



The Montour Trail Council: Celebrating 35 years of trail building

May-June 2024, Vol. 36, No. 3

A Celebration at the Newly Renovated Greer Tunnel in Peters Township



(L to R:) Mark Imgrund, MTC board member; Paul Lauer, township manager, Peters Township; State Rep. Tim O'Neal; State Rep. Natalie Mihalek; Julian Wolfe, MTC president; Larry Maggi, member, Washington Co. Board of Commissioners; Robert Griffin, exec. director, Washington Co. Redevelopment Authority; Nick Koman, MTC volunteer and Greer project manager; Amy Petro, Peters Township Chamber of Commerce; and Brian Tirpak, representing state Sen. Camera Bartolotta.



Early morning rain moved the event inside.



Rep. Tim O'Neal addresses the audience.



Rep. Natalie Mihalek speaks with volunteers.

An illustrious group of elected and local officials, Montour Trail Council members, supporters and friends, and trail volunteers celebrated the renovation of the Greer Tunnel in Peters Township with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting at the tunnel on May 10.

The \$1.1-million project represents the first major rehabilitation of a railroad tunnel that the Montour Trail Council has undertaken. The 235-foot-long tunnel, at mile marker 28.5 between Peters and Cecil townships, was built by the Montour Railroad in 1913 and opened for trail use in 2008.

Julian Wolfe, MTC president, and Ned Williams, a member of the MTC board and its Engineering and Construction Committee, noted at the ceremony that the Greer project could not have been accomplished without the partnership between Washington County officials,

generous trail donors and neighbors, and dedicated MTC volunteers.

Washington County's Redevelopment Authority provided a major grant for the project. The Treadway Foundation also provided a grant for the project. A grassroots fundraising campaign for "Clear the Greer" mounted by the Trail Council has thus far raised \$41,000.

At the ribbon-cutting, Larry Maggi, a member of the Washington County Commission, commended MTC volunteers for their enthusiasm and hard work in building an impressive trail and described it as one of Washington County's top outdoor attractions.

Robert Griffin, executive director of Washington County's Redevelopment Authority, echoed this sentiment, calling the

trail a "premier regional asset."

"Looking at the tunnel today, I think everyone is really happy with the outcome," said Nick Koman, a civil engineer and Montour Trail volunteer who was the project manager, in his remarks.

Over three phases, the project included installing a 120-foot long structural steel rib and panel system into the tunnel, designed by Camber Corp. of Butler, to support the roof. WEC Engineers of Bridgeville was responsible for the engineering of the project, designing a reinforced concrete end-section to support the sloping embankment behind the portal. The construction work on the rehabilitation of the tunnel's eastern portion was done by Swank Construction of New Kensington. Bioni Drilling of Lawrence handled the stabilization work on the western portal.

Prez Sez:**The Montour Trail in the Digital Age**

By Julian Wolfe

An important, but less heralded Trail Council committee, is the Information Technology and Geographic Information System (IT/GIS) group. This committee, co-chaired by Ray Paschke and Zachary Ordo, is a relatively new addition to the Council administrative and operational scene.

Its primary role is to mine new technologies to boost the performance of the organization and improve resources for the trail user. It resolves in-house issues within the MTC technology infrastructure and improves the level of understanding among board, committee, and Friends Group members. In addition, this committee is tasked with integrating the MTC's overall tech strategy with governance and compliance issues. For example, this group is drafting a new privacy policy and devising new digital processes for sales and donations at the trail fundraising events.

The main components within the IT structure are the cloud-based document storage system Zoho WorkDrive, the geographic information system (GIS), and the membership database NeonCRM. The Zoho file storage system was originally designed for tax records and audits. As the system matured, folders for all members, Friends Groups and committees were created that contain MTC bylaws, charters, policies, and procedures. Separate and more compartmented folders were created for our financial affairs.

On the MTC website, maps are among the most visited pages. Our GIS facilitates access to county parcel databases that can assist in identifying vacant properties. For a rails-to-trail organization, GIS augments our knowledge of railroad right of ways. In the future, GIS will aid in our effort to map trail infrastructure, to include sewer lines, grates and flood-prone areas.

