



The Official Publication of the Montour Trail Council

# MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

Volume 24 Issue 6

November-December 2013

## Bridge Completed at Sugar Camp Road



The new bridge over Sugar Camp Road in Peters Township (mile 33.5) is now open for both trail and road traffic, thus the trail detour near this location is no longer in effect. The 145 foot concrete span replaces the original 24 foot concrete arch that was built by the Montour Railroad in 1913. The new bridge features a faux stone façade and was opened for trail traffic in November.

The bridge is on the asphalt-paved Arrowhead Trail section maintained by Peters Township and similar in appearance to the Bebout Road bridge completed last year. The old arch bridge presented clearance and sightline problems for road traffic, thus it was determined that it should be replaced with a more open bridge style. The road traffic problems have now been corrected, while the trail crossing the deck of the new bridge remains at its original level.

Appalachian Industries was the primary contractor for the bridge project, with funding from Peters Township and Washington County, using proceeds received from the state gaming funds.

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## Interpretive Signs Installed by Bryan Seip, MRHS President



Two new historical interpretive signs have been installed on the Montour Trail by the Montour Railroad Historical Society. They commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of construction by the Montour Railroad at these locations.

*Left: The sign installed at the steps at Venice by MRHS President Bryan Seip..*

One sign is at the rest area and shelter (Trail mile 17.2) near the McDonald Viaduct, adjacent to the Dick Quasey Memorial. It acknowledges the construction of the viaduct and the McDonald Transfer Track which connected the Montour Railroad to the Pennsylvania Railroad's Panhandle Division. This connection is now used by the Trail as the Montour-Panhandle Connector.

The other sign was installed at the Venice Bridge, at the intersection of Routes 50 & 980 (Trail mile 22) in Cecil Township. Replacing a temporary sign, it commemorates the construction of the original railroad bridge, as well as the placing of the yard limit sign and railroad milepost 24, both located at this site.

For more information about the history of the Montour Railroad, go to: [montourrr.com](http://montourrr.com)

Visit the Montour Trail Web Site at:  
[www.montourtrail.org](http://www.montourtrail.org)

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

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**MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER**

Suite 3

304 Hickman Street  
Bridgeville, PA 15017

Or E-mail to:

newsletter@montourtrail.org

All other trail correspondence should be addressed:

**MONTOUR TRAIL COUNCIL**

Suite #3

304 Hickman Street  
Bridgeville, PA 15017

MONTOUR TRAIL COUNCIL  
PHONE NUMBER 412-257-3011

**NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL TEAM**

Dennis Sims, managing editor

Troy Bogdan  
Mark Imgrund

Tim Killmeyer  
Dennis Pfeiffer

**Prez says:**

I extend greetings to the members, friends and supporters of the Montour Trail. We are very appreciative of your support of the Montour Trail. Please let us know how we may better serve you, the organization and/or the general trail using public. Please send any comments, ideas or suggestions to our attention via email to [MTCooffice@montourtrail.org](mailto:MTCooffice@montourtrail.org). or call the office at 412-257-3011.

In 2014, the Montour Trail Council will be celebrating it's 25<sup>th</sup> year of existence. In 2014 we are also anxiously hoping to complete four major main line trail projects. These four major projects when complete will bring the main line ever closer towards being substantially completed. With completion of those four major projects (Library Viaduct, Pleasant Street extension, VB#2 bridge, Coraopolis extension) there will be less than one mile of main line trail to complete and most of it is in South Park Township. Thus we hope the main line will be about 98% complete at the end of 2014.

I said substantially completed above, because as our former president Ned Williams said a while back "We will never be totally complete". I would suggest that Ned's statement is correct, because with 46 miles of main line trail there will always be improvements that could be made. **If funding was not an issue and dreams became reality** .... I suspect a few of our dreams would be a tunnel at Brush Run, a tunnel at Tripphammer Road, a bridge at Park Manor Boulevard or land acquisition to build a bridge across Route 51 near Large. These would all be significant safety improvements and make the trail easier for our users.

However, let us get back to **reality**. As these construction projects are completed, the MTC finds itself evolving into an organization focusing more and more on the critical maintenance and organizational aspects needed for a successful trail now and in the future. Ned Williams last year recognized this need to plan for the future and presented this need to the board with the suggestion of conducting a Strategic planning Session.

