



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Celebrating 30 Years

Volume 30 Issue 2

March-April 2019

The Originals: Paul Mitsdarfer

by Bruce Barron



The creation of oral history is typically a race against time, an effort to capture the invaluable recollections of heroes while they are still with us.

The 13 Montour Trail originals being featured in this series—the 12 members of the board established in late 1989 plus legal counsel Dick Wilson—are all still alive, but we regret not getting to Paul Mitsdarfer sooner. Paul suffered cardiac arrest in October and is currently living at a rehabilitation center, wide-eyed and full of enthusiasm but capable of only limited verbal communication.

Happily, Paul's faithful wife, Dottie, has helped us to piece together the details so that we can appropriately honor his contributions to the Montour Trail.

Paul and Dottie rented a townhouse on Scott Lane in Peters Township, very close to where the Montour Railroad passed under Brush Run Road, in the early 1980s. Paul recalled seeing trains occasionally during the last year before the rail line was abandoned.

The end of train travel on the Montour gave Paul—who completed 11 marathons at places like Gettysburg, Wheeling, and Ottawa before the Pittsburgh Marathon came into existence, and who celebrated his 40th birthday with a 40-mile run—a great workout facility. Dottie, who joined Paul for some of his shorter runs, remembered having to watch out for kids zooming along recklessly on motorbikes as they jogged beside the railroad tracks. *Continues on page 5*

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Washington County Heritage Tourism

by Pat Friesdam

Phillip Torrez and Pat Friesdam represented the Montour Trail at the Washington County Heritage Tourism event last month. They participated in classes in commerce and making connections. As a result of this meeting, the Montour Trail will be marketed in Europe by Visit Pittsburgh and Washington County Tourism as one of the highlights of the Southwestern Pennsylvania experience. The keynote speaker, Laury Ellen Ward of Finger Lakes Wine Country. (Tourism Director), chose a great place to stand to give her speech (right).



Visit the Montour Trail Web Site at:
www.montourtrail.org
To converse go to:
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or

<http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Montour-Trail/info>



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THE MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Is published bi-monthly January through December.

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The Prez Sez: Spring Time on the Trail

Despite the claims of the old holiday song, right now it's pretty easy to proclaim springtime as 'the most wonderful time of the year.' Birds are back and singing, flowers are up and so is the temperature and everything's in bloom. Even though it wasn't much of a winter, we all want to get out and soak up the special beauty of spring. This is the time we see old friends and lots of new ones, out on the trail. I hope that all of you can get out, soon if you haven't already. It's the time to – even if briefly - just relax and enjoy this season of renewal.

Having been asked to again serve as MTC president, one of the job's pleasures is that regularly I get to place a few words in this fine newsletter. Recent editions have featured a series of stellar articles, in particular "The Originals" interviews with the founding 1989 board members. It's pretty humbling to attempt to follow in the footsteps of those giants. Other Trail-Letter articles explore almost everything of significance happening along the trail, the ongoing efforts of the Friends groups, trail-related events in our communities, and the Montour Railroad stories reminding us of where we came from. Every issue is a fine read, from cover to cover.

Springtime is when the Friends' groups make the effort to more intensively clean up the trail and make it look nice for our Spring visitors. There always seem to be lots of people on the Montour Trail, even fairly early in the season. Encountering a work party, sometimes they'll stop and show appreciation to the hard working bright-shirted volunteers. A few of those passing trail users express a real desire to help out in some way, so these trailside encounters remain one of our best opportunities to bring new people in to the Friends and the other parts of the Montour organization. We can always use more help!

The various elements of the Montour Trail organization, most especially its committees, continue to step up to implement the goals identified in the recently updated (2019-2021) strategic plan. Specifically, the plan's goals are: successful trail development; long term sustainability of the Montour Trail Council and its ability to maintain the physical trail; spreading the word of the Montour Trail more widely and effectively; and increasing our capacity to do all the work it takes to accomplish everything. This is a lot to undertake, but many Montour people are rolling up their sleeves and getting to it. There will likely be an upcoming newsletter article detailing the new strategic plan and its implementation. The key, as always, is that we need to continue to attract people with the desire and ability to shepherd Montour into a healthy future.

