Every aspect of life, including the Montour Trail, has been changed rather quickly and thoroughly this year. It is something of a challenge to look back past this moment, and review the wide range of last year’s good work that we were just starting, were in the middle of, or had finished. Nonetheless, I believe that these current times will bring even more focus on the importance of all the projects and initiatives that we had going last year. These good efforts continue to provide momentum that will help carry us forward through our present difficult times.

The Well Known Montour

Due largely to our volunteers keeping the trail in such excellent condition, and aided by our community outreach efforts, positive word of mouth of the Montour keeps growing throughout the region. The general populace, municipalities, public agencies, and news organizations continue to speak well of the trail. Having been a “Trail of the Year” is still an active force that is bringing all sorts of new contacts and offers of help to the trail organization.

A Friendly Bunch

The Friends Groups continue to be the most visible face of the trail to their communities – and certainly to individual trail users. Friends’ leaders and volunteers work with their municipalities, keep Trail neighbors happy, and continually plan and carry out trail maintenance, for which they sometimes get thanked trailside. The 2019 Montour Tail newsletters highlighted the fine work of the Cecil, Fort Cherry, the Airport Area, and the Montour Railroad Historical Friends. These men and women are really the backbone of the trail organization, and well deserve the thanks of all of us, and of their host municipalities.

Meeting the Originals

Headlining the Trail-Letter throughout 2019 were Bruce Barron’s in-depth looks at more of our founding Originals. These folks had the vision and drive to get it started, back when the very idea of trails was little known. Bruce’s articles crisply profiled George Schmidt, Paul Mitsdarfer, Jack Swisher, Peter Kohnke, Stan Sattinger, Dave Wright, and longtime Trail Letter editor Dennis Sims. For us followers-on, these guys are (at minimum!) a tough act to follow. Their insights and energy really got the Montour Trail started and well positioned for its bright future.

An Eventful Year

Each of last year’s annual trail events, at the time, was seen as yet another success, one more in a many years-long series. Once again, while these events provided longtime trail users to enjoy it in a different way, they also brought many new faces to the Montour – some of whom subsequently became members. Who knew that a year later we would be looking back on the very idea of events almost nostalgically, as one after another was cancelled? Going forward, though, the National Tunnel Race in Cecil, REI Trail Summit, J. R. Taylor Race in Bethel, Twilight Trail Walk in Peters, the Tour the Montour, and perhaps newly conceived events will once again arise to show the people of our trail community a good time, in a festive spirit beyond their everyday normal tail use.

Thirty and a Hundred

Having been founded in 1989, Montour marked its thirtieth anniversary last year. The November celebratory event was the annual dinner, held at St. Joan’s in Library. Founding President Stan Sattinger and his family traveled from Minneapolis to tell the amazing story of how they pulled the Montour Trail together more or less out of thin air. Many of the other ‘Originals’ founders were there as well, making for a highly entertaining and enjoyable evening. The organizers of this dinner cannot be thanked enough for their efforts. Coincidentally, just a stone’s throw from St. Joan’s is the Library Viaduct, which in 2019 turned 100 years old. The viaduct was the subject of one of many fascinating articles by the Montour Railroad Historical Society friends. Besides newsletter articles, MRHS last year continued to pursue its agenda of showing us the historical roots of our corridor, unfolding the Montour Railroad’s history through partnerships with Eagle Scouts who have built and installed a growing string of sturdy and attractive trailside historical signs for us to enjoy.

Swingin’ the Hammer – West, Middle and East

2019 saw several long anticipated construction projects, located throughout the trail corridor, being significantly advanced. The western maintenance garage, off Enlow Road near the Cliff Mine trailhead, was substantially completed. It will greatly facilitate keeping the westernmost dozen-plus trail miles in good condition. Also in the Airport area, project managers Dennis Pfeiffer and Dave Wright got construction of the 0.8-mile extension of the trail mainline (from MP 0 to Montour Street in Coraopolis) off to a good start, with completion hoped for 2020. In Cecil, metal doors were erected on the eastern portal of the National Tunnel, following the March removal (for the last time – hurrah!) of the cumbersome plywood panels deployed to prevent ice for the last several years. Bill Capp oversaw our fabricating / erection contractor on this one. The tunnel was also re-paved with asphalt, making for a smooth surface. This echoed the 2018 asphalt paving of Greer Tunnel in western Peters. Trail users like ‘em. Continues on page 2
Much has happened in South Park Township, mostly under the guidance of project manager Dave Oyler. He oversaw completion of the ¾ mile of new trail from Pleasant Street to the Port Authority’s park and ride lot. Just beyond that, the developer constructed a bridge which carries the Trail over Summit Drive. With a driveway that was built, the on-road detour was cut almost by half. Both the eastern ½ mile of the Summit development (to Wood Street) and the ¼ mile Pirain section (Wood Street to Stewart Road) sections got into the design stage. Design for both should wrap in 2020, with trail building planned for 2021. Further east, the Piney Fork trail building project is being managed by Tom Prezel. This 0.4 mile section started construction last year with completion planned for 2020.

Major Area Projects Continue

Several major developments by other organizations are underway in areas near the trail. In Peters Township, half of a former golf course is being developed as the new campus for their high school, and the other half as a township park – with a connection to the Arrowhead section of the Montour. Of the two new residential developments on the trail, the furthest along is McConnell Trails in Cecil, where construction of townhomes and single family homes was well underway last year, and continues at a stiff pace in 2020. In South Park, the Summit Station development in 2019 saw construction of apartment buildings and townhomes, with single family homes just starting in 2020. When built and occupied, these will make for a lot of people who want to live adjacent to the Montour Trail, so they can use it right out their doors. Construction of the Southern Beltway caused some inconveniences for our trail users, but was not as difficult as had been anticipated, with the contractors being generally cooperative. Disruptions should quickly taper off as the project moves toward its 2022 completion.

Big Plans

2019 was the first year of our 2019-2021 Strategic Plan, with the Board and several committees aiming to make progress on its goals. As you can see in this report, progress is being achieved on a number of different Plan initiatives. Each of the Friends Groups plans for their sections also moved along well in 2019. All of the Montour Trail committees made progress on their annual agendas too. And the MTC Board kept everything pulled together and moving forward. All these vital elements of the Montour Trail Council have had the benefit of some new volunteers with fresh ideas and new perspectives on the complex weave of matters at hand.

And a big THANKS to All the Volunteers, Members, and Donors. It takes all of you to make it happen: last year, this year, and as long as we want the Montour Trail to be there for the people of this region. You all know for yourselves how important the trail is, that’s why together we spend over 25,000 volunteer hours on it every year. It helps make the region a better place. Now more than ever, we have come to appreciate the great value of healthy outdoor recreation, for ourselves, our families, and everyone. Support in these difficult times has continued to be strong. 2019 was a great year for the Montour Trail. 2020 certainly has the potential – despite circumstances – of being an even better one.

The Montour Trail Council Board of Directors, its Committees, the Friends Groups and all the volunteers thank you for your ongoing support.

Ned Williams, President

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