

## Durham celebrates American Tobacco Trail

### *First section of 23-mile Triangle trail dedicated on National Trails Day*

June 3, National Trails Day, dawned with the promise of heat and humidity that would be ignored by rail-trail supporters. True believers had been waiting more than a decade. It was the day for dedicating the first 3.2 miles of the 23-mile American Tobacco Trail.

Many had already walked and biked on the completed sections, from as far south as Cornwallis Ave, to the downtown trailhead at the former American Tobacco Co. factory.

And the Durham Community Concert Band played on while folks congratulated one another, gratefully sucked on orange slices, drank iced bottle water and smiled a lot.

Mayor Nick Tennyson led off with a welcome, followed by rounds of thanks from Bill Bussey, TRTC chair; Tom Stark, Durham Open Space and Trails Commission chair; Kelly Bryant, Trails Committee chair, and Johnny Ford, Durham Parks and Recreation director. NC DOT Deputy Sec. David King batted cleanup within a long throw of the Durham Bulls Athletic Park

Often mentioned for special recognition was NCRT co-founder Al Capehart, who was the first to propose the ATT and has steadfastly nudged the project along through the slumps.

It was apparent that the ATT, 15 years in the making, is an overnight success. Still to come are another three miles to be built this fall in south Durham, bridging I-40 next year, a developing few more miles to Chatham County, solve



The long wait officially ends as the ribbon falls on the first 3.2 miles of the American Tobacco Trail in Durham. The eager young cyclist is Jonathan King, son of NC DOT Deputy Sec. David King. Holding the ribbon, from left, Durham Commissioner Ellen Reckow, Deputy Sec. King, Durham Mayor Nick Tennyson with scissors, Durham Commissioner Maryann Black and NCRT Pres. Al Capehart. *More photos Page 3*

Chatham's funding for 6.5 miles, and launching development in Wake County, which recently budgeted \$1 million to complete the route.

But then, what's a few more years when the ATT has come this far? Just a blink of the eye in rail-trail time.

### ***NCRT finalizes first federal railbanking***

The first completed federal railbanking in this state became effective when the Aberdeen & Rockfish Railroad Co. notified the federal Surface Transportation Board on April 19 that it had consummated a railbanking and interim trail use agreement with NCRT under Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act.

That notification was the final step in turning over management and liabilities

of the 5.3-mile Dunn-Erwin Railway corridor to NCRT. The management agreement and the donation of deed to the property makes the railroad eligible for conservation easement state tax credits.

The Harnett County railroad property was donated with the tracks in place, which will be salvaged to support the expense of managing the corridor.

On the other side of the state, a three-  
*Continued on Page 2*



## Deep River plan honors Shannon Goodwin

A familiar moonlight canoe outing on the Deep River turned tragic March 18, resulting in the death of Shannon Goodwin, 36, secretary of the Deep River Parks Association.

Following March 22 funeral services in Sanford, over 100 mourners and park supporters assembled in her honor at the Deep River Park camelback bridge for a presentation of park development plans drawn up by North Carolina State University School of Design under the direction of NCRT board member Prof. Shishir Raval.

Shannon and husband Ronald, the association president, were in the first of three canoes approaching the new U.S. 421 highway bridge when a hidden logjam threw them into the water. Shannon and the canoe were trapped under a tangle of trees submerged by the swollen river.

Her husband and four other canoeing

companions were unable to locate her. It took rescue crews four hours to find and extracted her body from the tangle.

## Lincolnton trail identity honors Marcia Cloninger

Lincolnton's two-year-old rail-trail has been renamed in memory of Marcia H. Cloninger, who championed the trail project through two terms on the Lincolnton City Council.

Mrs. Cloninger passed away unexpectedly last October after battling cancer for several years. During her illness, she also served as mayor pro tem, only missed one meeting.

She was unopposed for the November election and expected back for another four years. Her husband, Dr. Les Cloninger, was named to serve her council term. He has continued to make extension of the downtown trail a top priority. The community quickly contributed over \$12,000 to a memorial trail fund.

The accomplishment she was most proud of was the first stage of the rail-trail, despite stiff resistance in the beginning, according to her husband. She was eager to see the trail extended so it could connect Betty Ross Park with City Park at opposite ends of the city.

Mayor Bobby Huitt said Mrs. Cloninger was instrumental in securing state and federal funding for the trail. Even though Huitt opposed the trail, both as a councilman and mayor, he initiated renaming the trail in Mrs. Cloninger's memory.

