



## Celebrating 35 Years

An enthusiastic group of Montour Trail volunteers and friends joined in celebration on Nov. 3 at the Airport Marriott to mark the 35th anniversary of the organization’s founding.

In his opening remarks at the MTC annual meeting, Trail Council Treasurer Bill Orr described the organization’s contributions to the community since its founding in 1989 as “profound” in that it provides so much to so many.

He noted, “It’s a place to meet and spend time with a friend ... A place to spend time with your family. A place for a child to learn how to ride a bike. A place to connect people with nature ... A place to start a health improvement journey ... And a dedicated place for cyclists to ride that is off-road.”

In “State of the Trail” remarks, MTC Vice President John Dorman described 2024 as another “remarkable year” for the volunteer-led Trail Council, pointing to “successfully renovating some of the major critical infrastructure and opening some new trail.

“... the organization launched new public outreach programs, initiated new membership levels and funding programs, conducted trail surveys, secured new grants while still maintaining and expanding our signature event, the Tour the Montour, and advancing our annual maintenance crew resurfacing campaign.”

A major accomplishment this year was completion of a short trail segment between Stewart Road and Wood Street in South Park Township, Dorman said. “This project, led by (volunteer project manager) Dave Oyler, filled the final gap in the trail between milepost *continued on page 5*

## Montour Milestone: 40 miles of Continuous Trail



*Local and state officials and dignitaries join trail volunteers at festive ceremony.*

The Montour Trail Council celebrated the completion of a short but important section of the trail in South Park Township with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Oct. 17.

With this 1,000-foot section completed, trail users can now enjoy 40 miles of continuous off-road trail that begin at Montour Trail mile marker zero in Moon Township and extends to Green Man Tunnel.

“It’s a real milestone moment, a pivotal moment,” said Julian Wolfe, president of the Montour Trail Council who presided at the ceremony during which local and state officials and Montour Trail partners participated.

They included Edward Snee, chairman of the South Park Township Board of Supervisors, Adriene Smocheck from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and Joshua Scanlon of Gateway Engineers.

Before this trail section opened (which is at about trail milepost 35.5), trail-users had to travel on Brownsville Road where they encountered vehicle traffic. The new section starts at Wood Street atop a rock

streambank protection embankment. It closely follows Piney Fork Creek to a bridge in a grove of trees, then crosses Stewart Road to a trail parking lot.

Dave Oyler, a longtime Montour Trail volunteer who acted as project manager for the new section, thanked trail partners at the ceremony that included DCNR, which provided significant grant funding, the Pirain family that granted an easement on their property, and Pittsburgh-based Gateway Engineers, which designed the trail plan. Oyler also acknowledged South Park Township, especially Township Manager Karen Fosbaugh, and PennDOT for their assistance.

The project was the final link in a \$4-million effort to close the trail gap in South Park Township and took about 10 years to complete.

Montour Trail Council officials praised project manager Oyler, a member of the trail’s South Hills Friends Group, for his steady management and persistence in keeping the project moving forward. The council also acknowledged *continued on page 5*



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### Help Wanted: Finance Volunteer Opportunity

The Montour Trail Council seeks a volunteer Accounts Payable Specialist to join our finance team. He or she will work, in conjunction with our business operations manager, to: Disburse payments to vendors/suppliers; prepare reimbursement payments to volunteers; record deposits and ETFs; update vendor and donor information; assist MTC Finance Committee with annual audit; and prepare reports such as list of checks and A/P aging, using QuickBooks standard reports. Familiarity with QuickBooks online desirable. Time commitment: about two hours/week at the trail office. If interested, contact: [treasurer@montourtrail.org](mailto:treasurer@montourtrail.org)

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Mark Imgrund, Fran Hensler, Sarah Fetterman,  
and Dave Borrebach

## Prez Sez: Legends of the Montour Trail

By Julian Wolfe

The Montour Trail Council convenes an annual meeting in November to recap the year's achievements and recognize the contribution of outstanding individuals and groups. At our gathering on Nov. 3, we presented lifetime achievement awards to three long standing pillars of the organization. These three volunteers have worked in various capacities for decades to build, maintain and enhance the Montour Trail. In this, our 35th anniversary, I want to share some of their accomplishments and successes. They serve as a wonderful example of what one volunteer can accomplish. Huzzah!



