



The Montour Trail Council: 36 years of trail building

September-October 2025, Vol. 37, No. 5

Beautiful Day for the Tour



It was a picture perfect day on Sept. 13 as the Montour Trail's Council's signature bicycling fundraiser, the Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour, rolled out from the AHN Montour Sports Complex in Coraopolis. Details and more pics on page 4.

Trailblazing Toward 2050, A Vision for the Montour

By Fran Hensler

This article is the second in a series about Vision 2050 and the considerations, processes and milestones behind the plan.

When we started the Vision 2050 project in early 2024, we knew we needed to engage with all of our different constituencies. The consultants who worked with MTC interviewed over 70 individuals ranging from volunteers, contributors, affiliated organizations, and philanthropic foundations. In addition, we factored in collected information from our tri-annual user survey, which had 700+ respondents.

Supporting information came from national research conducted on recreational trails trends and data, nonprofit revenue sources, volunteerism, and charitable giving. All this information was distilled into a set of remarkable organizational strengths along with threats confronting MTC from a variety of sources.

Stakeholders praised MTC's volunteer-led culture, successful fundraising track record, meticulous maintenance, scenic corridor, role as a regional connector, and a key part of their quality of life. For those who have served as volunteers, they shared a deep care for and connection to the trail.

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Annual Meeting: Charting the Future of Trails

By Dave Borrebach

Amy Kapp of the national Rails-to-Trails Conservancy will be the keynote speaker at Montour Trail Council's annual meeting and dinner on Sunday, Nov. 2, at the Loft Conference Center — Southpointe.

Ms. Kapp is editorial director and editor-in-chief of *Rails to Trails* magazine and the TrailBlog of the Washington, D.C.-based conservancy. She grew up in the Pittsburgh area and earned a graduate degree from Pitt.



Amy Kapp

The MTC's annual event starts at 5 p.m. with a social hour and cash bar. The social hour provides a great opportunity to meet and talk with others who love and support the Montour Trail. A buffet dinner begins at 6 p.m. The business meeting and keynote address follows at 7–8 p.m.

Ms. Kapp's talk is titled Connecting People and Places: The Next Chapter in America's Trail Story. On the eve of the Rails to Trails Conservancy's 40th anniversary and the United State's 250th birthday, she will reflect on where our nation stands in the walking and bicycling movements.

Ms. Kapp says that demand for trails has never been higher, creating new opportunities for the Montour Trail and others across the country to expand their influence and help transform communities. She emphasizes the power of using our collective voices to share the vital value and benefits of trails, both locally and nationwide.

During the meeting, we will announce the results of the election of new board members; candidate bios are below. All current MTC members are eligible to vote.

You can find the link to the dinner reservation and ballot on the montourtrail.org home page. If you receive the printed *Trail-Letter*, you can use the attached form or download it from the MTC website. Reservation requests must be received by noon on Saturday, Oct. 25. Please plan to join us!

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MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER

is published bi-monthly by the Montour Trail Council.

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A Picturesque Farewell

by Bruce Barron

When I returned to Pittsburgh this summer for perhaps my final visit, my top nostalgia priority was the Montour Trail.

On an early July morning, MTC President Julian Wolfe and founding board member Tim Killmeyer greeted me at the Library light rail park-and-ride. Julian, who joined the trail just after my departure for Colorado in 2019, welcomed me with the gentility of a career State Department official (which he was), exchanging a new MTC hat for my 15-year-old Montour Trail half marathon shirt. (Back when MTC was chronically desperate for funds, we invested considerable volunteer effort in holding a half marathon each September. It ended in 2015.)

After Julian left us to attend a meeting, Tim and I set off to bike down memory lane. For most users, the Montour Trail is the premier nonprofit-managed recreational opportunity in Allegheny and Washington counties; for Tim and me, almost every mile holds memories of what it took to turn a dream into a trail. That's especially true in South Park Township, where we started our ride near the Library viaduct over Route 88.

I was a congressional aide in 1992 when a grant announcement informed me that a fledgling group of rails-to-trails visionaries had received a \$1-million federal award to rehabilitate the Library viaduct. I represented my congressman at the Montour Trail's first opening ceremony in Cecil Township that fall.

Twenty years later, I was on the MTC board when the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, which oversees regional transportation activities, sent us a "you can't sit on this money forever" message. The funds had never been spent, because \$1 million wasn't enough to do the job, and other projects kept taking priority. Finally, with a reason for urgency, we pulled in philanthropic support to complete the trestle's rehabilitation.

