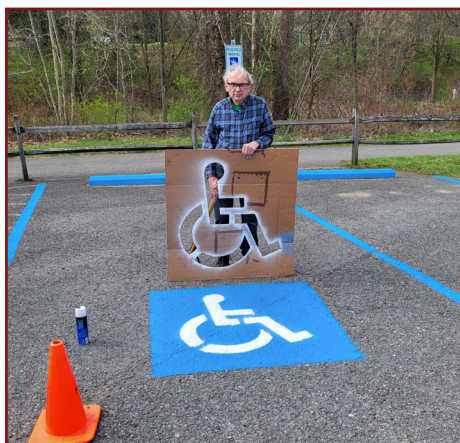




Trail Moves to Improving Accessibility *by Liz Dunn*

Physical activity is important for everyone, including people with disabilities. In a region filled with many hills and valleys, accessible trails are hard to come by. Many outdoor recreation areas in our area lack sidewalks and



Trail volunteer David Wright at the new accessible parking space at the Cliff Mine parking lot near trail mile marker six.

contain trails that are often too steep or made of difficult-to-navigate surfaces for wheelchair users and some people with disabilities. This is where the Montour Trail helps fill a need.

In April, a group got together to look at several areas of the airport section of the trail. Many of the improvements needed to improve trail access have already been implemented, or are in the process of being completed.

Accessible parking has been added at trail mile marker zero, including spaces by the chemical restrooms as well as one parallel to the trail. The one parallel to the trail will allow direct access to the paved portion for those that cannot navigate the rough gravel of the parking lot.

At the Cliff Mine trailhead parking lot, the accessible spaces now have adequate signage and have been repainted to increase visibility of these spaces. The entrance gate has also been widened slightly to allow for easier access for hand cyclists to enter the trail. Because handcycles have a larger turning radius, there is also a plan to widen some areas around gates to allow for easier navigation.

These changes will help increase the overall accessibility of the trail.

Ms. Dunn, who serves on the board of the United Spinal Association of Pittsburgh, is a member of the Montour Trail's accessibility committee.

Planning for the Trail's Future *By Fran Hensler*

What will you be doing 25 years from now? Tough to predict exactly, isn't it? Regardless, Montour Trail Council leaders are doing their best to envision what the trail will be in 2050 and in the process addressing what milestones need to be achieved to make that vision possible.

Past *Trail-Letter* articles have outlined Vision 2050's progress, including a wealth of ideas and opinions gathered through interviews; exploration of broader trends in trail development; and analysis of MTC's strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities. The most recent work has focused on defining what the mission, vision and values should be so MTC can thrive as a dynamic, effective organization.

The early work after the MTC's formation in 1989 was related to securing grants, promoting the rail-trail idea, acquiring rights of way, and building the many disparate trail sections. Over the last decade or so, MTC has prepared three-year strategic plans to achieve objectives beyond engineering and constructing — creating committees to govern/expand roles for finance, real estate and operations, for example. With the Vision 2050 initiative, MTC will switch to five-year plans, with milestone years between 2030 and 2050.

The MTC Board of Directors approved the vision, mission and values statements at a Spring meeting, reaching a consensus to keep Montour Trail a vibrant, accessible and scenic trail network that seamlessly connects communities. That vision includes linking Montour to similar trails as well as fostering healthy active lifestyles. For now and the future, the Montour will provide safe and enjoyable recreation and transportation opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. And MTC will continue to regard volunteerism as its (and the trail's) lifeblood.

In preparation for the strategic planning session scheduled for mid-June, the Vision 2050 team drafted a set of milestones that outline key areas of focus for the years ahead.

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Trail-user Survey Results: What We Learned

The fourth iteration of the Montour Trail user survey was conducted over 35 days in August and September 2024 under the direction of Montour Trail Council board member John Dorman. A total of 772 responses were collected, down from the most recent survey in 2021, reflecting broader trends in surveys generally as some people are "tuning out" due to numerous survey requests. Prior trail surveys were completed in 2016 and 2018.