### Gil McGurl

Gil launched his trail career in 2004. Within a few short years, he was a member of the Trail Council's Engineering & Construction, Finance, and Real Estate committees. He co-chaired E&C from 2010 to mid-2024. Gil served as Trail Council vice president at a time of substantial trail expansion. He served as a member of the three-person Trail Council delegation that negotiated a landmark agreement with MarkWest, which

resulted in the construction of trail's Westland branch in 2010 and solidified the Trail Council's financial future. As a project manager, Gil spearheaded the build-out of the trail from near Valleybrook Road to the Greer Tunnel in Peters Township.

Gil earned his B.S. at Carnegie-Mellon University, M.S. at Oklahoma State University in chemical engineering, and a Ph D. in philosophy from the University of Maryland.

Gil worked for several decades for the U.S. Department of Energy. He also worked as a senior fellow for energy policy at PennFuture, a nonprofit focused on clean energy and protecting air, water, land, and sustainable communities in the Commonwealth.



Oyler (L) with South Park Supervisor Edward Snee.

### Dave Oyler

Dave began volunteering with the Montour Trail Council in 2001. By 2003, he joined the council's Engineering & Construction Committee. He served on the council's board of directors for 12 of the last 13 years. He was a founding member in 2006 of the South Hills Friends, the trail group responsible for day-to-day maintenance of the Montour between Library and Clairton. He has been the secretary/treasurer of the group since its inception. As secretary, he is responsible for the group's agenda and meeting minutes, and writes regular news items for the *South Park News* and *Mon Valley Messenger*.

Dave was the project manager for two major trail projects that closed the trail gap between the Library Viaduct and Stewart Road and has written a half dozen successful grant applications for trail funding, bringing over \$1.2 million in trail construction funding into South Park Township.

Dave graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1972 with a B.S. in *continued on page 3*



## 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](mailto: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 am. For more information on meetings or work parties please email us at [petersfriends@montourtrail.org](mailto: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](mailto:davidoyler1950@gmail.com) or Paul McKeown at 412-835-6692, [mckeownp@comcast.net](mailto: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](mailto:intrepidscout@theneonweb.com)

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physics and in 1980 from Pitt with a B.S. in mechanical engineering.

Dave worked in Texas as a cased hole geophysical logging and perforating engineer for Schlumberger Well Services from 1972-1974. In 1975, he went to work for the U.S. Bureau of Mines at the Bruceton Research Lab in South Park Township as a research engineer. For the first 10 years, he worked in the Methane Control Group, researching ways to produce natural gas from coalbeds. In the mid-1980s, he worked in ground control research until his retirement in 2011.



### John Kozak

John entered into service with the Trail Council as a member of the Bethel Park Friends in 2002. He was a pivotal contributor in the buildout of the trail in the eastern section of Peters Township. John quickly became one of the most trusted heavy equipment operators. Within the last decade, he has been involved in numerous projects to upgrade the trail, including as a member of the trail maintenance crew's resurfacing team. He was also a key volunteer in periodic projects to upgrade and maintain lighting and doors on the National Tunnel. In addition, John contributed significant time to assist Cecil Friends, such as the 2022 major fencing rehabilitation initiative.

His most important role in recent years has been as chief mechanic for the maintenance crew and Friends Groups. John is one of those unique individuals with a talent of repairing anything. He has been the main "go-to" man when a riding mower, farm tractor, dump truck and smaller devices suffer a mechanical failure.

John Kozak graduated from Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie Mellon) with a degree in computer science. He served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps in Germany and later was employed by Westinghouse Electric and Eaton Corp.

## Fun Shines at Annual Tour the Montour

Cyclists from throughout the region rolled out for the 22nd annual Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour on Sept. 23. The popular family-fun ride attracted 500 registrants who choose out-and-back rides on the trail from 12 miles or less to a metric century (62 miles).