After a lot of pre-planning, a Strategic Planning Session was held on November 2 at Robert Morris University in Moon Township. This intense all day planning session was created and lead by board members Ned, Tim Thomassy and Chuck Hughey. As with any planning session, the key is implementing the appropriate recommendations and to periodically review progress relative to those recommendations. Thus a "strategic plan" follow-up approach was the last recommendation in the session.

While not as exciting to report like the opening of a new bridge, I think it is important to let you members know of the hard unseen work occurring behind the scenes. Thanks for your support.

Note: Special thanks for the planning session to our leader in Chairman Tim Thomassy, Chuck Hughey's great technical expertise with gathering and arranging the essential data and Ned Williams's pertinent input and numerous ideas in the pre-planning. Finally, thanks to Robert Morris Professor and HOLT board member Fred Kohun for setting up the use of the room for us in Wheatley Hall on the Robert Morris Campus.

Happy Trails & Merry Christmas  
Dennis Pfeiffer

## 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 Dennis at 412-262-3748 for more information or to get on the agenda.

### 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

### 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.

**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

### 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.

### Peters Township Friends: (MP 28.5 to 30.4, Libray 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 Parks and 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 markingrund@comcast.net.

### The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

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

## Volunteer feature

### Pete Merther: Early To Rise, Early To Mow

On warm summer mornings, runners flock to the Montour Trail near sunrise, hoping to complete their workout before the conditions become stifling. But how many people show up at 5:20 a.m. on a tractor, waiting for sunrise so that they can begin mowing alongside the trail?



We know of only one: Pete Merther, the man primarily

responsible for keeping the Montour Trail's North Fayette and Findlay mileage in great shape for the last 15 years.

Pete, who lives about 1.5 miles from the Cliff Mine Road trailhead, began his Montour Trail volunteer career while on temporary furlough from his job (conducting tests on the quality of steel and plastic products). He helped with the trail opening ceremony at Findlay's Enlow ballfield and then joined the North Fayette-Findlay Friends of the Trail group (now merged with the Airport Area Friends).

As members of that Friends group moved on, Pete was undeterred. In fact, he became virtually a one-man act maintaining the trail from Park Manor Boulevard in Robinson to mile 12. That's why he was often at trailside waiting for sunrise—mowing alongside more than seven miles of trail takes a full day.

"The fun part is to see it looking nice," Pete said, "and I love running the equipment, especially using the articulated arm [on the tractor] and chopping off low-hanging branches."

Pete did survive one close call on the tractor. While spreading dirt for a fence installation, he let the rear wheel get too close to a dropoff. The ground slipped away, the tractor rolled over, and Pete landed head-first in Montour Run. Fortunately, a crane with a forklift pulled the tractor out of the water, and Pete was digging postholes for the fence within an hour.

In addition to serving a term on the MTC board and assisting at the office once a week, Pete has played an indispensable behind-the-scenes role, scripted with logistical precision, the day before the Montour Trail half-marathon each September. For 15 years, Pete has been the unsung hero who picked up 22 large garbage cans at the trail garage in Cecil, scrubbed them thoroughly to sanitize them, positioned them in a rented truck, and filled them with water, dancing between them to tie up each bag while the hose fills the next one. On race day, Pete delivers those 22 garbage cans to serve as the water supply at five aid stations along the race course.

Now retired from his day job, Pete continues to exercise frequently on the trail and mows his section two or three times a year. He cited two things that keep his volunteer motivation high: the people who say thanks when they pass a work party, and the sight of a trailhead parking lot full of cars.

## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Tour the Montour – The Ride of the Sand Carriers

by Sam Hvifelt, Ride Director

One thing is for certain: Tour the Montour riders are a hale and hearty bunch. This year's ride offered nothing for the faint of heart and those stalwart souls who make up the bulk of our ridership came out in force to show Mother Nature a thing or two about dedication and loyalty. Montour Trail fans and supporters would not be deterred by a steady rain that began shortly after 9:00 a.m. and kept us company all day long. With the exception of a few riders unfashionably wise enough to sport fenders, a very large amount of crushed limestone sand found itself magnetically adhering to the back of everything from their helmets down to their shoes. The Eleventh Annual Tour the Montour on September 21, 2013 will officially go down in history as "The Ride of the Sand Carriers".