Respondents hailed from 105 ZIP codes across 12 states, with 97 percent residing in Pennsylvania — primarily Allegheny, Washington and Beaver counties. The top 20 ZIP codes, mostly located close to the trail, accounted for 76 percent of submissions.

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Prez Sez: The Montour Railroad Historical Society: Where History Comes Alive

By Julian Wolfe

Trail users often tell me about the wonderful interpretive signage dotting the length of the nearly 60-mile Montour Trail corridor, which documents the history of the railroad, the coal industry and its relationship to local communities. These informative placards, currently numbering 44, are designed, installed and maintained by the Montour Railroad Historical Society.

The signs are but one small part of the historical society's mission and activities. The society is, in fact, a multifaceted enterprise operating from its museum in the Venetia Community Center. Formed in 2008, the historical society is home to a large collection of artifacts and memorabilia, including physical components of the Montour Railroad, photographs, posters, railroad records, and press reports.

Examples of these wonderful treasures include handwritten log books with the minutes from meetings of the company's senior administration, tools used to repair the rails and the trains, signal switches, and safety equipment. The society counts more than 400 members throughout the U.S. as members and contributors, including former employees of the Montour Railroad.

The historical society has accomplished much to preserve and honor the history of the Montour Railroad and its employees. Among its most notable achievements was the recovery of an X-1 railroad crane.

In 2008, the society identified a Montour Railroad X-1 crane in Dennison, OH. The historical society engaged the Ohio Central Railroad, which acquired the X-1 for the last remaining years of its operational life, about recovery and relocation to its original Pennsylvania home. Eventually, the society negotiated terms to acquire the X-1.

The relocation of the crane necessitated its disassembly and relocation via truck. The X-1 was eventually relocated, reconstructed, and exhibited at the TAR storage site on Valleybrook Road in Peters Township. Society members built a section of railroad track at the site with donated rails, spikes and tie plates from the Montour Railroad.

Today, the X-1 stands astride the trail, a landmark and testament to the Montour Railroad, and the determination and resourcefulness of the Montour Railroad Historical Society.



Model of Montour Railroad engine and cars.

to engage and interact with the trains. There are no DO NOT TOUCH signs anywhere."



MRHS President Bryan Seip stands next to a replica of the Champion Coal Processing facility.

The Venetia Community Center also is home to the DARE Model Railroad club. The railroad club, formed in the 1990s as an extension to Peters Township's Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, builds, maintains and offers an opportunity for the younger generation to explore and broaden their interests in railroading.

President Bryan Seip notes that college-age students and adults work side by side with younger children to design and construct new layouts. The club has no age restrictions. Mr. Seip stresses that the "club is a venue

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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 Rd., North Fayette Township 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 St., McDonald 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 Rd., 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

continued from page 2- Prez Sez

DARE members are encouraged to bring their locomotives to ride the rails. The railroad club operates nine railroad layouts in several rooms of the historical society's building. This includes a remarkable HO scale representation of the Montour Railroad, which is reason alone to visit. The layout is well researched and includes accurate historical landscapes and other features of the railroad and the local communities it served in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The historical society and railroad club also conduct community outreach. Mr. Seip is a periodic guest presenter at local library programs. His well-researched presentations on the operations of the Montour Railroad, which include photographs and other railroad documents, routinely draw large crowds. The railroad club stages events in connection with the Venetia Heritage Society, including their annual Light-Up Night celebration. The DARE club also has hosted meetings of the National Model Railroad Association and sponsored clinics for its membership and the general public on building railroad layouts.

The History Room and DARE club's layouts are open to the public Wednesdays from 3-6 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon at the society's spaces at the Venetia Community Center, 800 Venetia Rd. in Peters Township.

If you enjoy the Montour Trail, your visit to the historical society and railroad club will enhance your admiration and appreciation for those who built and worked on the Montour Railroad, as well as those working to preserve its history.

