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MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

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January-February 2016



Volunteers install the plywood panels on the exterior of the west portal. Photo by Dennis Sims.

National Tunnel Closure and Ice Buildup

by Dave Oyler

Winter users of the Montour Trail in Cecil Township are familiar with the National Tunnel (MP25) winter wonderland. Every year stalagmites and stalactites of ice form in the tunnel, making navigation of the tunnel a challenge. However, aside from its beauty, the ice is also a safety concern and in a bad year the ice can make travel through the tunnel almost impossible without ice crampons, and certainly so for an ordinary bicycle. During the winter of 2014 – 2015 the Montour Trail Council Board of Directors closed the tunnel due to the ice and during the remainder of 2015 while the Board discussed the need to make winter closures a permanent policy, the Engineering & Construction Committee wrestled with the problem of preventing, or at least reducing the winter ice buildup.

Trail users might not be aware, but in a typical year, left to itself, the ice would not melt away until late May or perhaps later. Because the tunnel had to be open each spring by late April for

the Burgh's Race, volunteers with a tractor would enter the tunnel and painfully scrape ice, typically as much as two or three feet thick in places, from the floor of the tunnel. The process usually also caused damage to the expensive asphalt floor. Higher temperatures in April insured that no further ice buildup would take place once the ice had been removed.

Over the summer of 2015 a consensus was reached that if the air flow through the tunnel could be reduced, the natural ground temperature might remain high enough to prevent ice buildup. The most promising solution was offered by Bill Capp, who suggested building panels framed by 2x4s and sheathed in plywood and installing them at both tunnel entrances. Such panels offered several advantages. Overall cost was estimated to be less than \$2000 (much less than strip seal or steel doors), 2x4 construction is relatively easy, and the panels could be prefabricated at the trail garage less than a mile from the tunnel. It was also expected that the panels could be taken down in the spring and stored for reuse.

By the end of November, volunteers had assembled the panels for both ends of the tunnel. Montour Trail Council meteorological expert Dennis Sims estimated that the doors should be installed by mid-December, and the decision was made to install the doors during the week of December 7. Eight volunteers helped Bill to build and install the panels: Larry Castner, Doug Ettinger, John Kozak, Joe Lodge, Pete Merther, Gordon Ogle, Dave Oyler, and Tom Prezel.

So, how have the doors done so far? Through mid-January, the winter of 2015 – 16 has been mild and some trail users may feel that the doors were unnecessary. However, there have been a few periods of temperatures low enough to cause ice buildup without the doors. Since late December, Trail Council member, Dennis Sims, a meteorologist, has been monitoring temperatures both inside the tunnel and outside. During the period from December 26 through January 9, outside temperatures ranged from 63° to 2°. Inside the tunnel the temperature remained consistently around 48 degrees. So far there has been no ice buildup in the tunnel. The Trail Council is optimistic that the tunnel will remain ice free through the remainder of the winter and that it will be possible to remove the panels by the end of March

Adding one final personal note, on December 8, while the volunteers were installing the east panels, a cyclist rode up to the tunnel and asked this writer what we were doing. I explained to her that we expected the doors to reduce airflow through the tunnel and therefore reduce ice buildup. Her comment was, "Sounds like wishful thinking to me". However, it should be clear that the use of the doors was not wishful thinking, but carefully considered, and that the examples of Big Savage Tunnel and other sources made it clear that stopping air flow through the tunnel would create above freezing temperatures in the tunnel and prevent ice buildup. This writer, before he retired had collected temperature data from coal mines (for an entirely different reason) showing the contrast in the winter air mine shaft temperatures and temperatures just a few inches into a mine roof. So far our confidence appears vindicated, to the benefit of our trail users.



Volunteers install the plywood panels on the interior of the west portal. Photo by Dennis Sims.

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www.montourtrail.org

To converse, join the Yahoo Group at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Montour-Trail/info> or

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/43518292159>



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The Plan is . . . YOU by Prez Ned Williams

There's a plan for the future of the Montour Trail. In one word, it is . . . you.

