own food and drinks.

Just outside of Jim Thorpe is Glen Onoko, an area full of hiking opportunities and the picturesque Glen Onoko Falls, cascading some 900 feet down Broad Mountain. The falls require a two-hour hike to reach and are not visible from the trail, but what is readily accessible turned out to be my favorite sight here: the Turn Hole Tunnel. Cutting 500 feet through a mountainside, this long-abandoned railway tunnel looks like a cave entrance from the outside, having been nearly sealed on one end by rock falls—but the railroad ties still in place inside make clear what it once was. The other end of the tunnel opens to the mountainside and has a safety railing to keep visitors from plummeting 50 feet into the river below.

Rolling back into Jim Thorpe, a bit saddle sore and mighty hungry, I stopped at Molly Maguires Pub & Steakhouse—named for an Irish miner rebellion of the late 1870s—for a burger. I enjoyed listening to some live music at the Broadway Grille & Pub adjacent to the Inn at Jim Thorpe before calling it a day and resting my weary bones.

My first glimpse of Jim Thorpe took my breath away, and getting to know the town and trail better over a couple of days only strengthened that first impression. Jim Thorpe and the Lehigh Gorge Trail truly deserve every accolade they get.

Born and raised in Colorado, Scott Stark enjoys the great outdoors and the wealth of trail options near his home outside of Washington, D.C.



WHERE TO STAY: Hotels and quaint bed-and-breakfasts abound in and around town. You can find a comprehensive listing at jimthorpebedsandbreakfasts.com.

WHERE TO EAT: Across the street from the trailhead, Molly Maguires (jimthorpedining.com; 570.325.4563) offers basic and tasty fare including burgers, sandwiches and steaks. Located in the center of the historic district, Through the Looking Glass (ttlrestaurant.com; 570.325.9633) specializes in healthy farm-to-table fresh food and features live entertainment on Saturday evenings and Sunday during the day. About 3 miles outside of downtown Jim Thorpe is Macaluso's Restaurant & Cocktail Bar (macalusosrestaurant.com; 570.669.9433); serving Italian food, the restaurant is pricey but elegant and well regarded. Committed to the concept of making tasty and satisfying food for omnivores, vegetarians, vegans and folks with food sensitivities, Stone Row Pub & Eatery (stoneroweatery.com; 570.732.0465) makes almost everything from scratch with established protocols to avoid cross-contamination. For gastropub fare and live music, try the Broadway Grille & Pub (broadwaygrillepub.com; 570.732.4343).





GETTING THERE: About 16 miles south of the intersection of Interstate 80 and I-476, Jim Thorpe is an hour and a half drive from Philadelphia and two hours from New York City. The nearest airport is Lehigh Valley International Airport (ABE). Free and ample parking is usually available at the trailhead, but the lot becomes paid parking and fills quickly during popular town events.

LEHIGH GORGE STATE PARK TRAIL

Total trail length: 25.7 miles

Trail surface: Crushed stone

D&L Trail - Lehigh Canal North

-  Trailhead or endpoint
-  Parking
-  Multiple parking locations
-  Restrooms

Map Illustration by DanielleMarks.com

Map for reference only.

RENTALS: Both Pocono Biking (poconobiking.com; 800.944.8392) and Blue Mountain Sports (bike-jimthorpe.com; 800.599.4421) are steps away from the trailhead and offer bike and trailer rentals.

WHAT TO SEE: The Asa Packer Mansion (asapackermansion.com; 570.325.3229), once home to a railroad magnate, is one of the most well preserved Italianate villas in the United States; open seven days a week during peak season, its hours drop to weekends-only November–Memorial Day. Opened in 1855, the No. 9 Coal Mine (nogmine.com; 570.645.7074) was the oldest continuously operated anthracite coal mine in the world when it closed in 1972; today, visitors can travel 1,600 feet into the mountainside to experience firsthand the life of a coal miner. The mine and museum are located in Lansford, 11 miles from Jim Thorpe. Offering train rides year-round in an ever-changing schedule varying with the season, the Lehigh Gorge Scenic Railway (lgsry.com; 610.562.2102) is especially popular among autumn leaf peepers. Several walking tours of the town, including ghost walks, can be found at jimthorpe.org/tours.php.

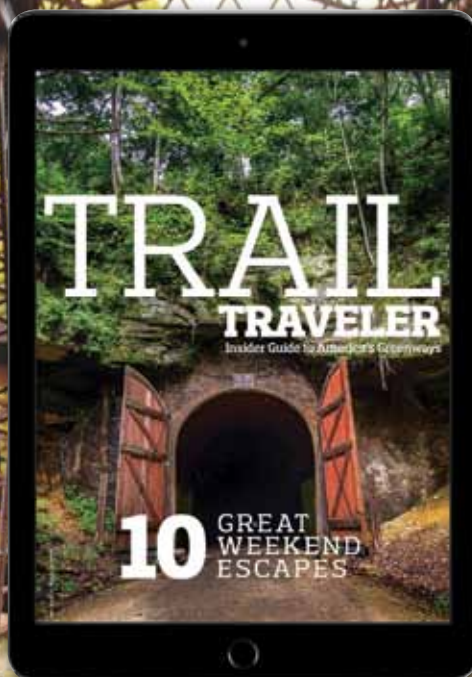
MORE INFO: The city's own website (jimthorpe.org) lists quite a few restaurants, attractions and places to stay, and provides a map of the town's major attractions (including the visitors center). Information about the longer D&L Trail can be found at delawareandlehigh.org.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

2121 Ward Court, NW, 5th Floor
Washington, DC 20037-1213

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage PAID
Rails to Trails
Conservancy

Download our **all-new**
digital magazine for your tablet today!



Your next adventure awaits ...

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's all-new digital tablet magazine brings you unique and vivid trail experiences, expert advice with local recommendations and travel tips—all curated by RTC staff.