Through the support of UPMC Health Plan, more than 50 children 16 years of age and younger who signed up with an adult were able to ride free, in an inaugural program initiated by Tour leadership.

The Montour Trail's signature fundraiser raised \$46,000 in sponsorships, a 50 percent increase from the previous year. Tour leaders want to thank local businesses and retailers, companies, and corporations for their generosity in supporting the trail.



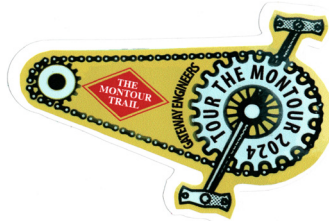
More young bike riders joined the Tour, courtesy of UPMC Health Plan.



Tour rider shows off her 2024 sticker (inside red circle).

This year's Tour benefited from a large number of volunteers who pitched in during the day, that included staffing the four rest/refreshments stops, luncheon and road crossings. Many Tour riders commented on the helpfulness and congeniality of our volunteers.

Tour leaders want to especially thank Brandon Otis and the 20+ volunteers he helped coordinate from Wellspring Church in Bridgeville.



Following their rides, cyclists enjoyed a picnic lunch at the Forest Grove Sportsmen's Club near trail milepost 1.5.

Please mark your calendar for the 2025 edition of the Tour, it is scheduled to roll on Saturday, Sept. 20.

## Walking, Cycling, Running, Now Yoga

The Westland Friends Group held what was envisioned to be the first-ever trailside yoga class at the Galati Trailhead in mid-October. Jon Haden, a veteran yoga instructor (and cyclist) from the North Hills, led the morning class, the first time he had conducted a session outdoors.

Haden said the location of the class was ideal since it was "quiet, accessible, beautiful, and faces the rising sun, which is how yoga is practiced traditionally in India, enhancing the experience." He also liked that people using the trail could see the yoga as they passed, "working in conjunction with the trail itself."

Westland Friends President Deb Thompson notes the yoga was staged as a fundraiser for the Friends Group and there are plans to convene yoga sessions in the Spring when warmer temps return.



The Galati trailhead was the site of the first-ever organized yoga class on the Montour Trail, led by Jon Haden (second from left).



### *continued from page 1 - Celebrating 50 Years*

zero and Green Man Tunnel. We now have 40 miles of continuous off-road trail.”

Another important development this year, he said, was the extensive renovation and re-opening of the Greer Tunnel in Peters Township, celebrated by a ribbon-cutting ceremony in May with local and Washington County officials.

Calling it “perhaps one of the most visible components of the Trail Council,” Dorman recognized the trail maintenance crew that’s deployed three days a week from March through November. The crew, led by Bill Capp and a senior team of Dave Jackel, Dave Mikula and Bob Sutton, recorded 4,200 volunteer hours between those nine months, he said.

Not only did the maintenance crew resurface more than six miles on the mainline trail in the Airport Area and



*Longtime trail advocates Mary Shaw and Roy Weil*

Fort Cherry segments and the Westland branch, but they were also pressed into action in the Spring after major storms damaged key trail sections, said Dorman. Moreover, they spent considerable effort to shore up the area around the National Tunnel in Cecil Township, he said.

Keynote speakers Mary Shaw and Roy Weil discussed their decades-long advocacy of connecting regional trails in the era before biking and hiking information was readily available online. Their explorations led them to compile *Free Wheeling in and Around Western Pennsylvania*, a book first published in 1995 and updated several times since.

They initiated the Yockatomac Trek in 1999 to help garner support for completing the Great Allegheny Passage, the 150-mile trail between Cumberland, MD, and downtown Pittsburgh, which was finally connected in 2013. The Yockatomac Trek began in Washington, DC, and their hardy band

of cyclists encountered many gaps in a contiguous off-road trail to Pittsburgh.

The couple established the Trail Volunteer Fund at the Pittsburgh Foundation in 2007 to provide grants to purchase tools, materials, and supplies to be used by volunteer trail projects. The fund has generously contributed to the Montour Trail and its Friends Groups.