Heading east from the trestle, we passed through the unforgettable "Kohnke Corner," preserved for eventual trail development because board member Peter Kohnke used personal funds to purchase one residential lot



Bruce Barron and Tim Killmeyer

on Pleasant Street and prevent a home from being built there. I remembered mowing the lot occasionally and assuring the two immediate neighbors that a trail passing directly between their homes would not become a nightmare for them. Today, one of the two adjacent houses has a solid fence enclosing the backyard. In this case, I guess, good fences make good neighbors.

I was especially excited to see the South Park trail sections that didn't exist six years ago. We had spent many years discussing how the trail would pass through Consol's research center, and then Consol sold the property to a residential developer who loves the Montour Trail. MTC then achieved a long-awaited easement through South Park Mini-Storage. Those risky half-mile bike rides on Brownsville-Library roads between Pleasant Street and Stewart Road are no more!

Continuing east, we also rode the relatively new half-mile of trail leading to the Green Man Tunnel, where I admired the salt pile sitting inside. About 20 years ago, MTC offered to build a salt storage facility for South Park Township if it would let the trail go through this tunnel. South Park's answer: No thanks, the tunnel is a zero-maintenance storage facility. I'm told that MTC is still trying. Meanwhile, I got one last trip beside cars through the adjacent one-lane, honk-your-horn road tunnel.

The mile that the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission built for us, when rerouting nearby roads for Mon-Fayette Expressway construction, is much appreciated but not the most scenic. So Tim and I turned around there and headed west, crossing the Library viaduct and continuing on to the Tandem Connection.

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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 Rd., 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 (MM 0 to 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 1 - Annual Meeting

Each fall, the Montour Trail Council asks members to vote on nominees to the Board of Directors. Voting begins at the end of September.

MTC members can use the link on the home page of montourtrail.org to vote electronically or download a ballot for submission by mail. Results will be tabulated and announced at the annual meeting.

These are the nominees for the 2026-2028 board term:

Terry Bimle is an avid cyclist who joined the board earlier this year. In July, he was installed by the board as MTC vice president. He is active with the trail's Bethel Park Friends and works regularly with the maintenance team, spending many hours tending to trail upkeep and resurfacing. He

also is a member of the Finance, Operations, and Engineering & Construction committees. Terry is an electrical engineer, recently retired after 22 years with Calgon Carbon, where he served as executive director of engineering and equipment manufacturing.

Donna Click has lived in Cecil for over 30 years, serving as an active MTC and Cecil Friends member for many years. Currently, she is secretary of Cecil Friends. She volunteers with Tour the Montour, especially working at trailside events spreading word of MTC's need for volunteers and providing information to trail users. Donna retired from working as a bank teller/customer service representative in Canonsburg. She is an active cyclist along with her husband, who also volunteers with Cecil Friends.

Joseph McKittrick joined the MTC Finance Committee in October 2023 and became its chair in April 2025. With 40 years served in a banking career, he is using his experience to contribute to the management of MTC finances. He and his family have enjoyed biking on the trail for many years, along with other outdoor activities. Joe is also president of the Highland Village Homeowners Association and a Pittsburgh Marathon volunteer.

Dennis Pfeiffer is a retired assistant vice president in telecommunications from PNC and has been volunteering with MTC since 1989. Dennis served as MTC president in 2000, 2004-2006, 2013-2014, and 2018. He founded the Engineering & Construction Committee in 2000 and led the effort to secure the MTC office in Bridgeville in 2001. Since 1993, he has been active in the trail's Airport Area

Friends, currently serving as president; he also has been the project manager of numerous construction efforts.

Phillip Torrez has been an MTC volunteer since 2018. He is editor of the *Montour Trail-Letter*, co-chair of the MTC's Operations Committee and VP of the trail's Westland Friends. Phillip previously served two terms on the board as well as co-director of Tour the Montour with his wife Annemarie. He was a newspaper reporter and later worked for his alma mater, the University of California, as a writer, editor and publications manager. Phillip is a long-time cyclist and enjoys bike touring with his wife and children.

Fun at the Tour



(L to R) The local Ft. Couch Potatoes cycling club supports the Tour each year; Father and daughter prepare to hit the trail; It's a banner time for MTC volunteers Ray Paschke and Chuck Wolf; and Moon Township police bike patrol officers Grant Delaney and William Morrow join the fun.