The final component is the trail's Neon membership database. This system allows the MTC to track memberships, but also establish and monitor special ad hoc campaigns. One such campaign was the "Clear the Greer" initiative, raising funds to offset the expensive rehabilitation of the 111-year old railroad tunnel in Peters Township.

Neon is also in use to generate emails to new and renewing members. Most recently, this system identified lapsed members and created email notifications that ultimately led to dozens of them renewing their memberships.

The IT/GIS Committee is essential to the future of the trail's ability to not only manage information, but enhance the trail user's experience. Those with interest in this dynamic field are urged to contact: volunteer@montourtrail.org. An IT/GIS Committee volunteer will reach out.

Kudos: As you can read on page 1 of the *Trail-Letter*, we had a wonderful ceremony on May 10 to reopen the Greer Tunnel. A small army of volunteers planned, promoted and executed this event. During the ceremony, we spotlighted a few of these individuals. Let me take this opportunity to thank MTC Trail Patrol members Chief Kevin McGoun, deputy chief James Lapenta, Greg Nass, and Alan Cowfer for their work to ensure safety and facilitate parking. We also are grateful to Peters Township Police Chief Joe Glover for the deployment of Peters Township police to provide security. Thank you to members of the trail's Peters Friends Group, Wayne Pfrimmer, Nick Busia, Dick McCracken, Chuck Harrison, and Subra Hoysala; supported by Cecil Friends, Bob Mihalco, Chuck Wolf, Bev Rowan, Larry Cumberledge, and Donna Click; and senior trail maintenance crew official Dave Jackel for the heavy lift to conduct site preparation and break-down. We also want to express sincere appreciation for transportation services provided by our stellar trail neighbor, Valleybrook Country Club, and its superintendent John Shaw. Last but not least, kudos to MTC's Business Operations Manager Sarah Fetterman. She was critical to the preparation, editing, review, and distribution of invitations, and handled a raft of correspondence and operational coordination for the Greer ceremony. Huzzah!



MONTOUR TRAIL COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Deb Thompson	2024-2026
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Tina Zottola	2024-2026

The Montour Trail Council's Annual Dinner Meeting will be held at the Airport Marriott at the Montour Run Rd. exit of Parkway West on Sunday, November 3, from 5-8 pm. We'll be celebrating our 35th anniversary. Save the date and plan to join us!

MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

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newsletter@montourtrail.org

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Editorial Board:
Mark Imgrund, Fran Hensler, Sarah Fetterman,
and Dave Borrebach

Trail Friends' Meetings and Work Parties

MTC Board Meeting:

Every third Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at 2589 Boyce Plaza Road, Suite 4, Upper St. Clair. Turn at the traffic signal on Boyce Road between the railroad and the creek. 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)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every second Wednesday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the MTC Western Corridor Garage, 450 Cliff Mine Road, North Fayette Township, PA 15108. New volunteers are always welcome. For more information call Mark Modispacher at 412-266-1544. Work parties are scheduled as needed. For more information call 412-262-3748.

Fort Cherry Friends (MM 12.6 to 20.7)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every 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 parties are scheduled as needed. For more information, contact Tim Thomassy at 724-926-4617 or Chuck Hughey at 724-926-9436.

Cecil Friends (MM 22.0 to 28.5)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every fourth Wednesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the Kurnick Access area along the trail off Cecil Henderson Road. Work parties are scheduled as needed. For more information, contact Bob Mihalco at 786-910-5575 or ramihalco@icloud.com.

The Montour Railroad Historical Society:

For more information, email mrhs@montourrr.com

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

Friends of the Trail meeting, the first non-holiday Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at various locations depending on weather and time of year. Work parties on the first Friday and third Saturday of every month at 8:30 a.m. For more information on meetings or work parties please email us at petersfriends@montourtrail.org.