All in all, this was another wonderfully successful year for the Tour. With over 600 riders ranging in age from 7 months to 70+



*The King of the Mountain: Curt Brown*

years young, we continue to share our trail with all sorts of fun and interesting folks from as far away as DC and the Carolinas. The King and Queen of the Mountain competitors truly braved the elements and conquered the heights the hill challenge demanded. Most impressive were Curt Brown and Ann Austin (who hiked up in a fixed gear bike), our King and Queen for 2013. Not only do they have serious bragging rights and a commemorative award to remind them of their accomplishment.



*The Queen of the Mountain: Ann Austin*

For those of your unable to make the 2013 Tour, you also missed another extensive lunch at Brothers Grimm at Mile 3. Our sponsors Brothers Grimm, The Oakdale Diner, Mediterra Bakery, Moon Giant Eagle, EatnPark and Anthony's Original Wholesale Produce kept everyone's energy levels up with their wide selection of yummy food. And of course you will have missed out on Tim Killmeyer's Collectors' Edition 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Tour T-Shirt – a fairly cheeky design this year on an autumnal shirt color. T-shirts are only guaranteed for pre-registered participants, so those in the know are aware there is distinct benefit for registering before the deadline. You'll also have missed an opportunity to win a fantastic new ride. Pro Bikes LLC generously donated a 2014 Specialized Sirmus Elite for us to raffle as a fundraiser for the trail. We're excited to report we raised \$1,800 in raffle ticket sales

- thank you to all who purchased a chance to win. Liliana Cica from Imperial was our ecstatic winner – she has since visited Pro Bikes' South Hills location to pick up her new chariot (and even added a rear fender for future damp days on the trail). Thanks so much to Chas Duboy and Kris Powell from Pro Bikes LLC for their benevolence and support.

While we can never thank all our generous sponsors enough – we are ceratinly going to give it our best try. Many thanks for their financial support go out to our wonderful title sponsors Newalta, REI and Thermo Fisher Scientific, and our presenting sponsors Brothers Grimm, Nova Chemicals, Wojanis Hydraulic Supply, Pro Bikes LLC and WYEP 93.1fm/WESA 90.5. Additional and much needed support came from our sponsors AFG Retirement Income Planning, Chairman of the Boards, AeroTech Designs, Holy Trinity Knights of Columbus, Lanxess, MarkWest, Trek, ADP Inc., Day Apollo VW Subaru, Mueller Appraisal Service LLC, Somma Funeral Home, Park West Supply, Appalachian Liquids Marketing, Tandem Connection, Signal Graphics, Western PA Wheelmen, Pittsburgh Airport Authority and Original Shake and Twist .. You'll find the names of all wonderful sponsors proudly emblazoned on our T-shirts.

My personal hat is off to our fantastic volunteers, who brave the elements and all manner of challenges to ensure that our riders are safe and well cared for, from the early morning hours of parking through lunch to the final clean up at the end of the day – THANK YOU ..

Congratulations and heartfelt appreciation goes out to our excellent Tour the Montour Planning and Execution team members (Phyllis McChesney, Bud Halpin, Janet Jackson, Cyndi Fink, Teresa Gallagher, Mark Imgrund and Dennis Pfeiffer) and our event team leads:

Dave Mueller – Rest Stops  
Debbie Andrus – Food/Grimm  
Tim Killmeyer – King/Queen of the Mountain  
Don Thobaben – SAG/Ride Patrol  
George Coholich – Parking  
Noel Letterio – Gifts/Prizes

On behalf of the entire team, we'd like to thank all our 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Tour the Montour's sponsors, volunteers and sand carriers. Please don't forget to mark your calendars for next year's **12<sup>th</sup> Annual Tour The Montour on September 20, 2014**. We'll see you all there.

Until then, keep riding and enjoying The Montour Trail.

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## My Top 10 Miles by Warren Smith

In deference to Jack Kerovac's On the Road and John Steinbeck's Travels With Charley. I have written about my experiences on the Montour Trail. As an avid biker and runner who has used the trail for the past 20 years, I could write long, flowing soliloquies about each and every mile. But instead I've decided to place it safe and simply list my top ten miles.

**10) Mile Marker 1.** Not mile marker 0. But mile marker 1. Being born and bred in Pittsburgh, nothing says this area like having a Water Pollution Treatment Center and a Sportsmen Club within a quarter mile. You haven't gone 2 miles and already there are multiple signs that read CAUTION SHOOTING RANGE.