Mary and Roy encouraged the MTC to continue its efforts to connect the Montour to other trails and to cultivate its volunteer corps.

Results of the MTC Board election were announced at the annual meeting. Elected to begin serving their three-year term beginning in January were: Dave Borrebach, Peter Kohnke, Mark Modispacher, Bill Orr, Dave Oyler, Tom Prezel, Ned Williams and Chuck Wolf.

#### **MTC volunteers were recognized at the annual meeting:**

**Elizabeth Babcock**, honored for creating excellent training modules for MTC’s online record-keeping system.

**Dave Borrebach**, former VP and active member of several committees and leader of numerous initiatives, honored for his many years as chairman of the Nominations Committee.

**Ray Paschke**, co-chair of the IT/GIS Committee, for tackling several long-neglected technology issues the Trail Council has faced.

**Don and Jackie Thobaben**, longtime cycling enthusiasts and charity ride volunteers, honored as deputy co-directors of the 2023 and 2024 Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour.

**Phillip and Annemarie Torrez**, honored as co-directors of the 2023 and 2024 Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour.



*Dave Borrebach receives award from VP John Dorman.*

### *continued from page 1 - Montour Milestone*

its volunteers including the trail’s maintenance crew led by Bill Capp and many generous donors.

The project required the construction of four bridges, a multi-million dollar rehabilitation of the 500-foot long Library Viaduct spanning State Route 88, and numerous other minor construction projects.

In remarks at the ceremony, DCNR’s Smoczek said that “trails are vital as infrastructure for transportation and local economic growth but perhaps most importantly, trails like the Montour Trail provide great benefit to the neighborhoods they touch and the people in them.”

## Montour Railroad History

### Green Man Tunnel

by Bryan Seip, Montour Railroad Historical Society



The tunnels under construction beneath the B&O trestle in 1924.  
(Photo: South Park Historical Society)

At milepost 39.5 in South Park Township sits one of the most infamous sites along the Montour Trail, Green Man Tunnel. The scary stories about the Green Man are the stuff of legend. But — before there was Green Man ....

The B&O Railroad constructed a trestle crossing the Peters Creek valley in 1884. This wooden trestle was then the second highest in Pennsylvania. Running underneath the trestle, the Pennsylvania Railroad extended its Peters Creek Branch along the valley in 1905 to eventually service the Knothole Mine, which opened in 1913, and the Consumers Coal Gould Mine in 1919. Both mines were located near the current Triphammer Road trailhead.

The trestle lasted until 1924 when the wood structure was replaced. Two concrete tunnels were built beneath the trestle, which can be seen under construction in the accompanying photo.

The tunnel on the left was divided into two lengthwise sections, one carrying Piney Fork Creek and the other a roadway. This became known as Corvette Tunnel. The white looking tunnel on the right housed the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Upon completion of the two tunnels, the trestle site was filled with dirt up to the level of the original trestle and B&O tracks were re-laid on top of the new fill section. This railroad is still in use, currently by the Allegheny Valley Railroad.

In 1929, the Montour Railroad extended their Library Branch down the valley from the opposite direction to establish an interchange point with the B&O about a half-mile from the tunnels. The interchange was named Snowden, where coal hoppers and general freight were exchanged. A short section of the existing PRR track was leased to complete this extension.

By 1963, the mines served by the PRR had been closed for years. The PRR abandoned their Peters Creek Branch and the shared section of track was sold to the Montour Railroad.

But now, what about the spooky legend of the green man who

haunted the PRR tunnel in the valley?

Starting in the 1940s, stories started to circulate about a faceless green man who haunted the tunnel. If he approached a car full of youths and touched the car, it would spark and stall the motor, making it hard to restart. There were also stories about a man who murdered his family with a hatchet in the depths of the tunnel. With ghosts and murderers, the tunnel became a popular spot for local teenagers, but not for the faint of heart. These legends and sightings led to the tunnel becoming known as “Green Man Tunnel.”