"What a wonderful day to be on the trail," a rider commented after completing her ride on the Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour on Sept. 13.

Now in its 23rd year, the annual signature fundraising ride of the Montour Trail Council began and ended at the AHN Montour Sports Complex in Coraopolis, not far from mile zero of the trail. This year, the Tour partnered with the sports complex and the Coraopolis Community Development Corp.

It was big grins and high-fives as the Tour attracted 475 registrants who cycled 12 miles or less, 15-24 miles, 44 miles or 62 miles with four refreshment stops along the out-and-back courses. Road marshalls assisted the riders to cross several busy intersections on the trail.

"It was great to see the uniformed officers on the trail today," said another cyclist, referring to the bike patrolmen from Moon Township and North Fayette police departments, which deployed officers during the Tour.

Pro Bikes+Run and Trek Bikes set up before the Tour riders took off in the morning to assist with minor adjustments, provide tire pumps and lubricate chains.

The Tour leadership committee thanks the more than 30 community and corporate sponsors for supporting our fundraiser, the dozens of volunteers and friends of the trail who pitched in and contributed in myriad ways, and to the cyclists for rolling out for a fun day on the Montour with family and friends.

We hope to see you next September.

continued from page 1- Vision 2050

Many people see their support of the Montour as a key part of their legacy to their communities.

Based on this input and analysis, MTC committed to seven 2030 milestones and supporting objectives (below), that build the capacity, knowledge and partnerships required to put the organization on a path to 2050's goals.

The new strategic vision focuses on milestones for stronger financial health, continued volunteer leadership with professional support and preserving scenic beauty. We also took the opportunity to review and refresh MTC's vision, mission and values as a set of guiding statements for decision making that support MTC on the path to 2050. We shared draft language of these statements with friends of the trail and adjusted words and tone until we reached a consensus.

The main areas for the 2025-30 strategic plan and their corresponding 2050 vision are:

Leadership & Organizational Structure: By 2050, MTC will be a national model of trail-related organizational management and governance. Professional leadership, an active board, and a strong volunteer recruitment and retention strategy will lead MTC to that overarching goal.

Financial Support & Fundraising: MTC's endowment funds will support operational and maintenance expenses as well as contribute to project expenses. Getting there will require a strategic fundraising plan, revenue from other sources, and investment from local and state governments.

Trail Infrastructure & Maintenance: Within 25 years, MTC will have established standards, processes and tools for efficiently upgrading, repairing and replacing trail infrastructure. The plan includes meeting ADA compliance and completing the Route 51 crossing in the South Hills.

Greenway Protection & Enhancement: The scenic nature of the mainline trail will be secured as a greenway by mid-century, especially by protecting segments susceptible to loss, encroachment, degradation, or environmental threat.

Community Engagement & Collaboration: MTC will be a key player in local transportation and recreation planning. Achieving this reputation begins with Friends Groups building strong relationships with trail communities and expanding awareness of the trail, its ownership and how it is supported.

Trail Accessibility & Connectivity: Area residents will have ready access to Montour Trail and other networks through branches and connections. This will be realized by engaging with peer/regional trail, transit, conservation and recreation groups for mutually beneficial goals.

Trail Usage & Importance: By 2050, the mainline will be off-road or protected throughout. The trail will be ready to handle increased volume as more people rely on it as a free resource for transportation, recreation and adventure travel/tourism.

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

To learn how you can help: montourtrail.org/support-us/donations/

A Festive Time at the Muse Branch Dedication

More than 60 people including officials and dignitaries from Washington County and Cecil Township celebrated the dedication of the newly opened Muse branch with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on August 21.

"The opening of this new trail branch is the culmination of more than 10 years of planning, negotiation and construction," said Julian Wolfe, president of the Montour Trail Council, which sponsored the event.

The trail's Muse branch, near mile marker 24.3 of the Montour mainline, is adjacent to McConnell Trails, a Ryan Homes residential development in Cecil Township.

Said Jacque King, Cecil Township's assistant manager, "On behalf of Cecil Township, I want to thank Washington County Tourism Promotion Agency, NVR/Ryan Homes, members and the donors of the Montour Trail, and the Montour Trail Council maintenance crew for all their hard work and dedication, making Cecil Township the best it can be."