Late last year, your Montour board members spent a day updating the best parts of the 2013-15 plan, assessing current and future needs, and coming to agreement on what the objectives in the new 2016-2018 strategic plan should be. We of course want to complete the main line of the trail. But other top objectives centered on Montour Trail members and volunteers. We'd like to get better at letting all of you know about the wide variety of opportunities that are there for you to become involved with improving every aspect of the trail. We were fortunate that day to have had a professional facilitator, Joy Ruff of Dawood Engineering, who had volunteered her services. The discussions worked towards identifying what actions would be needed for Montour to continue to build a strong organization into the future, so that the trail can be maintained and improved as time goes on. So, what does this have to do with trail users?

One top objective is, "Better engage and capitalize upon the membership and volunteer base, to benefit the Montour Trail." The idea is to encourage more trail users to become members, and for the majority of you reading this who are members, show what volunteer opportunities exist. People have often said that they have used the trail for years, but have never given anything back, yet would like to. The first question is: Are you a Montour Trail Council member? If not, the simplest – yet most fundamental – thing you can do is to join up. This is a membership organization, and a larger supporting membership (among other things) puts us in a better position with granting agencies and other potential sources of help.

But far more important than the total numbers are the individual members. As a new member, you'll find that you start to pay attention to the trail in a somewhat different way. You'll start to think of ways that the trail could be made better. If you connect with your local Friends of the Trail group, you'll find people who share your enthusiasm and can put these kinds of ideas into action. As you go on to engage with the trail as an active volunteer, you'll learn more about the overall trail organization, and you'll find that it takes an incredibly diverse set of skills to make the trail what it is and will become. Whatever your interests, there is likely to be a similar need on the trail somewhere. You'll discover, as I did, that the folks working on all of these different things are really nice people. So it's actually a lot of fun to be working with them, using your skills, to help to keep a great trail like Montour strong and growing.

Sure, there is always the on-the-ground maintenance of the trail corridor itself, which is actually a lot more involved than meets the casual eye. But we can also use a hand from people who have skills in accounting, real estate, communications, and (like all organizations) information technology. Management and leadership abilities are especially valuable. People with links to neighborhood, civic and business organizations can help Montour better tie into its communities. Then there is the travel and tourism component: There are wide open opportunities along the Montour Trail for a trailside bed and breakfast or two, awaiting the right person to seize it. The important thing for all of us to realize is this: The physical trail that you see is only a reflection, a shadow, of the people who love it and care for it. The more people who are involved, the better their skills are directed and coordinated, the greater will be the condition, scope, longevity – and effectiveness – of the Montour Trail.

Pennsylvania Trolley Museum executive director Scott Becker once said to me, standing in the midst of the museum, "If it wasn't for the volunteers, none of this would be here." This is certainly true of the Montour Trail and its volunteers as well. I like the positive case that implies: That the Trail can continue to grow and become what it should be: the premier trail serving Southwestern Pennsylvania, connecting suburbs to the city and numerous states and regions; remaining in excellent condition and well cared for into future generations. All this and more can be accomplished if there is you, doing what you can to help out. That's the only way it can work. So that's why Montour's now and future plan is . . . you.

Throughout 2016 you'll hear more about volunteer opportunities, and if you're not already a volunteer I hope you'll respond. In the meantime, if you have a specific volunteering interest and would like us to contact you, send an email with your area(s) of interest and full contact information to info@montourtrail.org.

Friends' Meetings and Work Parties

MTC Board Meeting:

Every third Monday of the month - 6:00 p.m. at 304 Hickman St., Suite 3, Bridgeville, PA. Turn right off of the Bridgeville exit of I-79. Turn left at the next light, go straight at next light and make left turn onto Hickman St. just after the Post Office. Call the Montour Trail Office for more information or to get on the agenda.

Airport Area Friends: (MP 0 to MP 12.6 and the 6.3 mile

Airport Connector) The Airport Area Friends of the Trail meet every second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Forest Grove Fire Hall, 2044 Ewings Mill Road, Robinson Township, PA 15108. New volunteers are always welcomed. Contact Phyllis McChesney at 412-264-6303 for more information. Numerous Saturday "work parties" are held during the season. Please call 412-262-3748 to lend a hand at the work parties.