One of the most strikingly visible changes along the trail corridor is presently occurring at the Summit Station residential and retail development, located on the former Consol property in South Park Township. Last fall, the eastward march of the Montour Trail mainline continued with initial construction from Pleasant Street to near the Port Authority park-and-ride lot.. The project is being managed by Dave Oyler using funding from a PA DCNR grant. Those trail construction activities will resume this spring. The Summit Station people are working with us to provide a connecting trail into their development. One of several things they are doing as part of their highly cooperative relationship with the MTC. This climate of cooperation is proving to be key to a model of a successful relationship with an adjacent developer. With Montour being a trail located in suburban and rural areas, we are likely to be negotiating numerous such relationships all along the trail corridor as time goes on.

The beginnings of finishing the trail into Coraopolis have already seen a couple of early season volunteer work parties. Managed with great patience by Dennis Pfeiffer and Dave Wright, major construction on the long delayed trail section is expected this year.

continues on page 5

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 "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 6:30 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 Wednesday 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 and varying locations during warmer weather at 7:00 p.m. Work and cleanup parties on the first Wednesday and third Saturday of every month at 8:30 a.m. For more information, please call Jim Robbins at 724-941-6132. For monthly meetings contact Wayne Pfrimmer at 724-747-9766 or by email at waynepfrimmer@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 Caucus Room behind the 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 46.6)

Meeting second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at South Park Township Community Room or the Township Library located at the Township Building at 2675 Brownsville Road, South Park, 15129. Work and cleanup parties on the second Saturday of the month. For more information, contact David Oyler at 412-831-9288, davidoyler1950@gmail.com, or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, mckeownp@comcast.net

The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

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

Westland Friends: (Westland Branch)

Meeting is second Thursday of the month at 11:00 AM at Paneras Restaurant in Bridgeville located on Route 50. Work and cleanup parties meet at the Galati Trailhead on Southview Road and will be announced. For more information contact Doug Ettinger at 412-302-1993 or dougettinger@verizon.net.

Fort Cherry Friends of the Montour Trail by Deb Esia

The Fort Cherry Friends of the Montour Trail maintain the trail between miles 12.3 and 20.7. The Montour-Panhandle Connector, which takes off at mile 16.9 of the Montour, is also part of the Fort Cherry Friends responsibility. Last year our small team of dedicated volunteers logged over 600 hours mowing, trimming, repairing fences and removing tree falls in our section.

The Fort Cherry Friends had two fundraising efforts in 2018: a Steeler ticket raffle and a GoFundMe campaign, in addition to aluminum can recycling to raise money for a new tractor. When our 30-year-old tractor quit running mid-summer, the Montour Trail Council generously provided the remaining monies required to purchase a new tractor. We will be proudly using our new tractor for many years to keep the trail in top condition.

The municipalities of Robinson and Mt. Pleasant in Washington County also assisted the Fort Cherry Friends last year with trail encroachment issues and overgrowth clearing along the trail. Their professional personnel and equipment made a tremendous difference

in the appearance and maintenance required along the trail corridor.

The Fort Cherry section of the Montour Trail travels through mostly rural terrain with the McDonald Trestle (stunning views) and Quicksilver Bridge (beautifully designed) crossing over roadways along its route. The construction of the Southern Beltway (SR 579), which will run parallel to a portion of the Fort Cherry section and cross over the Montour-Panhandle Connector, will soon bring change to our rustic setting. Once the turnpike work is completed, planned residential and business developments will commence due to easy turnpike access. It will not be long before we are welcoming new trail users to the Fort Cherry section of the Montour Trail.

The Fort Cherry Friends group includes: Betsy Prickett, Mary Kay and Phil Sapovchak, Roger McElhaney, Tim Thomassy, Chuck Hughey, John Wasco, Dale Risker and Deb Esia.

J. R. Taylor 5K a Better Deal Than Ever for Young Runners

The annual J. R. Taylor Memorial 5K race and walk, scheduled for Saturday, June 1 at 8:30 a.m. on the trail in Bethel Park, is making a special effort to attract young athletes this year. **Early registration is just \$12 for anyone under age 18.** Adults can still sign up for \$20 through May 12.

As usual, the race will start alongside Washington Elementary School and cross the Taylor Bridge as part of a flat, relaxing out-and-back route. Postrace refreshments from Whole Foods and Bethel Bakery are anticipated.