Bethel Park Friends (The 2.75 mile Bethel Branch and a short piece of main line trail around MM 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 parties, every second and fourth Saturday of the month at 8:30 a.m. For more information call Bill Capp at 412-833-5928.

South Hills Friends (MM 35.4 to 46.6)

Friends of the Trail Meeting, every second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at South Park Township Community Room or the Township Library located in the Township Building at 2675 Brownsville Road, South Park, 15129. Work 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.

Westland Friends (MM 21.0 to 21.9, and Westland Branch)

Friends of the Trail meeting, every first Wednesday of the month. For more information, contact Deb Thompson at intrepidscout@theneonweb.com

Special Events on the Trail

By John Dorman, MTC VP & events coordinator

Everyone is probably familiar with the Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour or Penny Day events sponsored by the Montour Trail Council. But not all events on the trail are MTC events. The Montour is open to the public and operated for the benefit and enjoyment of all its users. On occasion, groups or individuals may wish to hold a special event on the trail such as a 5K run or bike ride.

To evaluate and manage these event requests, the MTC has established an Event & Special Activity Policy. It's intended to balance the needs of all our users with those of groups wishing to hold an organized event or special activity.

Very small events (under 25 people) that meet certain criteria are deemed "informal" and can proceed with minimal MTC oversight. Organizations considering larger events and events that do not meet the criteria to be considered informal, must submit an application (found at montourtrail.org). Preference is given to proposed events that would benefit schools, scouting, charities, and nonprofit organizations with missions similar to those of the Montour Trail, as well as events that encourage exercise, fitness and enjoyment of the trail.

Review and approval by the local Friends Group is always required, and depending on the number of participants expected, MTC Board approval may be required, as well. To minimize disruption to trail users who are not part of the event, the MTC may require the proposed event to be modified or rescheduled if it conflicts with other planned events.

Once the event is approved, it is the requestor's responsibility to comply with all trail rules and policies when holding their event – including cleaning up when they are done. They are also responsible for providing proof of insurance for their and the MTC's protection.

Using this policy and approach, the MTC is able to accommodate both the day-to-day users and those wishing to use the beautiful trail resources for special events.



Altered Genius Brewing Co. of Ambridge has opened its Trailside Taproom adjacent to the Montour Trail in the Imperial section of Findlay Township. The taproom, near the township activity center (at about mile marker 8.5), is the first brewery on the trail. Altered Genius poured complimentary ale at last year's Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour post-ride lunch. Altered Genius opened on Merchant Street in downtown Ambridge in 2020.

Blessing of the Bicycles



Deacon Tim Killmeyer of Archangel Gabriel Parish in Robinson and one of the founders of the Montour Trail Council celebrated a “Blessing of Bicycles and their owners” in the parking lot at Mile Marker zero on Saturday, April 20. After a brief prayer service, he sprinkled holy water on the cyclists as they rode by. Cyclists were then encouraged to go for a ride up the trail.

(photo: Phillip Torrez)

Vision 2050 Looks to the Future

At its May board meeting, the Montour Trail Council approved proceeding with Vision 2050, a project designed to identify what the organization will accomplish over the next 25 years.

“This is one of the most important projects we’ll be working on this year,” said MTC board member Tina Zottola, who serves as chair of the council’s Finance Committee. “The consensus we develop during the project and the written documents we produce should have a profound effect on the Montour Trail and the MTC’s ability to thrive as a dynamic, effective organization.”

The project will be led by Michelle Walker and Heather Sage, a two-person consulting team with substantial experience conducting strategy development assignments with regional environmentally-oriented not-for-profit organizations. Their project plan envisions broad-based constituent consultation to incorporate multiple points of view.

After data are analyzed, the consultants will help us develop three documents:

1. Vision 2050: A statement of what the MTC will represent and what it will have achieved by 2050.
2. Major Milestones: A set of intermediate objectives that must be met over the next 25 years in order for Vision 2050 to be achieved.
3. 2025-2027 Strategic Plan: Near-term objectives that take the initial steps toward the achievement of the Milestone objectives and Vision 2050.