Fort Cherry Friends: (MP 12.6 to MP 20.7)

Friends of the Trail meeting: Second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the McDonald Trail Station, 160 S. McDonald Street, McDonald, PA 15057 (adjacent to the Panhandle Trail). Work and cleanup parties will be scheduled as needed. For more information contact Tim Thomassy, 724-926-4617 or Chuck Hughey, 724-926-9436.

Cecil Friends: (MP 20.7 to MP 28.5)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every fourth Monday of the month at 7:00 p.m. From May-August, meetings are held at the Kurnick Access area along the trail off Cecil Henderson Road; other months (with the exception of November and December) meet at the MTC Offices. Work and cleanup parties are scheduled as needed. Call 412-496-4308 for more information, or email densimwx@comcast.net

Peters Township Friends: (MP 28.5 to 30.4, Library Jct to near MP 35 and part of the Bethel Branch)

Friends of the Trail Meeting, first non-holiday Monday of the month at Peters Township Community Recreation Center at 7:00 p.m. For more information on work and cleanup parties, please contact Jim Robbins at 724-941-6132, or for monthly meetings, Mark Imgrund at 724-941-6351 or by e-mail at markimgrund@gmail.com

Bethel Park Friends: (The 2.75 mile Bethel Branch and a short piece of main line trail around MP 35). Friends of the Trail meeting, every first Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. in the Bethel Park Municipal Building Council Chambers. Anyone interested in the Bethel Park Trail segment is encouraged to come. Work and cleanup party, every second and fourth Saturday of the month - 8:30 a.m. Call Bob O'Connell at 412-833-6259 for location and information.

South Hills Friends: (MP 35.4 to 46.3)

Meeting second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at South Park Township Community Room, located behind the Township Building at 2675 Brownsville Road, South Park, 15129. Work and cleanup parties scheduled and advertised as needed. For more information, contact David Oyler at 412-831-9288, davidoyler@verizon.net, or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, mckeownp@comcast.net

The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

For more information send email to mrhs@montourrr.com.

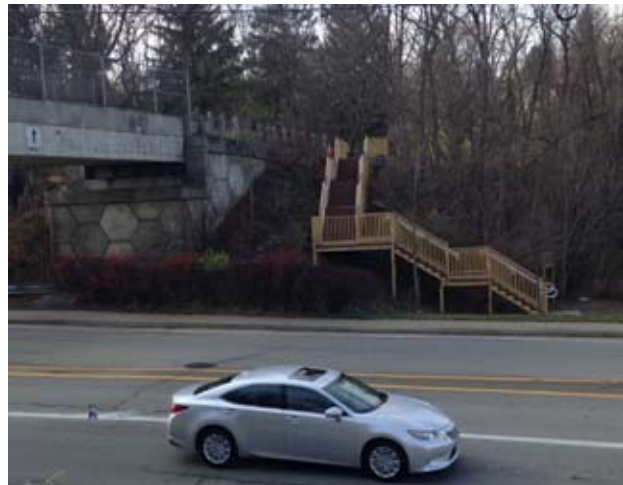
Arrowhead Trail Improvements

Photos and story by Bryan Seip

Peters Township has recently made some improvements on the Arrowhead Trail section of the Montour Trail: Two new sets of stairways increase safe accessibility to the trail.

The access on the west side of McMurray Road has a new stairway connecting the ground level rest area and benches with the overhead trail beside the McMurray Road bridge at the Valley Brook intersection. This is on the opposite side of McMurray Road from the former Farm House Coffee (now Vintage to Vogue) location, at Mile 32.1.

Another set of stairs has been completed at the west end of the parking area at the Bebout Road / Valley Brook intersection. It is a few hundred feet from the Bebout Road bridge at Mile 32.7. The old set of stairs at the east end of this parking area has been removed. The top of the old stairs met the trail right at the end of the trail bridge, but with the concrete side walls and fencing on the bridge and the pitch of the stairs, several close calls between bicycle riders and pedestrians coming up the stairs had occurred due to the restricted sight lines. The new stairs will give some separation between the bridge and the stair access, thus improving the sight lines and safety distance.



New trail access stairway at McMurray Road.



Bebout / Valley Brook Road stairway.