All of last year's sponsors are back, helping to make this annual event a success for the Friends of the Montour Trail in Bethel Park. Sponsors include:

- Brentwood Bank
- Highfield Crossing Apartments
- Fleet Feet Pittsburgh
- John A. Biedrzycki, Esq.—the Steel City Lawyer
- KOB Solutions
- Brookside Lumber
- Al's Café

Margie Carl of Finleyville provided this testimonial on her J. R. Taylor 5K experience:

I took up running in 2016, and at the urging of others I decided to make the J. R. Taylor 5K my first race. I was full of self-doubt and apprehension, but everyone was so supportive. The race coordinator and other volunteers answered all my questions, told me what to expect, and boosted my confidence.



At the starting line, fellow runners put my nerves at ease with their encouragement. There were runners of all ages and abilities, and despite my fears, I was not left alone in the back. My experience was so positive, I became hooked! In the three years since, I've worked my way up to running my first half-marathon in May. If you need a great confidence-builder for your first 5K, this is it!

Signup is available through the Montour Trail website or at runsignup.com. Contact Bruce Barron at bruce.barron0@gmail.com or (412) 260-8797 with any questions or for race brochures.

Save the date...

June 1, 2019: J.R. Taylor Race. (Bethel Branch)

July 26, 2019: Twilight Walk. (Peters)

Sept 21, 2019: Tour the Montour.. Registration link for riders on montourtrail.org. Volunteers needed as well Raffle tickets on sale in May

Update - Coraopolis Trail Extension Phase 30 by Dennis Pfeiffer

Phase 30 Work Party, March 15, 2019



Airport Area Friends – (L to R) Kevin Swenson, Ken Gregory, Pete Merther, Dale Main, Dennis Pfeiffer, Ed Bashiom, Bill Rose, Mark Modispacher (not pictured)

Shown above is the second Phase 30 fun work party held in 2019 to remove brush and some trees to provide a 25 foot wide clear area for the needed 20 foot wide trail "right of way" (ROW). The crew cleared 700 feet of the trail ROW and now only 750 feet remain to be cleared.

Previous Work:

In 2013, the MTC received a DCNR award to construct the 8/10th of a mile trail connection to Coraopolis. We also received a PA DCED grant, an Allegheny County Regional Asset District grant and a McKee Food grant for the project. In 2016, we received a DEP permit to construct the first 190 feet of trail. This 190-foot was a concrete land bridge built by Marricco Construction that was cut into the steep slope. The slope cut was from the back of the properties on 4th Avenue in Coraopolis and the main line of the CSX railroad. This land bridge was completed in September of 2016 and took the trail to Montour Street in Coraopolis.

Good News:

Finally, in September of 2018 we received the DEP permit for the rest of the 8/10th mile trail. Project manager Dave Wright is now preparing bid documents for filter sock, fencing, guide rail, stone, top soil and other materials that is estimated to cost \$146,000. All of the monies from the other grants was previously spent. The work items described will use up the rest of our remaining DCNR grant funds of \$126,000.

The construction sequence is to grade, place an asphalt millings base and add infiltration ditches this construction season. This will basically complete the trail except for the final surface. The final surface will be asphalt, due to the area being in a flood plain. The MTC will wait until 2020 to place the final surface and hopefully have a grant in place for financial assistance in the work.

Paul Mitsdarfer continues from page 1

Back then, the wooded area off Brush Run on the other side of the railroad bridge was a place for youthful misbehavior. Dottie said they found dead cats in the area on several occasions. Once they spotted two white kittens in a sack; one ran away as they approached, but they brought the other one home. "It turned out to be deaf," Dottie explained. "We had to throw a shoe at the kitten to keep it from climbing our curtains." They went back the next day and rescued the second kitten.

Paul and Dottie were serious bikers too, riding the whole C&O trail from Cumberland to Washington long before it was popular. To manage the feat with no helpers, they drove two cars to western Maryland, biked from one car to the other, and then drove to the next trailhead. "My hands and arms were shaking from all the tree roots we hit on the C&O," Dottie laughed.

The Mitsdarfers were also collectors of railroad memorabilia; in fact, Paul donated a framed photo of a Montour Railroad train that remains in the MTC office today. So between their running, biking, and railroad interests, they had multiple reasons to get involved when in 1989, through a family connection, they met Tim Killmeyer and learned about the proposed Montour Trail.

As a salesman for a company that provided customized forms to banks and other businesses, Paul had a large number of corporate contacts and used those connections to recruit sponsors during the Montour Trail Council's early years.