Other speakers at the dedication included state Rep. Jason Ortity; Nick Sherman, Washington County Board of Commissioners chairman; Tom Casciola, Cecil Township Board of Supervisors chairman; and Will Thomeier, director, economic and tourism development at the Washington County Chamber of Commerce.

Additionally, comments of congratulations and thanks came from Andrew Hutchinson, project manager, NVR, Inc.; Jessica Cavey of the nonprofit TreePennsylvania; and Brian Tirpak, representing PA state Sen. Camera Bartolotta.

The Muse Branch follows the former right-of-way of a 1.6-mile spur built by the Montour Railroad to service a coal mine in Muse. The MTC plans to extend the branch another mile to connect with the community of Muse.



Above Left: The dedication concluded with a ceremonial ribbon-cutting. (L to R) Will Thomeier, director, economic and tourism development, Washington County; Andy Hutchinson, project manager, NVR; Bryan McConnell, neighbor who sold land to NVR for McConnell Trails; Nick Sherman, chairman, Washington County commissioners; Julian Wolfe, MTC president; Electra Janis, vice chair, Washington County commissioners; Jacque King, assistant manager, Cecil Township; Cindy Fisher, supervisor, Cecil Township board of supervisors; Bob Mihalco, president, MTC Cecil Friends Group; Jessica Cavey, program director, TreePennsylvania; Ned Williams, Muse project manager, MTC; Levi Cannon, forester, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Brian Tirpak, representing PA Sen. Camera Bartolotta.

Above Right: A large crowd gathered for the festivities.

(photos by Dave Borrebach and Phillip Torrez)

Protecting the Trail: Project Stabilizes Streambanks

By Terry Bimle

The Montour Trail Council recently completed two projects to stabilize the streambank and protect the trail in Coraopolis and Moon Township.

The trail sits on the roadbed of the old Montour Railroad, which dates back to 1879. While the roadbed remains stable, Montour Run has meandered and widened and is threatening to undermine the Montour Trail in several areas.

The streambank project involved the placement of nearly 1,500 tons of large stone along 500 feet of streambank at mile markers zero,

4.8 and 5.0 of the trail.

Limestone sized at 30 inches in diameter and weighing up to one ton each were placed along the stream embankment.

The project budget of \$150,000 was funded by the MTC along with a matching grant provided by the Allegheny Regional Asset District.

WEC Engineers of Bridgeville provided engineering and design for the project. BKG Industries of Imperial, PA, completed the project.

Mr. Bimle, MTC vice president, oversaw the work for this project.

The Library Footbridge

by Bryan Seip & Tim Sposato, Montour Railroad Historical Society

A little-known piece of Montour Railroad history once existed underneath the Library Viaduct. The Library foot bridge was one of several Montour RR owned and maintained bridges that did not carry the railroad itself, but rather allowed access to a property or carried a roadway over the railroad.

Tim Sposato worked on the Montour Railroad as a member of Section Gang #2 in the 1970s and 80s. His memories and notes tell this tale of Montour history.

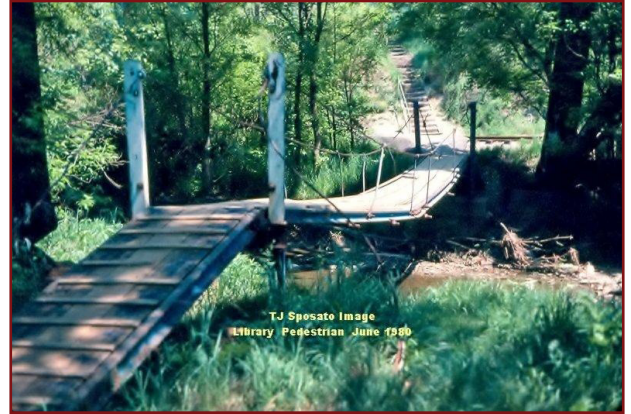
When the railroad was constructed, in several locations it interfered with landowners' or public access to some properties. One solution would be to build a bridge to provide access that had been cut off.

Some examples would be the overhead bridges at the cuts on Brush Run, Broughton and Triphammer roads or the Erbe Farm road bridge along Irishtown Road in Bethel Park. Several pedestrian cable supported swinging bridges were also built, such as those over Kamp's Cut in Peters Township or one over Montour Run around trail mile 2.5. All these bridges had one thing in common: They were owned and maintained by the Montour Railroad.