Trail Weather by Dennis Sims

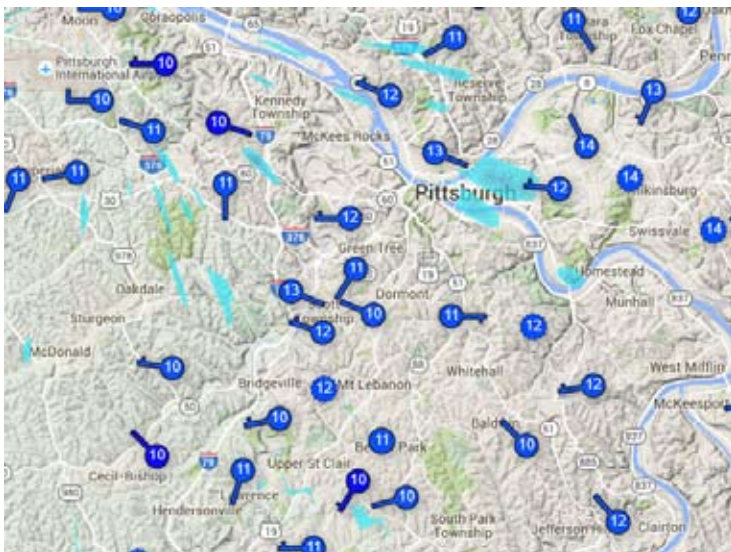
Home weather stations have become very affordable in recent years. The only requirement is having a good exposure to the elements. Many weather stations owners also have home computers and that are connected to dedicated high speed internet. Weather stations are easily connected to your home computer via a wireless or wired connection.

Many owners have chosen to share their weather data through Weather Underground or Weather Bug. Another choice of data dissemination is through the Citizen Weather Observer Program. This data is actually put into weather models run by the National Weather Service.

Some owners have also chosen to install a webcam, so you can actually see what the weather is while looking at the weather data.

There are several weather stations along the Montour Trail as well as other trails around the region.. On the Montour, they are found in the Airport, Peters and South Hills areas. Want to know what the weather is along a section of trail before you venture out? Go to Weather Underground, bring up their map and you can see where the stations are located. Click on the station icon and you will see the current weather in detail, and you may even see a web cam view.

Below is a sample view of the weather on Weather Underground for 5:30 p.m. Monday, January 21 of the Montour Trail area, you can get to this map by going to: <http://www.wunderground.com/wundermap/>. You will need to drill through the page to get this map.



Imperial - Five Point Intersection Safety Improvement - REI Grant - Trail Mile 7.8

By Pete Merther and Dennis Pfeiffer

With an REI grant, a significant safety improvement was made adjacent to the trail near the Five Point Intersection in Imperial. Green Acres Contracting was hired and installed 160 feet of guide rail between busy Main Street and the trail near mile 7.8. In this small section, there is literally no space between the trail and the road. Additional safety for the trail users was provided by our volunteers who installed 2 inch by 12 inch by 7 feet long pieces of treated lumber on the trail side of the guiderail between the posts. This installation provided a smooth surface for trail users riding, running or walking along this section.

We did run into one problem, though. There was only one hole on either side of the guiderail post to fasten the lumber. Thus two additional holes were drilled at the top on either side of the 23 posts. With the help of a magnetic drill on loan from TUV Rhineland Industrial Solutions, these 46 holes were drilled.

On December 14, a very efficient crew of seven Airport Area Friends cut, drilled holes and installed the 23 pieces of treated 2x12's between the guiderail posts.



From left to right: Pete Merther, Ken Gregory, Jim Stauber, Dale Main, Mark Modispascher and Carol Lake are 6 of the 7 Airport Area Friends. The 7th is the man behind the camera: Dennis Pfeiffer

Thanks to REI for the grant and for the dedicated work of the Airport Area Friends.

Let Your Voice Be Heard!

We're conducting an on-line user survey in February, and we want your thoughts! We'll provide details via social media and the MTC website. If you aren't a member of one of our social media groups, please check the website for more information.