The project is scheduled to conclude by the end of 2024.

Stay-tuned: Montour Trail-User Survey

Data is gold. Rather than trying to guess how many people use the trail, or what they think of the trail, the Montour Trail Council collects data to answer these important questions. That is why we initiated an ongoing trail counter program earlier this spring, and why we will be launching our fourth Trail-User Survey in the near future.

As in the past, the survey will be accessible from our webpage and the trail Facebook Enthusiasts page, as well as through a link that will be emailed to our extensive contact list. The survey will include basic demographic questions along with many familiar questions about trail conditions, frequency and duration of trail use, and comparisons with other regional trails.

In a twist for this year, we will also be asking some questions about the future of the Montour and the MTC itself as part of our upcoming long-range planning process – Vision 2050, as discussed in the adjoining article.

Trail-users’ opinions have always been a valuable tool in setting priorities and measuring our progress. This year, it will take on extra importance as we work to identify not only our near-term priorities, but also our long-term view of what the trail will become.

Be sure that your voice is heard – complete and submit your MTC-User Survey.

Fun Fact

The 35-year-old Montour Trail, the nation’s longest suburban rail trail, is among the 200 rail trails in the Commonwealth. These trails, which encompass 2,232 miles, generate economic activity of more than \$120 million annually, according to the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.



Q&A: Jason D. Jesso, CEO, Gateway Engineers

Gateway Engineers has been the title sponsor of the Tour the Montour since 2021. With offices in Pittsburgh, Butler, PA, and a new one near Raleigh, NC, the 70-year-old company is a multidisciplinary engineering business with approximately 200 employees. Ninety-five percent of the company's work is in the Pittsburgh region, which includes projects on the Montour Trail.



Jason Jesso (center) at the Point in Pittsburgh.

Jason D. Jesso, who has been with Gateway for more than 20 years, began spearheading workplace wellness for employees shortly after becoming CEO 10 years ago. The company's wellness initiative encourages employees to balance their work life with their physical and mental well-being through a corporate culture of "act well, eat well, think well." Here, Jesso discusses Gateway's support for the trail's annual fundraising ride and why the Montour is an asset to the community.

How did you come to the Montour Trail?

My initial exposure to the Montour Trail was when I was training for the Great Allegheny Passage ride from Pittsburgh to Washington, D.C., on my gravel bike.

Why has Gateway taken a major role in supporting the Tour the Montour?

Our enthusiasm for supporting the Tour the Montour comes from a few reasons. First, the event aligns perfectly with Gateway's Employee Well-Being Program. We understand the importance of taking care of ourselves and one another, and the tour is a great way for employees to be active. Second, the

trail has access points within 20 minutes to over half Gateway's employees. It couldn't be more convenient. And lastly, the event has a great exposure to a large, diverse pool of clientele. It's a great way for us to make connections outside of the office.

Do you believe it's important for companies in the region to support the trail?

Yes. The trail acts as a major benefit for so many people. It allows them to have direct access to a no-cost, well-maintained, multi-purpose outdoor facility.

What do you most enjoy about the trail?

The number of access points is what I enjoy the most about the trail. From South Park, Bethel Park, Peters Township, to Coraopolis, I love the fact that I can get a bike ride or jog in, in combination with my kid's activities – my son is playing hockey at RMU, and my daughter is running cross country in South Park and has forensics meets in Peters Township. The accessibility makes it easy to be active.

What activity gets you on the trail?

Cycling and running, of course.

Is there a section you favor?

My favorite section of the trail would have to be the first 2.5 miles starting from the Logan Road's access point. This is my go-to running spot.

Do you have a favorite Tour the Montour memory or moment?

My favorite part of the Tour the Montour is riding in a group. As someone who mostly cycles alone before the sun rises, I love being able to ride in a pack. Being together is the best part.

The 2024 Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour will be Saturday, Sept. 21. Registration online starts June 3.

Montour Participates in Target Circle Campaign

We are honored and excited to announce that we have been chosen to participate in a special charitable giving campaign, sponsored and funded by Target. And you have the chance to help direct a portion of Target's donation to us!

