



## National Tunnel Campaign: Early Gifts Build Critical Support

The Montour Trail Council’s campaign to raise \$3.2 million to repair and reopen the shuttered National Tunnel continues to build momentum as trail users and partners step forward with generous support.

“We’ve received some very significant gifts from MTC members and other trail friends,” said board member Dave Borrebach, who is a member of the volunteer team coordinating the council’s ambitious fundraising effort launched in April.

As of early June, the campaign had received about 125 individual donations totaling \$150,000, including an anonymous gift of \$35,000 from an MTC member.

“All gifts up to \$1,000 so far have been matched by a group of generous trail supporters, and the match will continue through the end of September,” Mr. Borrebach said. He added that several donors have contributed through donor-advised funds, an increasingly popular way to support nonprofit organizations like the trail council.

Before the public phase of the campaign began, the Richard King Mellon Foundation provided crucial early support with a \$500,000 grant to the National Tunnel project.

“We are deeply fortunate that the Richard King Mellon Foundation stepped forward with this major contribution,” Mr. Borrebach said.

“Because many statewide grants require a significant local funding commitment, their early generosity positions us to secure the broader support this project demands.”

*continued on page 4*



## Coraopolis Connector Finally Completed *By Dennis Pfeiffer*



*The arduous journey in completing the Coraopolis connector is over. It’s shown here looking toward mile marker zero.*

On March 25, our contractor completed the 0.8-mile Coraopolis connector trail through the Montour Junction property. There are still some minor items to complete, but we are starting to plan for a grand opening in August.

The Montour Junction is a 78-acre property between MTC mile zero and Coraopolis. The property was formerly the Montour Railroad’s maintenance yard and offices. In addition to the

Dave Wright, Allegheny County right-of-way expert and a MTC super-volunteer, and I have been planning the Coraopolis Connector for 35 years. Finally, we have completed the project.

When you look at the small completed 0.8-mile trail, it looks like it would be a simplistic project. However, I would suggest this project (known as MTC’s Phase 30) has been our most difficult one due to lack of property ownership and building in a floodplain.

I will explain the ups and downs of obtaining an easement from various Montour Junction owners. A second article in the next *Trail-Letter* will describe the grand opening details and obtaining the very difficult PA Department of Environmental Planning approvals for construction in a floodway and floodplain.

In 1991, Allegheny County purchased from the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie (P&LE) Railroad (the owner of the Montour Railroad right-of-way) 38 miles of the Montour Railroad right-of-way (ROW).

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Montour Trail, the Riverhounds built a first-class soccer complex in the junction and an Allegheny Health Network medical facility.



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*The Montour Trail Council is a volunteer-driven 501(c)(3) nonprofit that acts as a land trust, responsible for preserving green space within the trail's viewscape. The MTC owns and manages the 60-plus-mile Montour Trail in Allegheny and Washington counties in Southwestern PA.*

### **MONTOUR TRAIL-LETTER**

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## Prez Sez:

### Local Corporations Bring Muscle to the Trail

*By Julian Wolfe*

The Montour Trail is fortunate to have a strong foundation of dues-paying members whose financial support enables the Montour Trail Council to carry out a wide range of essential activities. Their contributions help us maintain and operate the equipment needed for trail construction and routine upkeep, protect vulnerable areas from streambank erosion, expand access for users with mobility challenges, and engage in important community outreach, among many other efforts. Complementing this work are the many groups and organizations whose members and employees volunteer their time at trail work parties. The trail council is also grateful for the growing number of corporations and businesses that encourage their employees to participate in community service or “give back” programs.

A typical corporate service project begins with a conversation between trail officers and company representatives about the number of volunteers available, preferred work locations along the trail and convenient dates. With 60 miles of trail spanning 12 municipalities in two counties, the Montour Trail offers a wide range of potential project sites. The trail council then consults with members of its skilled Friends Groups to identify suitable projects in locations convenient for the company and its employee volunteers, and to determine mutually agreeable dates.