Paul left the board after his initial term, but the Mitsdarfers remain MTC members to this day. He also participated in work parties during the construction of the Moon-Robinson section in the 1990s. Meanwhile, Dottie maintained a trail connection while working as a legal secretary in the corporate section of the Buchanan Ingersoll law firm, headed by Tom Thompson, whose wife Judy was MTC treasurer in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The Mitsdarfers also found one more way to use the trail—as cross-country skiers. When there was enough snow, they would ski along the railroad right of way for two miles to Al's Café in Bethel Park, stop for a drink, and ski back.

After they retired, Paul and Dottie bought a recreational vehicle and spent winters in Arizona, where Paul's sister lived. But their life of travel and hiking ended suddenly when Paul suffered a bleeding stomach ulcer so severe that doctors wouldn't let the Mitsdarfers drive the RV home.

About nine years ago, Paul had a cardiac arrest while hiking. He had open heart surgery, but was still healthy enough to walk the trail with Dottie until last October's cardiac event.

Even now, though wheelchair-bound, Paul still displays his athletic instincts, breaking the speed limit as he rolls down his rehab center's hallways. "I keep telling him to slow down," Dottie said. "I'm afraid one of these elderly ladies is going to walk out of her room and get plowed over."

Dottie concluded, "Our lives have been enriched over the years by the people who dedicated their time to the Montour Trail. I can't thank them enough."

We thank Paul and Dottie for their historic contributions and are pleased that they will now be preserved for posterity!

Prez Sez Continues from page 2

Elsewhere, a great deal of wonderful activity all along the trail is just starting to gear up for the season, driven by the commitment and determination of Montour's large cadre of volunteers. But, dear reader, continue on; for the compelling stories of all those things are the business of the rest of the pages.

Once again, it is an honor to serve you as president. I will do the best I can, and help is most appreciated. Thanks.

Ned Williams

McConnell Trails Update by Dennis Sims

Just prior to this newsletter going to press, your editor had a casual conversation with Andy Hutchinson, who is overseeing the McConnell Trails housing development, which borders the trail in Cecil Township in the vicinity of MP 24.5. Unsurprisingly, the wet winter has put them behind and with drier weather in the near future they are hoping to get back on schedule. They will still be crossing the trail this spring as material gets moved from the south side of the trail to the north side of the trail. You will see the "tunnel" get back-filled and by June the roadways will have been constructed and trail crossings will not be necessary. At that time, trail damage will be repaired. Construction of the first model home should be underway soon.

MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

Thompsonville – Fife – McMurray**By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society**

The Montour Railroad was constructed through Peters Township in 1913-14. After the railroad was abandoned, the township acquired the property containing the railroad right-of-way in 1985 with the plan to convert it to a recreational multi-use trail. A 3.5 mile section from Rt. 19 looping around to Brush Run Road was paved and designated as the Arrowhead Trail. The remaining three sections leading to the boundary of the township were later opened and are maintained by the Montour Trail Council by virtue of a 30-year agreement with the township.

As you travel the Arrowhead section of the trail, there are several railroad landmarks which are still noticeable along the trail.

On the main line at trail mile 30.6, just east of the through-plate girder bridge near Rt. 19, was the west switch of Thompsonville Siding. It was near the end of the current parking lot behind the St. Petersburg Center. This siding track ran east for about 3,400 feet and could hold 68 cars. A commercial spur came off the siding at the Rt. 19 end to service Easton Lumber, whose buildings now make up the St. Petersburg Center shops. This spur ran along the edge of the current parking area.

Thompsonville siding was used to hold empty hoppers destined for loading at the nearby Montour Mine #4 when the mine yard was filled, and extra cars were pulled off the Hills Transfer track. It could also be used to hold loaded hoppers from the mine when additional space was needed or for coal loads going east to Mifflin Junction. Railroad telephone booths at each end of the siding allowed train conductors to communicate with the Montour dispatcher regarding train movements before radios came into use in the early 1970's.

The double track arrangement of main and siding can be seen in the bridge at the Pelipetz Road trailhead parking area. It is a double width bridge to hold the two tracks. Several hundred yards east of the Pelipetz trailhead was the east end siding switch. It was just about opposite the small block building located along Valley Brook Road. This building was the Hickman Fan, the head of a ventilation shaft coming from Montour Mine #4 below ground.



The double width bridge at Pelipetz Road shows a train eastbound on the main line and Thompsonville Siding to the right. Gene P. Schaeffer photo taken November, 1980.