## Rep. Ryan files new bill to block interim trails

U.S. Rep. Jim Ryun, Kansas, has again introduced a bill intended to block trails on federally-railbanked corridors. HR 4086 adds language to 16 U.S.C. 1247(d) which would require paying compensation to abutting property owners for rail corridor easements before trail development could go forward.

The bill does not specify who would have to pay and whether payment would be for fee or a new trail easement. Ryun's media comments indicate his intent is to saddle the sponsoring trail agency or entity with the expense.

The bill received a fast track hearing on May 9 in the House Resources National Parks and Public Lands Subcommittee. The bill was pulled from a hurried markup the following week, an indication that leadership had problems with the bill's ambiguity.

## First federal railbanking

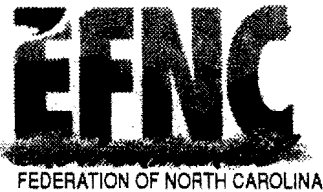
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way Section 8(d) railbanking agreement was signed May 25 by the Thermal Belt Railway, the Rutherford Railroad Development Corp. and the nonprofit Bechtler Development Corp.

The agreement is for federal railbanking and interim trail from Spindale to Gilkey in Rutherford County. The Thermal Belt has discontinued service on that segment, but continues to operate the line from Bostic to Forest City. The RRDC owns the tracks and leases them to the Thermal Belt.

Bechtler Development will assume corridor responsibility on the 8.5-mile railbanked segment. National Recreational Trails Fund and National Park Service grants are in place to start trail development as soon as the federal STB reviews and publishes the railbanking notice. That process takes a minimum of 90 days.

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## Whistle Stops:

### Great granddaddy of the trail

It was 1985, fifteen years ago, that Durham citizen Al Capehart launched a private crusade to educate local and state governments on the value of preserving the Triangle region's surplus railroad corridors.

From that solo effort grew the Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and our statewide North Carolina Rails-Trails organization.

How sweet it had to be on June 3, National Trails Day, 2000, for Al to walk past the ribbon which marked a new beginning for the American Tobacco Trail.

For 15 years the ATT has had to jump through endless hoops. Many people in public and private roles piled on their efforts. Generations of TRTC leadership took the ATT to each next level.

Between leadership generations, there was Al, often in the background, bridging some gaps and applying a steady push.

The first 3.2 miles of the ATT are on the ground. The next 20 miles look like smoother sledding. And that's because of all who previously leaned into the harness. When the last ribbon is cut on the final section, it will be a North Carolina monument to persistence.

Thanks to y'all for working up a sweat. And, especially, to you, Al, the great-granddaddy of the ATT.



Al Capehart

### One percent of the green

One Million Acres. A nice, round, political figure grabbed out of the air. That is the figure Gov. Jim Hunt came up with. A million acres of green space to be set aside in North Carolina over the coming decade. And to make it more dramatic, the governor gave DENR Sec. Bill Holman less than two months to come up with a grand plan.

The DENR, the state's land trust community and others are to be commended for grabbing the bone and running with it. They saw the opportunity to go for green, to set out an on-going mission, before the lame duck governor disappears.

We'd like to offer one small amendment: Make a small fraction of the One Millions Acres be One Thousand Miles of deserted railroad corridors, often the last places to harbor rare and endangered species.

One Thousand Miles would equate to roughly 10,000 acres or only one percent of the One Million Acres. It would only be about one-half of the rail corridors that have gone by the wayside in this state over recent decades.

Think about it: One Thousand Miles of linear green space, with tons of public infrastructure potential to boot. That's One Thousand Miles of linear options that could save many more thousands of green acres from the bulldozer during the 21st Century. It makes sense.

Other states have found ways to do just that. One Thousand Miles and more. Does North Carolina have to stay at the back of the railbanking pack?

age of all age groups used the trails and, most significantly, even larger percentages increased regular walking when trails were available.

Age Group	Used Trails	Increase Walking
19-39	44.3%	60.3%
40-59	37.1%	52.5%
60-plus	34.2%	52.6%

*Ed's Note: The following appeared June 1 in The Jefferson Post. Of all the recent articles, editorials and letters published on both sides this subject, the simple elegance of Sharon Gambill's letter speaks best to the issue.*

To The Editor:

As a young child, I remember visiting my grandparents who lived on Buffalo Creek in Warrentonville near the railroad. I so loved seeing the Norfolk & Western (Virginia & Carolina Railway) train go by and years later, as an adult, I was saddened at the discontinuance of the train and the dismantling of the track.