Once the project, location, and schedule are set, much of the preparation falls to these same Friends Groups. They handle planning, equipment setup and the acquisition of necessary safety gear, and they oversee the work on the day of the project. Some preparation begins days in advance, as the trail must position trucks and other heavy equipment to ensure a smooth and successful effort. In recent years, several corporate partners have supplied such large volunteer teams that the trail council has coordinated two simultaneous work projects in different trail sections, each managed by a different Friends Group.

The trail council and our Friends Groups offer a wide range of project opportunities. Over the past two years, volunteer teams have taken on fence installation, painting and repairs, trimming back encroaching vegetation, clearing drainage ditches, gardening, selective tree trimming, mowing and weed-whacking, installing signs, and maintaining our reforestation areas. Our employee volunteers consistently bring an impressive esprit de corps to every assignment. And when the work is done, it's clear how much pride they take in seeing a completed project,

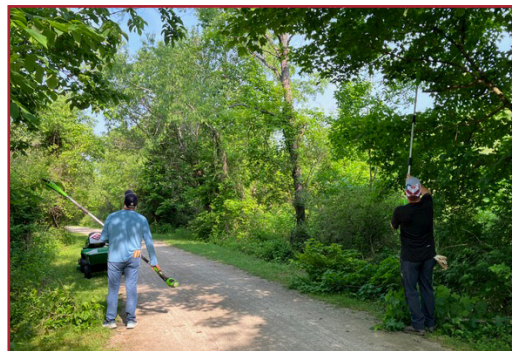


*Employee volunteers from across the country — and even around the world — contribute hands-on work that keeps the trail thriving.*

walking away knowing they've made their mark and contributed to the upkeep and enhancement of one of the region's most beloved recreational assets.

Many of our corporate employee volunteers come from well beyond western Pennsylvania.

*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 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 meet 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 meet 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 meet 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 meet 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](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 meet 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 meet 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](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 meet every first Wednesday of the month. For more information, contact [newsroom711@gmail.com](mailto:newsroom711@gmail.com).

*continued from page 2- Prez Sez.*

When local companies host workshops or training programs at nearby facilities, we benefit from the team-building and community-service components built into those events. One of our most recent work parties even included corporate leaders from Asia and Europe who had traveled to Pittsburgh for a weeklong training seminar.

We truly enjoy engaging with such a diverse mix of volunteers —

from managers to technicians and everyone in between — and it's always gratifying to see their reactions when they learn that the Montour Trail is owned, operated and managed entirely by an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization.

We welcome inquiries from the local business community interested in community service opportunities and engagement with the Montour Trail. Please email us at [volunteer@montourtrail.org](mailto:volunteer@montourtrail.org). We will work hard to provide an enriching and rewarding experience for your employees. Huzzah!



*A drizzly morning didn't dampen spirits on May 14 as a George Washington historical marker was unveiled at mile marker 20.5 on the Montour Trail. Sponsored by the Montour Trail Council, Historic Fort Cherry and Montour Railroad Historical Society, the ceremony*

*commemorated land holdings on the trail once owned by the first U.S. president that would later become Mount Pleasant and Cecil townships. At the marker are Julian Wolfe, MTC president; Bryan Seip, historical society president; Electra Janis, vice chair of the Washington County Board of Commissioners; and Brad Cowden, Historic Fort Cherry co-director.*

*The audience listens as Mr. Seip explains that President Washington received the 2,800-acre property in 1774 as recognition for his service to the British crown during the French and Indian War. Washington*

*retained ownership of the land, then part of Colonial Virginia, until 1796. The marker was provided by the William G. Pomeroy Foundation in partnership with Rails to Trails Conservancy's Trails Across America program.*



### *continued from page 1- National Tunnel*

More recently, the campaign received a boost from the Public Lands Fund, the charitable arm of the outdoor retailer Public Lands, which awarded a \$10,000 grant for the tunnel rehab.

Cumulatively, more than \$1.15 million has been raised, including funds from Montour Trail Council coffers.