Now through June 30th, vote for us through the Target Circle program to help determine how Target's donation will be divvied up. Find out more about Target Circle here: www.target.com/circle

We're asking our supporters to help us make the most of this incredible opportunity. Every vote counts to help us receive a portion of the available Target funds as we continue our mission to build and maintain the Montour Trail.

Don't forget, as you earn more votes, you can keep voting multiple times during the campaign.

Thank you for your support, and we encourage you to share your support for us (and your thanks to Target) on social media throughout the duration of the voting.



Montour Railroad History

Tunnels on the Montour Railroad

by Bryan Seip, Montour Railroad Historical Society



Aaaah – fresh air. A train exits National Tunnel, trailing a cloud of diesel exhaust. (photo: Gene P. Schaeffer)

With the recent re-opening of Greer and National tunnels after repairs and winter closure, the Montour Trail is again wide open for travel. I thought this would be a good time to reprise a previous Montour History column to inform newer trail users and remind others about the tunnels on the trail.

During the summer months, Montour Trail patrons enjoy a brief respite from the sun and heat as they pass through the tunnels on the trail. How many tunnels are on the Montour? Let's count them – Jeffreytown – Enlow – Peacock - McConnell – Bishop – National - Greer – that makes seven tunnels, right? Well, not exactly.

The first tunnel, at trail mile 7.2, was actually the last one built and was known by two different names. Railroaders called it Jeffreytown for the settlement at the eastern portal, but it is also known as Enlow Tunnel, for the town located to the west. It was built in 1926 as a re-alignment project eliminating several sharp curves on the Montour's main line. The original railroad followed Montour Run as it looped around the hillside. The tunnel eliminated about a half-mile of track and some sharp curves by burrowing under the hill for 575 feet. This tunnel is the only straight bore on the Montour.

The next tunnel was probably the first one to be built, but now does not exist. It was bored through the hillside at Peacock, at Trail mile 19.2. Built during the 1913 extension of the railroad, it had a wooden liner, a curved bore and was about 600 feet in length. This tunnel had numerous problems, including rock falls and water seepage, as the ground was unstable and very wet. After a few years, around 1918, it was determined that the tunnel was too difficult to maintain as there had been too many blockages of railroad traffic. It was daylighted, which means digging out the roof and making it an open cut through

the hillside instead of a tunnel. As you travel through what is now Peacock Cut, you will notice that the hillside still stays very wet and rocks litter the ditches and occasionally roll out onto the trail surface.

At Mile 25.0 in Cecil Township, another tunnel was built in 1913. Bored through a hill on the McConnell farm, it was thus known as McConnell Tunnel. It was also called Bishop Tunnel, for the nearby community, and when National #2 mine was opened nearby, it became more widely known as National Tunnel. Also built with a wooden liner, the concrete portals and liner were added in 1928. It has a curved bore and also crests a hill inside its 623 foot length. Pulling trains over the hill inside the tunnel meant the engineers had to keep full power on their train while transiting the tunnel. Smoke, steam and later diesel fumes made it an unpleasant trip and the crews tried many solutions, like water-soaked bandanas over their noses, to help them breathe while inside the tunnel. Trains were often down to a few miles an hour going through the tunnel, which made the transit time even longer.

The final tunnel was bored through the ridge above Chartiers Creek in 1913 at trail mile 28.6. It also has a curved bore and was the shortest on the line at 235 feet. As with the others, it had a wood liner until concrete was added in 1922. A nearby tunnel had been previously bored to carry the Pennsylvania Railroad through this ridge and was called Bell Tunnel after the landowners of this area. The Montour called its newer tunnel Greer, for another nearby landowner. The active railroad now operating through Bell Tunnel's trainmen actually call their tunnel "Greer," as did some old U.S. topographic maps – a misnomer that adds to our tale. Greer is a tunnel with only one name, but seemingly with two locations.

Now the answer to our original question, as trail patrons know, is actually three. But the tales and stories are as numerous as the countless coal trains that have passed through those tunnels in the past 100-plus years.