The stories do have a basis in truth, though. In 1918, an 8-year-old boy named Raymond Robinson was climbing around some power line poles and touched one of the wires, sending 22,000 volts of electricity jolting through his body. It burned off most of his face and he lost his eyes, nose, an ear and an arm, but he survived.

After some years passed, Raymond started walking along local roads to help keep active. He took his strolls at nighttime to keep out of the view of cruel townsfolk who called him names. This nocturnal wandering only served to add to the urban legend that was growing around him. After accidentally being discovered on his nightly walks, the tale of the Green Man — or Charlie No-Face, as he was also called — developed. There are conflicting stories about the origin of the “green skin” idea.

Some accounts say he always wore his favorite green plaid shirt or other green clothes that reflected the color onto his pale skin while others swore his skin was actually a pale shade of green. Either way, it became a popular pastime to head out at night to look for Raymond.

Those who weren't too terrified to stop would often chat with Raymond over a smoke. He even posed for pictures, often in exchange for beer or cigarettes. Raymond continued his evening walks until his death in 1985, and by then his story had become legend.

With the railroad abandoned, South Park Township uses Green Man Tunnel to store road salt, but the old stories and legends continue. Even though Raymond is gone, be cautious — there just might be something lurking back there in the shadows.



South Park Township stores road salt in Green Man Tunnel now.

**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](http://montourrr.com)**



## I want to support the Montour Trail Council



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## Opportunities for Year-End Charitable Giving

By Joe McKittrick

### Employer matching:

Employer matching gifts are a form of corporate giving where companies agree to match their employees' and sometimes retirees' charitable donations. For the Montour Trail, these programs produce additional fundraising revenue that goes towards the maintenance and expansion of the trail.

The end of year is rapidly approaching, and a lot of companies have December deadlines for employees and retirees to submit their employer matching gift request. If you haven't submitted your employer matching gift request already for prior donations or have a new donation, these steps can help.

Assess your eligibility and gain access to detailed information about your employer's

corporate giving program by searching our database of companies with matching gift programs: <https://montourtrail.org/support-us/donations/>

### Planned giving:

Also referred to as gift planning or legacy giving, it is a donor's intention to contribute a planned gift to an organization beyond their lifetime. This is often a continuation of the donations an individual or couple has made while living, but on a much larger scale.

Unlike an annual gift, a planned gift is scheduled for the future, often as part of financial or estate plans. Typically donated through a will or trust, planned gifts are realized after a donor passes away. Typically, planned gifts are coordinated with professional advisers, attorneys and nonprofit organizations.

Other benefits include:

- Planned giving provides an opportunity to leave a major gift that may not have been possible in a donor's lifetime due to financial commitments.
- Charitable gifts are often exempt from estate tax, allowing more of the gift to go directly to the organization.
- Donors can avoid capital gains taxes when they transfer assets as part of a planned gift, maximizing the charitable contribution.

Perhaps the biggest benefit is that planned giving preserves a donor's legacy. The Montour Trail Council is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization so donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowable by law.

Please contact us at [MTCooffice@montourtrail.org](mailto:MTCooffice@montourtrail.org) if you have any questions or would like more information.

## 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*.

### Trail Blazer

Stephen Colodny  
Philip Kocher

### Benefactor

Sarah Buffington  
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Lyle Farmer  
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Timothy & Kathleen Kosty  
Jane Lienhardt  
Denny Long

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Suzanne Sperling  
Michelle Talarico  
Phillip & Annemarie Torrez  
Bob Waruszewski  
John Wasco  
Nicholas Weirick

### In Memory

Jerome "Jerry" Heinz  
Christine Heinz  
Thomas A., Freda I., Thomas H. & Margaret V Higgins  
Anonymous  
Robert O'Connell  
Sue Allen  
Marlene Pennington

### In Honor

Dave Borrebach,  
Margaret Kinsky &  
Karen Robbins  
Robert St. Clair

### New Members

Gerard Beckhusen  
Grey Berrier  
Richard Bondi  
Franklin Chen  
Charles Christen  
David Cochran  
Tony Cuneo  
Krista Day  
Joseph & Beverly Dorko  
Andrew Garrett  
Gary Gegick  
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