Save the Dates, Please



The 23rd annual Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour will be Saturday, Sept. 13, at the trail's mile zero in Moon Township. This family fun bike ride features distances of 12 miles or less; 15-24 miles; 44 miles; and 62 miles. Registration will begin in July and includes lunch and an event t-shirt. Full details will be available soon at montourtrail.org.



The Montour Trail Council annual dinner and meeting will be Sunday, Nov. 2, from 5 p.m. - 8 p.m., at the Loft Conference Center-Southpointe in Canonsburg. We would love for you to join us for this festive evening celebration. More details to follow in the *Trail-Letter*.

continued from page 1- Trail's Future

This work started with an ideal vision of what Montour Trail and its governing body should be 25 years from now, based on six categories: leadership/organization; finances/fundraising; trail infrastructure/maintenance; community engagement/collaboration; trail accessibility/connectivity; and trail usage/importance — and the concepts aligned with opinions expressed in interviews from the start of the project.

The team worked backwards from these ideals to determine key accomplishments for each five-years' objectives. These milestones are not rigid prescriptions, but they serve as guideposts — designed to reflect the vision and the work needed to make it all become real.

It may be a while before trail users and partners notice anything significantly different about the Montour Trail. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day! The process will make the organization stronger and the trail even more scenic.

Ms. Hensler, board secretary, is a member of the Vision 2050 leadership team.

continued from page 1- Trail Survey

Nearly 60 percent identified cycling as their primary activity. When combining primary and secondary uses, cycling (82.5 percent) and walking (71.3 percent) were the most common activities. Jogging was a distant third — with most joggers being under 45 years of age. Only two percent were new users, while nearly two-thirds had used the trail for more than a decade.

While the respondent gender mix shifted somewhat compared with the previous surveys, the “typical” trail-user profile remained consistent over the past decade: a male over 45, cycling one or more times weekly, often alone or with one other person, and typically living within five miles of the trail.

Trail maintenance continues to earn high marks, scoring 4.56 out of 5, with nearly 70 percent rating it as “excellent.” Compared with eight regional rail trails, the Montour scored highest with an average 3.44 rating (“somewhat better”), driven largely by trail surface quality and strong maintenance.

Efforts to raise etiquette awareness through signage, social media and MTC initiatives had a modest but positive effect. Safety and security ratings increased slightly to 4.21 out of 5, the highest score since 2016. Users highlighted areas where improvements could be made, including additional signage, more trail patrols and enhanced

security in parking areas.

In support of the MTC's Vision 2050 Strategic Planning initiative, respondents were asked to prioritize several focus areas for future development by the council. Connecting to other trails and building a stronger community of trail supporters were the key long-term initiatives highlighted by users. Eliminating road segments and bridges at key intersections (Park Manor and Route 51) also received high ranks. Meanwhile continued focus on etiquette, and amenities (restrooms, water fountains, bike tool stations, e-bike charging and the like) in various combinations were most frequently mentioned for short- and long-term action.

The online version of the *Montour Trail-Letter* remains the most popular way for users to stay informed, with nearly 70 percent “very satisfied” with its content. The most requested additions were more construction updates, event information and history articles.

Just over 70 percent of respondents were MTC members. Users living within a mile of the trail and users under 45 years old had the lowest membership rates — highlighting opportunities for additional outreach and recruitment efforts.

Overall, the survey continues to help the MTC monitor the satisfaction and priorities of users so that the trail can continue to delight users well into the future.

Merakey Volunteers Give TLC to Trailside Trees

In April, seven individuals from Merakey Allegheny Valley School's (M/AVS) Zapp Program Center began volunteering at the Montour Trail. As part of their efforts, they visited the trail's Fort Cherry trailhead and received training on how to properly fill tree watering bags. Two groups from the Zapp Program visit the trail weekly. These visits are part of their Community Participation Supports outings, designed to foster stronger community involvement.

Merakey/Allegheny Valley School is a non-profit organization founded in 1960 to provide homes and a full range of services to individuals with all levels of intellectual and developmental disabilities, providing opportunities and choices to help them grow and function at their full potential as independently as possible.