The steel Fife water tank sits beside the main line in the 1920's. Concrete footers for the four legs and the central column can be found near the edge of the trail. Photo from Gene P. Schaeffer Collection.

A few hundred yards further along the trail was the area known as Fife. A large steel water tank was erected along the main line track and its concrete footings can still be found beside the south edge of the trail near several benches. In 1917 there was a plan to build an engine service facility at the tank, but this plan never came to fruition.

After crossing over McMurray Road, another commercial spur came off the main line to serve McMurray Supply with lumber and coal deliveries. Coal was loaded into trucks for sale and delivery to local homes. This business was located where the Cob Collection and next-door office buildings are now in use. An east facing switch near the end of the current office parking area led to a 495-foot-long spur which could hold 8 cars.

Next to the trail, near the Bebout Road bridge, is a brick house that was originally built for a farm in the early 1900's. It was purchased by the Montour Railroad about 1917 to house the local section foreman and his family. A tool shed was located across the trail from the house. It held tools, spikes and track supplies as well as a speeder car for the section gang to use. Its concrete slab foundation can still be found near the stairs coming up from the Valley Brook Road parking lot.

The paved Arrowhead Trail follows the original Montour main line to Brush Run Road, but the main trail diverges at Library Junction behind the horse farm and continues down the hill on what was the railroad's Library Branch.

You can contact the Montour Railroad Yahoo group at http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/ There are currently 355 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>



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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

Drew Blackburn
 Tom Duzak
 Joshua Fletcher
 Elizabeth Hamilton
 Roger & Belinda Lynn
 Tim O'Keefe
 Benjamin Reuter
 Matthew Sonnett
 Donna Williams

Benefactors

John & Kathy Drescher
 Donna Huffman & Richard Dum
 William & Mary Ann Rose

Leader

Francis Feld

The Montour Trail Patrol

We are looking for a few good men and women to join our Montour Trail Patrol group. Our current Patrol group is made up of



people from all walks of life. Our Patrols assist trail users that need help. Our people have gone through CPR and First Aid Training and can assist bikers with mechanical problems. They also keep an eye out for illegal vehicles on the Trail. In addition, we assist with "The Tour the Montour" bike ride event in the Fall.

In the Photo above, John F. Kun on the right has been with us since May 24, 2017. John is a Certified Public Accountant and is a Partner in an accounting firm. He now serves on the MTC Board of Directors and chairs the Finance Oommittee. If you are interested in participating in our Patrol Group, contact Jesse Forquer, the Director of Trail Security (on the left in the photo) at jjforquer@comcast.net.



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Municipal Support in the Western Corridor of the Trail

By Dennis Pfeiffer

In the last newsletter there was an article on the annual dinner. Amongst others we honored Findlay, Robinson and Moon Townships for originally building the trail and their 25 years of support. There was not room to detail their history of support, so it follows here.

Excerpt:

At the annual dinner the MTC gave Findlay Township a Trail Blazer award for their 25 years of trail support from 1993 through 2018. Representing Findlay Township was manager Chris Caruso and their three Supervisors Ray Chappel, Tom Gallant and Janet Craig. Also receiving trail blazer awards for 25 years of support were the municipalities of Robinson Township and Moon Township. Representing Robinson Township was manager Frank Piccolini and Public Works Manager William Bianco. Representing Moon Township was Code Administrator Lora Dombrowski and Community Engagement Coordinator Amy Ottaviani.

History of Municipal support.

In 1993, after Larry Ridenour met with the three townships and explained the plans for the Montour Trail, we received letters of support from all three townships. Dave Wright then set up meetings with municipal management and their public works directors. Dave presented the engineering plans and said it may be a long time before MTC has the funding to hire contractors to build the trail. However, if the municipalities and their Public Works Departments would consider building the trail, Allegheny County would supply the crushed limestone material for the surface. MTC volunteers would install all needed fencing and signage and build the trail heads and parking areas. Moon, Robinson and Findlay Townships then all voted **yes** to have their Public Works Departments build the trail.

All three municipalities completed the trail in their communities in 1993. They also have occasionally resurfaced sections, after various storm events and normal wear. The municipalities and Public Works workers take a lot of pride in their work and the MTC is very thankful in having and maintaining such a great relationship with them over the 25 plus years. **(Note: North Fayette Township completed their section of the trail in 1994.)**