The trail council has submitted, or is preparing to submit, additional funding proposals to area foundations, state agencies that have previously partnered with the Montour Trail, local governments, and corporate supporters.

Project manager Paul McKeown said the trail council will use the funds already in hand to purchase the custom-fabricated galvanized steel and other components needed to stabilize the tunnel's east and west ends. "Full construction will follow in Spring 2027, pending the success of our ongoing fundraising," he said.

The council has adopted the renovation plan prepared by WEC Engineers, an area company that worked on the recent Greer Tunnel renovation, said Mr. McKeown. "With adequate funding, this plan will allow us to fully reopen the National Tunnel to trail users by October 2027," he said.

Plans call for installing a 295-foot steel liner along the western half of the tunnel, a 60-foot liner on the eastern edge and rehabilitating both portals, similar to the successful repair of Greer in Peters Township two years ago.

The 113-year-old National Tunnel, at mile marker 25 in Cecil Township, was closed last November after engineers identified a cracked and deteriorating ceiling. With no safe detour available, the closure effectively divides the Montour Trail mainline into two disconnected segments.

The 630-foot curved National Tunnel, built by the Montour Railroad, is the longest of the trail's three tunnels and one of its most iconic landmarks.

"We know how deeply our trail users value the Montour as a welcoming place for walking, cycling, running, and enjoying the outdoors," said MTC President Julian Wolfe. "We're confident they will contribute to our efforts as we work to reopen this historic tunnel."

For more information about the project or to donate, visit [nationaltunnel.org](http://nationaltunnel.org).

### *continued from page 1- Coraopolis Connector*

However, the purchase did not include the 78-acre Montour Junction property or the first 7.3 miles of the ROW. Dave Wright placed a request into P&LE to make any potential buyer aware of the Montour Trail Council wanting an easement through the junction and the first 7.3 miles of ROW.

In the late 1990s, a contractor placed an option to purchase both the Montour Junction property and the first 7.3 miles of the ROW. The contractor ultimately chose not to proceed with the purchase, but unfortunately renewed the option monthly for about seven months, delaying any action on our part. When the option finally expired, we immediately secured our own \$200,000 option to purchase the first 7.3 miles of the ROW.

We did not have the \$200,000 and it would have taken a long time to get a federal, state or county loan. However, we had been in discussions with the Allegheny Trail Alliance (ATA), owners of the Great Allegheny Passage, about a \$200,000 loan. They ultimately approved it, and in October 2000 the MTC purchased the first 7.3 miles of ROW for the trail from the P&LE using the ATA loan.

The Montour Junction property was still for sale at more than \$1 million. Because we only needed a 20-foot-wide easement for the trail, we had no interest in purchasing the entire 78-acre Montour Junction parcel.

In 2002, the nonprofit Sports Legacy Foundation purchased the Montour Junction property to create non-traditional sporting fields

for children. Mr. Wright again placed a request for a trail easement to the new owners. In 2005, the Sports Legacy Foundation and Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County (RAAC) formed a partnership. That partnership led to the Sports Legacy Foundation donating the Montour Junction property to the RAAC in 2011.

Finally, in 2016 the Montour Trail Council signed a 25-year license agreement with the RAAC for a 20-foot easement to establish the 0.8-mile trail from mile zero to Montour Street in Coraopolis. In addition, we obtained an easement from Duquesne Light for a small property under the Coraopolis bridge. We also obtained a slope easement from Bob Bolea on 4th Avenue so the 190-foot-long concrete land bridge could be installed to Montour Street.

In 2019, Tuffy Shallenberger of Shallenberger Construction purchased the property to build soccer fields and the AHN Montour Sports Complex. The MTC easement lease carried forward with the new owners.

(With Mr. Wright's contacts among the property owners, I was able over the years to work with the last three owners to secure permission for using Montour Junction as parking for the MTC's annual Tour the Montour ride each September. We park more than 220 cars there for the event, and holding the Tour would have been extremely difficult without the owners' continued cooperation in allowing access to Montour Junction.)