A train in Peacock Cut, from 1979. Originally bored as a tunnel, it was "daylighted" around 1918. (photo: Gene P. Schaeffer)

You can contact the Montour Railroad Historical Society through Facebook by searching for *the Montour Railroad Historical Society*. There are currently 425 members from across the country. There you'll find a wealth of information about the Montour Railroad and you can pose questions of its membership. You can also check at montourrr.com

I want to support the Montour Trail Council



Become a member now

Complete this form, scan the QR code, or go to montourtrail.org/support-us/



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Annual Membership Level

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- ☐ Leader's Circle.....\$500
- ☐ Benefactor.....\$250
- ☐ Sustaining.....\$100
- ☐ Supporting.....\$50
- ☐ Family.....\$35
- ☐ Individual.....\$25
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Contribution enclosed: \$ _____

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MTC Earns Four-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

By Bill Orr, MTC Treasurer



The Montour Trail Council proudly announces that our strong financial health, ongoing accountability and transparency have earned a Four-Star Rating from Charity Navigator. This rating designates the MTC as an official "Give with Confidence" charity, demonstrating that we are using donations effectively based on Charity Navigator's criteria. Charity Navigator is America's largest and most-popular independent charity evaluator. Since 2001, it has been an unbiased and trusted source of information for more than 11 million donors annually.

Charity Navigator analyzes nonprofit performance based on four key indicators, referred to as beacons. Nonprofits can earn scores for the Impact & Results, Accountability & Finance, Culture & Community, and Leadership & Adaptability beacons.

"We are delighted to provide the Montour Trail Council with third-party accreditation that validates their operational excellence," said Michael Thatcher, Charity Navigator president and CEO. "The Four-Star Rating is the highest possible rating an organization can achieve. We are eager to see the good work that Montour Trail Council is able to accomplish in the years ahead."

Julian Wolfe, MTC president, said, "Our Four-Star rating is further validation that our donors, members and trail-users can trust our commitment to good governance, integrity and transparency. Prospective members and donors, furthermore, can be assured that their support will advance our core mission to construct new and rehabilitate existing trail, ensure financial stability and oversight, and manage and expand our growing volunteer base."

The MTC will continue to raise funds for ongoing trail improvement projects including the recently-reopened Greer Tunnel rehabilitation along with trail reconstruction and repair from the April flooding.

MTC's rating and other information about charitable giving are available at charitynavigator.org.

Welcome New Trail Members and Donors

The Montour Trail Council welcomes these new members and donors and thanks them for their support. We would also like to thank all our members and donors who have recently renewed their annual contributions. Please note that foundations and other grant-making agencies often look at a strong membership as a criteria in their consideration of our funding requests. Not all new members have been entered as of our print deadline and will be listed in the next edition of the *Trail-Letter*.

New Members

Carol Aber
 Ronald Barbati
 John Belleno
 David Bentley
 Rod Bourn
 David Cappello
 Michael Dailey
 Susan Dunay
 William Frazier
 Elizabeth Gallik
 Kristina Gantner
 Timothy Garry
 Walter & Lynn Heintzleman
 Michael Hood
 Susan Hyre
 Cathie Jenkins
 Brianna Kadlecik
 Beth Kairush
 Rod & Judy Kemerer
 Sue Lauer

Mark Mamroj
 Linda Maydak
 John McCracken
 Marianne McIntyre
 Susan Phillips
 Brendan Poffenbaugh
 Tom Pollard
 Richard Roos
 Elizabeth Russell
 Patrick & Barb Schneider
 Harry Serene
 Carol Stein
 Joseph Sufrin
 Brian Wallace
 Robert Wargo
 Bernard Wendler

Trail Blazer

Berkshire Hathaway Energy Political Action Committee
 David Cappello
 John Dorman

David Oyler
 Rosie Leo and Autumn Fund

Leader's Circle

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 Kelley Suwak
Phillip Torrez
 Timothy Green
 Mark & AJ Modispacher



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