The Library footbridge was built under the Library viaduct to allow pedestrians to access the trolley stop called "Hicks" that was located there. It may have gone back into the days of the Pittsburgh Railways interurban trolley that ran through South Park along Brownsville Road. It allowed residents living near Library Road (Route 88) to cross Piney Fork Creek to get to the trolley stop.

The swinging bridges were made up of two rails stretching across the creek, supported by vertical rails or pipes on either side of the creek at the abutments. The bridge then had wood planks fitted between those rails. The rails were held with threaded rods that held the planking in place, with occasional bolts into cross braces. This deck was then supported by cables stretching across the creek that also served as handholds.

Tim recalls: "Section Gang #2 trackmen were responsible for repairs to the Library foot bridge. I remember replacing planking on several occasions, removing a fallen tree from its approach and shoveling snow off it in the winter months. The local kids would hang out there drinking and partying, based on the many bottles, cans and other items that littered the area. I'm not sure who dismantled the bridge, but I'm sure it was in a bad state of disrepair by then."



As seen in the picture, the Library footbridge had a joint in the middle where the side rails of the deck met. The creek was too wide to be spanned by a standard 39-foot length of rail, so two rails had to be bolted end-to-end to form the walkway. This added to the swing and bounce of the bridge as pedestrians walked across it.

The two pictures were taken from the Route 88 side of the bridge looking toward the trolley tracks. Beyond the trolley tracks a set of stairs with a handrail can be seen. The stairs and path gave access to the houses on Helen Street, so the neighborhood residents could get down to the trolley stop.

The Library footbridge lasted into the 1990s. After the Montour Railroad ceased operations on the Library Branch in 1977, the Port Authority Transit crews made necessary repairs. The arrival of the light rail vehicle fleet in 1984 led to the retirement of the trolley stop under the Viaduct. In the 1990s, a flood along the Piney Fork valley took out the main span and decking of the bridge. The frame of the approach ramp and the abutments at the creek's edge were the only remnants. These were removed when the overhead viaduct decking project was undertaken in 2014.



(Photo: Bryan Seip, 2013)

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

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continued from page 2- Farewell

Immediately west of the viaduct, the trail passes through the Lindenbrooke Apartments complex. Twenty-five years ago, Lindenbrooke opposed the trail, citing security concerns. Eventually, we persuaded the manager to poll his own residents. The response was overwhelmingly pro-trail and Lindenbrooke became quite cooperative.

As we reached the paved Arrowhead Trail segment owned by Peters Township, I turned right and climbed to Brush Run Road to take a last look at the Bethel branch, where I had done hundreds of running and biking workouts while living in Bethel Park for 18 years. I was also race director of the J.R. Taylor 5K for four years. When I took over the race, I was advised that in a previous year, an inattentive runner ran right past the turnaround cone, continued uphill to Brush Run before realizing the mistake, and was not happy afterwards. To avert such a mishap, I asked my wife to stand at the turnaround cone. I then told all the runners to shout "Hi, Nancy!" when reaching the turnaround. Nancy has not forgiven me yet.

The Arrowhead section brought my only disappointing sight: occasional orange lines warning riders of dangerous bumps in the pavement. I recalled having seen such marks on the South Side Trail years ago, but never on the Arrowhead. The few imperfections reminded me why MTC has generally preferred crushed limestone to asphalt, but MTC-managed sections remained in impressively good shape as always.

Despite these bumps, observed usage on the Arrowhead once again fulfilled what Yogi Berra has been saying about that segment for years: "Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded."

We turned around at Tandem Connection and headed back to Library, and I said farewell to the most incredible civic project I've ever contributed to. If you bring a bike to Colorado Springs, I'll go riding with you, but unless you want to try summiting Pikes Peak, we—like most U.S. cities—have nothing as varied, scenic, safe, accessible, or popular as the Montour Trail.

Mr. Barron was an MTC board member for 10 years (1997–2003 and 2011–2013).

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*.

In Memory

Robert A. McFerren
Gary McFerren

Trail Blazer

Patrick & Lynn Gurrentz

Leader's Circle

Paul & Katherine Black
Stephen Magnotti
Raymond & Patricia
Nepa
Elizabeth Sichi

Benefactor

George M. Golvash
Timothy & Kathleen
Kosty
David Kunkel

New Members

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Sandra Belfiore
Richard Cook
Steven Crandell
Joe Cybulski
Albert Czapik
Andrew Czynewski
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