Volunteering, working and engaging with community neighbors are all key aspects of that journey. M/AVS is proud of its new partnership with the Montour Trail and its conservation subcommittee co-chairs Patricia Friedsam and Julian Wolfe. M/AVS is an affiliate of Merakey USA.

“The trail representatives we work with have been extremely kind and helpful to us, and they make the individuals feel so welcomed each time,” says program instructor Dominique Mancuso. “This has been a wonderful partnership, and we are thankful for the opportunity for our individuals to be able to help with this project.”

Thanks to Mrs. Mancuso for her help with this story.

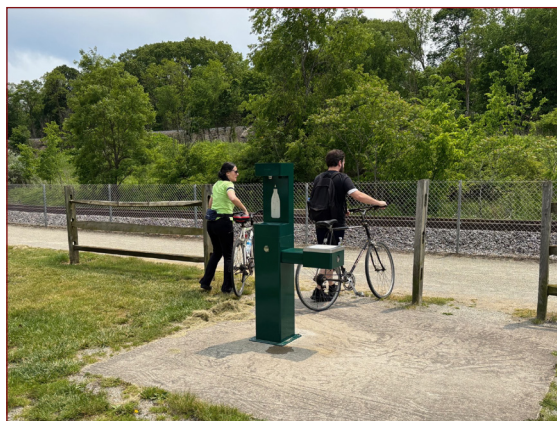


Volunteers “Give Back” to Veterans Cycling Across Country



Montour Trail volunteers again this Spring assisted the Warrior Expedition as seven veterans biked through the region on their 3,700-mile cross-country journey from Washington, DC, to Washington state. (Left) Mark Modispacher, a member of the Airport Area Friends Group (standing, in yellow shirt), provided food, snacks and cold beverages when the expedition pulled into Cedar Creek Park on the Great Allegheny Passage trail. (Right) Dino Angelici, a Montour founding member (in maroon shirt), accompanied the visitors on their rest day to the Bicycle Heaven Museum on Pittsburgh's North Side. The day before, Angelici on his bike met the vets near Boston on the GAP and accompanied them into Pittsburgh. It was the fourth year our volunteers lent a hand to the Warriors Expedition, a veterans nonprofit outdoor therapy program that helps ex-military personnel transition from their wartime experiences through long-distance outdoor pursuits.

Fountain Flowing at Galati



Trail users are loving the recently-installed water fountain at the Galati Trailhead overseen by the Montour's Westland Friends Group. The bottle filler seems more popular than the bubbler, with visitors drinking from their water bottle after topping it off and ignoring the fountain. The new water fountain, which is ADA-compliant, replaced an older device that persistently leaked.

Brownsville Road Extension Parking Fix



The South Hills Friends group oversaw the paving of the shoulder of the Brownsville Road Extension parking lot in June. The project fixed a deep narrow ditch that caused vehicles to bottom out upon entrance or exit. Amity Asphalt workers milled out the shoulder before laying the binder (base) and wear courses of asphalt.



(photos: David Oyler)

Montour Railroad History

Living in Muse *by John Soma*

Years ago, John Soma wrote a pamphlet relating what it was like to be raised in a miner's family in the village of Muse. A life-long resident of the area, Mr. Soma passed away at age 94 in 2021. Here are excerpts from his pamphlet.



The miners' homes in Muse were mostly duplex houses with four rooms in each half.

I was four years old when my family moved to the coal mining village of Muse during the depth of the depression of the 1930s. My father was fortunate to get a job with the H.C. Frick Coal Co. since there were many people unemployed at that time.

Only miners who had a job in the mine could live in Muse, because it was built for the miners only. The whole village was owned by the coal company: streets, red dog roads, company store, service station, everything, including their own private cops who had much more power than private security has today.