**9) Mile Marker 6.** Huge trees. Pristine streams. And information about the Hollow Oak Land Trust. Without organizations like these we would be biking/running/hiking along 30 miles of strip malls and big box stores.

**8) Mile Marker 26.** There are lots of small gardens and monuments dedicated to people who have made this trail possible. And I appreciate each and everyone's contributions. But my favorite is the Ghost Bicycle Garden. It's so well maintained and I swear every time I go by the couple is there working on it.

**7) Mile Marker 11.** The last mile of what I call Mt. Imperial. I have never camped overnight at the Boggs camping and fitness site, but when I run 6 miles to the top, I do stop and do 100 chin ups and 300 sit ups before I head back down.....

**6) Mile Marker 19.** Off the beaten track, you have what I call the Montour Gorge with steep cliffs on both sides. There is also a long pool of water that is a great breeding ground for prehistoric turtles and 8 foot black snakes. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

**5) Mile Marker 27.** The Tandem Connection is an incredible addition to the Montour trail. It has EVERYTHING a trail users would ever want or need. This mile also has 2 cool bridges and foliage that reminds you of the Great Allegheny Passage.

**4) Mile Marker 7.** The Enlow tunnel is the centerpiece of this mile. But don't ignore the natural marshes and streams on both ends of the tunnel. And if you are thinking about moving next to the trail, there are two houses beside the 5 point intersection that have been For Sale By Owner for the past 20 years.

**3) Mile Marker 25.** Every time I get to the other side of the National tunnel I feel like I have cheated death!! The natural water falls feel great on hot summer days, but crawling across the 10 feet of thick ice during the winter can be a little challenging.

**2) Mile Marker 17.** Ok! So it's not the viaduct outside of Meyersdale on The Great Allegheny Passage. But the McDonald trestle is only about a half mile from my house. Close Counts!

**1) Mile Marker 28.** This was a no brainer! Quite simply I feel like I have been transformed and am now part of the Buhl Planetarium Christmas Train display. Railroad tunnels. Railroad tracks. A babbling brook below. Golfers out in the distance. Steep cliffs. Huge boulders. Amazing mile because of amazing volunteers for whom I am so grateful for.

## MTC Gardens and a Local Landscaper Have Winning Ways by John Hooton

If you have hiked or biked our Trail in the Hendersonville area, you have no doubt seen and enjoyed the five flower and shrub gardens that have expanded there over the last twenty years. Berenice Hooton, chief gardener, with husband John, has been fortunate to attract additional helpers this year. Vince Gaoghan and his sister, Bridget Ellis, have been real soldiers to the cause.



*From left to right: Vince Gaoghan, Bill Kramer and his helper*

The fall's final garden push needs to get special notice. Wood chips dress the gardens attractively, keep the plant root systems moist, and above all, help control weeds. Where do we get a supply, who will deliver and at what cost?

Vince, who lives in an apartment complex nearby, noticed a landscaper, "Landscapes and More", was clearing out unwanted backyard trees in the area. Vince introduced himself to Bill Kramer and found he and his "Landscapes" crew was happy to fill our needs. Even better, "Landscapes" usual dump site is 15 miles away. Long story short, "Landscapes" supplied and delivered 35 cubic yards of free wood chips to us. We now have enough for our gardens and 10 yards for bedding at the nearby MTC campsites.

"Landscapes' and More" is a 22 year old firm located in Aliquippa that serves Washington and Beaver counties for both homeowners and businesses, including Nevillewood. Their efforts were certainly a win for The Montour Trail, and as it turned out, our site helped them save travel time. Thank you, Vince and "Landscapes and More".

That done, the next job was to spread the chips where needed. Again, a volunteer crew of eight stepped up and in a few hours, we had them "put to bed".

**Montour Trail Council members are encouraged to follow in Warren's footsteps and submit articles about their experiences on the Trail.**

## MONTOUR RAILROAD HISTORY

## How Coal and Freight Moved On and Off the Montour

By Bryan Seip - Montour Railroad Historical Society

The Montour Railroad's main business was moving coal. Coal from the mines was taken to the Champion Preparation Plant for cleaning and processing and was reloaded for final shipment to customers like power plants and heavy industries. Non-coal freight also moved to and from local businesses along the Montour.