*Mr. Pfeiffer is president of the council's Airport Area Friends Group and an MTC board member.*

## Party on the Montour for National Trails Day



The Montour Trail celebrated the annual springtime observance of the nation’s trails at the Tandem Connection trailhead on May 2. Although the national event is traditionally held on the fourth Saturday in April, unfavorable weather prompted Montour volunteers to shift the celebration by a week. Staffed by members of the Montour’s Cecil Friends Group and the trail’s Membership and Community Outreach Committee, the event offered volunteer and membership opportunities, Montour merchandise, displays highlighting the National Tunnel fundraising campaign, and complimentary hot dogs, chips and drinks. *(Photos: Emma Borsh)*

## New Signs on Trail Highlight Local History

The Montour Railroad Historical Society has recently installed four new interpretive signs commemorating milestone anniversary events.

Two of the signs commemorate President George Washington’s landholdings in the Southview area, which he owned in the late 1700s. The Montour Trail crosses this property in two locations. One stretch runs from trail mile 19.5 to mile 20.9, where a marker has been installed at the Millers Run bridge near the intersection of Southview and Primrose roads (photos on page 3).

The second area lies along the trail’s Westland Branch from mile 1.0 to mile 1.5, near the Route 50 and Hornhead Road intersection, where a second marker has been installed. Together, these signs connect the Montour Trail to the nation’s 250th anniversary through President Washington’s history in the region.



*On the Westland Branch.*

The third sign was installed on the Montour Railroad bridge over Route 30 in Imperial at trail mile 8.8. One hundred years ago, Route 30 through western Pennsylvania was designated as part of the Lincoln Highway — the first transcontinental paved highway built expressly for automobile travel. Stretching from Times Square in New York City to Lincoln Park in San Francisco, the Lincoln Highway was also the nation’s first memorial to Abraham Lincoln, predating the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.



*At the Venetia Community Center.*

The fourth marker, while not located directly on the Montour, commemorates the Venetia Community Center, home of the Montour Railroad History Room. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the former Peters Township Graded School No. 1 building, which now houses several nonprofit organizations.

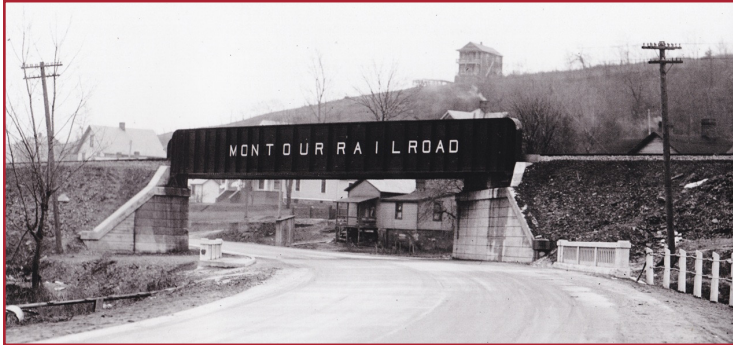
These new interpretive signs bring the number installed on the Montour Trail to 47, with more in the works. *(Photos: Bryan Seip)*

## Montour Railroad History

### The Lincoln Highway

By Bryan Seip, Montour Railroad Historical Society

*This year is the 100th anniversary of the Lincoln Highway route through Imperial, PA, where it met the Montour Railroad.*



*Montour Railroad bridge over Rt. 30 in Imperial.  
(Photo: Allegheny County archives)*

The first transcontinental highway to be built as a paved road expressly for automobiles was the brainchild of a group established in 1913 as the Lincoln Highway Association. The highway was to run from Times Square in New York City to Lincoln Park in San Francisco. It was the first national memorial to Abraham Lincoln, predating the 1922 opening of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The Lincoln Highway was dedicated on October 31, 1913, using many existing roads. New roadways were added to fill the gaps as auto traffic increased. The highway was finally completed in 1925.