Clearview FCU Award

By Dennis Pfeiffer

On October 26, 2015 the Montour Trail Council was notified by Clearview Federal Credit Union that the MTC was selected as Clearview's Community Champion of Pitt football game #1. Clearview selected one charity organization for each of Pitt's twelve football games. Trail user and volunteer GIS contributor, Zachary Ordo nominated the MTC for this award. Along with the award comes a \$300 donation from Clearview FCU. The award was accepted from Clearview in conjunction with Pitt Athletics on Heinz Field at halftime of the Pitt / Miami football game on November 27. The presentation was shown by Pitt Athletics on the Heinz scoreboard.

We graciously thank Clearview FCU for the award and to Zachary for the nomination.



Heinz Field – Pitt / Miami Game Halftime
Tim Killmeyer and Dennis Pfeiffer Accepting Clearview Savings Award
on behalf of the Montour Trail Council

The Bi-Monthly Photo Contest Winner

This winner of this bi-monthly contest is Nick Jarina's photo "Good Buds." Tosha and Moses, best friends of Bob Mason, "paws" for a pose between Greers Tunnel and the Tandem Connection on the Montour Trail. Congratulations Nick! See all the entries at www.montourtrail.org and don't forget to enter your's.



Your incoming board members for 2016-2018. From left to right, Gil McGurl, Denis Kane, Dennis Pfeiffer, and Pat Friedsam. Missing from the photo is David Garraux

The 2015 Trailblazer Awards by Dennis Pfeiffer

On November 22, 2015 the Montour Trail Council held it's annual dinner at the Valley Brook Country Club in McMurray.. Our president, Ned Williams, was very elegant as master of ceremonies. At that event, four exceptional individuals were recognized with 2015 Gold Spike Trail Blazer awards. They were as follows:

Tom Prezel, current MTC Vice President and co-chair of the Engineering and Construction Committee, was the MTC's project manager for the very successful Library Viaduct rehabilitation project completed in 2015.

Dave Kuhlman, owner of Kuhlman Sales and Services, has over the last twenty three (23) years professionally repaired and supplied parts for the Airport Area Friends numerous push mowers, hand held trimmers, chainsaws and generator and many times donating the work. Pictured below is Dave receiving his award at his shop on December 23.



Ken Gregory, an Airport Area Friends group member, has created and maintained the beautiful "Gregory Gardens" and camping site at the Boggs Trailhead at

mile 11.4 over the last 14 years.

Deb Esia, MTC Treasurer for the last several years, has also done a terrific job as the new Fort Cherry Friends president over the past few years.

MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

Bridges on the Montour - Part 2**By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society**

On the 52 miles of original Montour Railroad right-of-way there were over 80 bridges that the railroad was responsible for building and maintaining. In the last newsletter, steel bridges were discussed, but there were also numerous bridges that used concrete construction consisting of slab, beam or arch types.

Several of the new trail bridges completed in recent years are actually replacements for original concrete railroad bridges at those locations. These include Muse-Bishop Road in Cecil Township, and Bebout and Sugar Camp Roads in Peters Township.

Concrete slabs were the simplest of this style of bridge. They were mostly short in length and would consist of a poured slab sitting on top of two concrete side walls. Many of these slab bridges carried the railroad over small streams or single lane farm roads. Some examples are the small stream beside Beaver Grade Road, the pedestrian underpass at the Findlay Township Activity Center and along Hahn Road at the Valley Brook Country Club.

Concrete beam bridges were used over roadways, streams and as other medium length bridges. Some were made of pre-stressed concrete beams and some used steel I-beams encased in concrete. Locations for these type of bridges include two of the bridges crossing Montour Run near Enlow Tunnel, at Cowden Road in Cecil and at the water company along Brownsville Road in South Park. Most of these had ballast rock placed on the concrete deck and then ties and rails laid on the ballast, instead of using the timber decking style that was prominent on the steel girder bridges.



The bridge at Cowden Road in Cecil Township used steel I-beams encased in concrete. This narrow underpass was completely demolished and re-graded in 2002, with the trail currently using an at-grade crossing of the road. Dennis Sims photo.



This short concrete slab bridge seen under the caboose crosses a stream flowing into Montour Run next to Beaver Grade Road. Gene P. Schaeffer photo.