How did all this coal and freight get onto or off of Montour rails? The Montour established interchange points with five major railroads where cars could be exchanged for further shipment. Some remnants of these interchanges can still be seen as you travel the Trail.

At Montour Junction in Coraopolis (Trail mile 0), a connection with the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie RR was established in 1879, near the current Neville Island Bridge. The Montour Junction complex was built in 1900 and was the main terminus of the Montour, with yards, offices, shops, scales and a passenger station. Coal to be shipped on the P&LE was delivered here and empty hoppers for the mines were received. Non-coal freight cars going to and from businesses on the Montour were also exchanged at Montour Junction. Until passenger service was discontinued in the late 1920's, a station here allowed passengers to transfer to and from P&LE Pittsburgh trains.

A connection with the Pennsylvania RR was made at McDonald in the early 1920's. (Trail mile 17) McDonald was used mostly for delivery of loaded coal cars to the PRR's Panhandle Division. Trains were taken down a transfer track and delivered to the PRR receiving track. This transfer track connecting the two railroads is now the Trail's Montour-Panhandle Connector.

At Southview, (Trail mile 21) an interchange was made with the Pittsburgh & West Virginia RR. This track could hold 38 cars. It was in the same area where the new railroad branch was recently built, except that it climbed the hillside in the opposite direction. The Montour switch was near Antil Street and the P&WV

connection was near Galati Road.



*Engine 76 works the Hills Transfer track in Peters Township as it pulls non-coal freight from the PRR interchange. The empty hoppers and caboose sit on the main line, which is now the Montour Trail. Roy Parkinson photo / Gene P. Schaeffer collection*

Near Baptist Road in Bethel Park (beyond trail's end) was the interchange at Salida with the P&WV (later N&W) RR. A siding there held 60 cars and was used for interchange with the P&WV or for storing cars that were on their way to or from Mifflin Junction. This track was last used in 1976.

The eastern terminus of the Montour was at Mifflin Junction, in West Mifflin. The Union RR maintained a rail yard which also provided a connection with the Bessemer & Lake Erie RR. The Montour interchanged cars at Mifflin Junction, where they had a scale and local agent office to handle shipments. Countless Bessemer hoppers came onto and off of the Montour at Mifflin Junction, which was in use from 1914 until 1975.



*Empty hoppers cross McDonald Viaduct as a loaded coal train heads down the transfer track to deliver its cars to the interchange with the PRR Panhandle Division. Tim Sposato photo*

The PRR connection at Hills (Trail mile 30) was one of the busiest interchanges on the Montour. The PRR delivered a steady stream of empty coal hoppers to be used at the adjacent Montour #4 mine as well as others. Non-coal freight from the PRR was also delivered or picked up at the Hills Transfer. A total of 115 cars could fit on the two tracks here. In the 1970's, Montour #4 was loading up to 130 cars a day, thus train crews were constantly pulling empty cars off the transfer to supply the mine's loading tipple.

In 1929, the Library Branch of the Montour was completed at an interchange with the Baltimore & Ohio RR at Snowden, about a mile beyond the current Trail's Piney Fork section (Trail mile 39). Two tracks each held 60 cars, one used for deliveries to the B&O and the other to receive cars. This interchange was last used in 1975.

Also on the Library Branch, the Montour maintained a connection with the PRR at Pennmont (Trail mile 38.5). This was not used for interchanging cars, but was a remnant of the old PRR Peters Creek Branch that had serviced coal mines near Triphammer Road.

You can contact the Montour Railroad Yahoo group at [http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour\\_rr/](http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/montour_rr/) There are currently 328 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.

## 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

William Beegle  
 Laura Beegle  
 Dan & Dorothy Bielecki  
 Michael Bodek  
 Sandy Bosick  
 Jason Brown  
 Christine Burlew  
 Brent Bush  
 James P. Callan & C. Adele Weitz  
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 George Hondula  
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 John Morris  
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 Amy Ottaviani  
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 Suite #3 2nd Floor  
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*The Montour Trail Council is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. All donations are tax-deductible. You may also be eligible for matching funds from your employer. A copy of the Montour Trail Council's official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling (toll-free within Pennsylvania) 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.*

#### Don't Forget

The Montour Trail Council may be designated as your United Way Contributor Choice as option #3308.



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