Also in 1925, federal and state governments adopted the U. S. Highway System, which changed previously named road and trail designations to a system of numbered routes with oversight by the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. Much of the existing Lincoln Highway across Pennsylvania became U.S. Route 30.

In the Pittsburgh area, the Lincoln Highway followed a route along the Ohio River to East Liverpool, Ohio, using what are now Routes 65-68-39. The highway was relocated in several places across America over its lifetime. One such reassignment in 1926 moved the highway to U.S. 30 from Pittsburgh into West Virginia and Ohio, running through Imperial, PA.

In Imperial, U.S. 30 descended the hill on Church Road from St. Columbkille Church and met Main Street at the Montour Railroad passenger station — today the site of the Findlay Township Activity Center. From there, the highway followed Main Street to the west edge of town.

At that time, the Montour Railroad ran down Main Street and crossed U.S. 30 at grade. As automobile traffic and train movements increased, the crossing became the site of several serious accidents. A railroad realignment project in 1928 moved the railroad off Main Street onto a raised fill through the town. A new half-mile section of U.S. 30 was constructed to bypass the center of town, including a bridge carrying the railroad over U.S. 30, which eliminated the

dangerous crossing.

The Lincoln Highway Association wanted their entire route to be numbered as U.S. 30, but that was not approved by the federal bureau. However, the Lincoln Highway did follow U.S. 30 from Philadelphia traveling west into Wyoming.

With the federal government takeover of the public roads system, the old Lincoln Highway Association had little to do and ceased operations at the close of 1927.

One of the final actions of the Lincoln Highway Association was to commission 3,000 concrete markers dedicating the highway to the memory of Abraham Lincoln. With approval from the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, these markers were placed along the length of the route, and on September 1, 1928, Boy Scout troops across the country installed them in a single coordinated effort.

Some markers remain at their original positions, but not many. Some have been relocated. Many are gone, lost forever to road enhancements, realignments, neglect, or indifference on the part of local highway departments that were entrusted with their care.

The Lincoln Highway Association was re-formed in 1992 with the mission, "... to identify, preserve, and improve access to the remaining portions of the Lincoln Highway and its associated historic sites."

There are active state chapters in 10 Lincoln Highway states, with the LHA governed by a board of directors with representatives from each Lincoln Highway state.

In 2000, the Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor installed 150 colorful wooden and metal roadside signs along the historic alignments of the 200 miles of Pennsylvania's Lincoln Highway — from Irwin in the west to Abbottstown in the east.

The LHHC operates a museum, The Lincoln Highway Experience, with many artifacts and exhibits, located along U.S. 30 between Latrobe and Ligonier.

*Information and assistance for this column came from the Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor. For more information about the Lincoln Highway in PA: [LHHC.org](http://LHHC.org).*



*The Lincoln Highway in the 1930s followed U.S. 30 in Pennsylvania.  
(Photo: Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor)*

**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 out [montourrr.com](http://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/](http://montourtrail.org/support-us/)



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- Champion .....\$2,500+
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- Individual.....\$35
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## Join us for the Tour!

The 24th Annual Gateway Engineers Tour the Montour takes off on Saturday, September 12.

The Tour the Montour is our annual community cycling event on the Montour Trail, welcoming riders of all ages and abilities. The ride offers a safe, scenic and family-friendly experience on one of the region's most valued shared-use trails. Participants enjoy a well-organized event that emphasizes recreation, wellness and community connection rather than competition. All are invited to participate: recreational cyclists, families on bikes, trail supporters who value outdoor activity and community spaces, and even volunteers.



Registration opens soon and includes a souvenir t-shirt, rest stops with snacks, on-trail rider support, and a delicious post-ride lunch. Raffle prizes and basket chance items are also offered. Choose a standard ride ranging from a short family fun ride to more than 50 miles, or customize your own distance.

Not a bicyclist? You can help. To stage the Tour, we need many volunteers to fill a variety of positions. Please email [TheTour@MontourTrail.org](mailto:TheTour@MontourTrail.org) if you're interested.

## 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 one criterion 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

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