A large white house used by the mine superintendent overlooked the center of town. He could see most of the town, keeping an eye on the miners' activities. The common miners' houses were painted various shades of gray. A small shed, called a coal shanty, was in the rear of the lot on the alley. It stored coal for cooking and heating. Outsiders commonly mistook them for outhouses. Actually, the village had one of the most modern sewage disposal plants in the area.

There were 150 gray duplex houses in the village for the working miners. Each side of the duplex contained four rooms. There wasn't a furnace for central heating, since gas was not supplied to the homes. Coal heaters and coal cooking stoves were used to heat the house. No hot water. Even with a modern sewage plant, they never installed bathtubs. A commode was in the basement.

Electricity was installed in the homes with one light bulb in the middle of the ceiling. There weren't any receptacles in the house unless the miners installed their own. The kitchen had a sink with a

cold water spigot. A coal cooking stove was in the kitchen.

Two large mine tipples stood on top of the hills. One tippie was situated near the bath house so the miners could change into work clothes and go down the "cage," which the elevators were called, and get to the bottom of the mine to go to work.

The second tippie was used to load coal into coal cars outside the mine. A coal burning steam engine pulled coal cars to and from the tippie. Waste products such as slate, poor coal and other waste products were dumped all around the mine, creating what was called a slate dump. It burned, smoked, smoldered, and stunk up the town.

The large red building in the center of the town was the company store. It was the only store in town. They sold everything such as mine tools, picks, shovels, large crowbars, augers, brass checks for blasting powder, hard hats, furniture, clothing, jewelry, guns, etc. Everything was sold on credit. It was deducted from your pay at the mine. A lot of paydays you got nothing. More was spent than made.

In fact, most miners in those days were in the minus column after working for the coal company for a while. The company managed this by working you only one, two or three days a week, keeping you broke. It didn't take long to go in the hole.

Five o'clock was an important time in the life of the miner. That was when the mine whistle would blow if there was work tomorrow. No whistle, no work. Needless to say, people liked to hear the whistle.

We played street hockey with tin cans and sticks, softball with a home-made rag ball, and outdoor basketball. Most everyone had to do chores. I spent a lot of time in the garden, weeding and planting. Firewood had to be gathered. Coal had to be picked on the slate dump, put in burlap sacks, loaded in a wheelbarrow, and pushed about a quarter of a mile to home. It was real tough for a kid in the hot summer. That was called the good ole days.



A miner makes a purchase at the company store.

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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Trailside Volunteers Are Back for Meet & Greets



(photo: Michele Kiraly)

Please look for our volunteers trailside this summer at various points along the Montour. They're selling raffle tickets for this year's Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour, offering Montour Trail Council memberships, distributing trail maps, recommending Montour merch, and accepting donations.

This year's raffle prizes include a \$500 gift card from Pro Bikes+Run; a \$500 gift card from Tandem Connection; a \$500 gift card from T.J. Maxx; a recreational package from Wilderness Voyageurs of Ohio; a package valued at \$460; a hitch and installation or bike rack from U-Haul of North Hills valued at \$350-\$500; and a \$250 gift card from AeroTech Designs. The tickets are \$5 or three tickets for \$10. The Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour, a family fun bike ride, is the trail council's single most important fundraiser.

The Montour is a privately owned trail and the council receives no tax-based support for trail maintenance or operations. We encourage you to stop by and talk with the volunteers when you see them trailside over the next few months.

For more information, please call the MTC office at 412-257-3011.



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

Colleen Lindow
Richard & Martha
Munsch

Leader's Circle

William Murdock
Jay Shock
Mike Super

Benefactor

Gregory Boris
Michael F. Colligan
Brittany Engelhardt
John Yadlosky
Ron & Cathy Zabowski

In Memory

Gil McGurl
Ned Williams

New Members

Jamie & Michele Baker
Timothy Butler
Frances & Stephen
D'Andrea
Catherine Ficari
Gary Holt
James Jaques

Joseph Kranyak
Rachel Kuchnicki
Joseph Kuchnicki
Lee Libert
Elizabeth Maleski
Matthew Morris
Matt Rhodes
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