The concrete arch at Beagle Club Road was built in 1913 during construction of the of the Montour Railroad extension to West Mifflin. It is still in place today carrying the Montour Trail. Photo courtesy Dave Richards.

Concrete arches were used where the railroad would cross on a high fill above a roadway. These look more like a tunnel was dug under the railroad. The arches were typically 24 feet wide to accommodate a 2-lane road. Fill would be piled on top of the arch and then ballast and rails laid in the same manner as on flat ground. Often, when travelling over these bridges, trail users might not be aware that they are actually crossing a bridge, unless they would see a roadway going underneath the trail. It looks very similar to places where the trail (nee-railroad) runs on a raised dirt fill. Examples include Santiago Road near Imperial, Beagle Club and Donaldson Roads near Champion, Primrose Road near McDonald, and Southview Road and the adjacent Miller's Run bridge. Several of the arch bridges were removed due to traffic safety issues where visual clearance was blocked and cars could not see oncoming traffic, or to provide access for large trucks which could not fit through the old arches. Some were replaced with new, longer trail bridges like those on Muse-Bishop Road in Cecil Township and at Bebout and Sugar Camp Roads in Peters. Approaches were re-graded to provide safer sight lines and the new trail bridges, which replace a 24 foot wide arch, each of which exceed 100 feet. The concrete and fill removed at several of these bridge replacement projects was re-cycled and used as fill at other Montour Trail project locations.

Several concrete arch type bridges were removed in Bethel Park in the 1980's, at locations where the Montour Trail was not developed after the railroad was abandoned. These include Logan, Brightwood and Baptist Roads as well as Route 88.

There are also many concrete culverts crossing under the railroad and trail which are too small to be considered as true bridges, but they provide a very important service by draining water that is flowing off the hillsides along the right-of-way.

While some have been demolished and several have been replaced with new bridges, the Montour Railroad built many bridges a century ago that are still in use to carry the trail today and into the future.

You can contact the Montour Railroad Yahoo group at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/ There are currently 349 members from across the country. You are encouraged to join. There is a wealth of information about the Montour Railroad at this location and you can pose questions of its membership, from whom you are sure to get an answer. There is also much information at <http://www.montourrr.com>

Welcome New Members

The Montour Trail Council welcomes these new members and thanks them for their support. We would also like to thank all our members who have recently renewed their membership and to remind all that a growing membership is one of the criteria foundations look for when we apply for grants.

New Members

Charles Bauer
Carole Brachna
Hugh J. Carr
Cheryl Davies
East/Narayanan Foundation
David Garraux
David & Denise Gillette
Michael Grzesiak
John & Denise Heisey
Norman Hilf
Henry & Elizabeth Huffman
Bayard & Karen Johnson
Jason Kurtz
Robert Lehnert
Richard Matthews
Elizabeth McCall
William Morse
John Porcari
William Schildknecht
Donna Staub
Kathryn & Bryan Swinehart
Jamie Wright

Cathy & Jeffrey Finch
Gigi Gerben
John & Denise Heisey
William Morse
Thomas Nacey
Siddharth & Andrea Pant
Henry Pecher
Kathryn & Brian Swinehart
Helge H. Wehmeier

Leaders

Carole Brachna
Kenneth Christman
East/Narayanan Foundation
Laura & Gary Graf
Jim & Wendy Homerosky
Johanna Hvitfelt
David Kasper
Louis & Vida Komer
Anton Knaus
Robert Lehnert
Richard J. Munsch
Robert Purdy
William Schildknecht
Judy & Tom Thompson
Roy Weil & Mary Shaw
Jamie Wright

Benefactors

Christopher Basar
Stephen Bowles
Dick & Annette Bryant

In Memory of William Popeck by Carole Brachna

New Patrol Member Introduced



Wesley Attwood (right) welcomes his Bike Patrol recruit Norman Hilf, (center) a retired State Policeman and resident of Bethel Park along with Patrol leader Jesse Forquer (left).

I want to help complete the Montour Trail!

I want to join the Montour Trail Council at this level:

■ Student/Senior	\$15
■ Individual	\$25
■ Family	\$35
■ Supporting	\$50
■ Sustaining	\$100
■ Benefactor	\$250
■ Leader's Circle	\$500+

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