When the train was up and running, "we" somehow managed to do without the space the railroad took up and I fail to see why we cannot do so now for the proposed Virginia Creeper Bike Trail. I feel the Bike Trail will enhance rather than detract and certainly nothing could be more harmless than the cyclists who, of necessity, travel light. They are out there cycling because they are into good health, the environment and nature.

I have had the good fortune to hike with friends on the Bike Trail (Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail) near Abingdon, Va. In many places, the trees meet overhead to form a lovely bower, a cool, peaceful oasis, where hikers, cyclists, and nature seem to all co-exist following the curve of the hills, the trestles over gurgling creeks, that was the old railroad bed.

The bedrock of cinders, gravel, and creosote of the former railroad seems not conducive to a garden plot nor much else except it is ideal for a Bike Trail and I just wish the "doomsayers" with the "I, me, and mine" syndrome could see the greater good.

Ashe County is a wonderful place built on the backs of folks who are generous to a fault with their time, money, and property. It behooves each of us to remember this as we contemplate our legacy, our contribution. Perhaps a reminder that our sojourn here is relatively short, that we are merely custodians of "our property" is in order.

Sharon B. Gambill,  
West Jefferson

### Build it and they will walk

The availability of trails makes a big difference in adult exercise habits, according to a Missouri study conducted by St. Louis University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study telephone interviewed 1,269 adults in 12 rural counties that had 21 trails. The results showed a large percent-

## Local bills seek interim trail use exemptions

Two local bills were filed May 25 to exempt pieces of the state-railbanked Piedmont & Northern Railway corridor from the statutory roadblock to interim trail use.

Sen. Daniel Clodfelter, Mecklenburg, introduced S1449 to allow utilization of 0.8-mile for a parks connector trail in northwest Charlotte. Rep. John Rayfield, Gaston, filed a like bill to allow interim trail on the P&N Belmont Spur.

Mt. Holly resident Richard Duren is leading a Gaston County initiative to utilize the 2.5-mile Belmont Spur, which connects Belmont Abbey College to downtown Belmont.

The initiative has the support of Abbot Placid Solari, who thinks the rail-trail a "wonderful proposal." The spur includes a bridge over I-85.

"This is quite proper use of the tracks," he said. "It would enable our students to get to town much easier and tie the community much closer to the abbey."

At the abbot's urging, the Belmont City Council Belmont passed a proposed rail-trail resolution.

The P&N is a state-railbanked easement which is in the NC DOT Rapid Passenger Rail and Public Transit Plan as a commuter rail corridor between Charlotte and Gastonia. It is subject to G.S. 136-44.36D, the interim leasing law which requires fee simple absolute railbanking for interim use.

The two local bills leave the other requirements of G.S. 136-44.36 in place. Those include written notification to all abutting properties, public hearings and broad property owner representation.

## Nantahala trail a scenic delight



NCRT board member Mike Domonkos watches for rafters to appear through morning mist on the Nantahala River Bike Trail, which was built on a historic railroad spur.

Dramatic mountain views, towering hardwoods, seasonal wild flowers, rhododendron thickets and entertainment in the form of bobbing rafters make the Nantahala River Bike Trail an enchanting leg-stretcher for travelers and tourists driving U.S. 19 through the Nantahala Gorge in the southwest corner of North Carolina. And it is a rail-trail.

An abandoned spur of the Murphy Branch, now the popular Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, is the basis for the 1.2 mile U.S. Forest Service project which was constructed largely with NC DOT bike/ped ISTEA funds. The project includes a bike lane on U.S. 19, providing an option to hop off the GSMRR excursion train at the gorge stop, and then safely transition to the half-mile trail. At

the opposite end, the trail can be accessed at the Nantahala commercial rafting launch site.

The paved trail is on a historic rail spur built to carry steel and other materials for building a NP&L generating plant near the present launch site. A mountain tunnel supplies water for powering turbines and controlling water levels in the gorge.

From the north, most the visual cue of the trail is the bike lane on U.S. 19. From there it is short transition on SR 1100 to the paved trail. From the south, look for a rest area on the right and then the raft launch site just off U.S. 19 on SR 1310. You can't miss it if you are taking time to properly enjoy the scenery.

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**THANK YOU FOR JOINING NCRT**

## Federal grants aid rail-trails

Ashe, Rutherford, Guilford and Wake county rail-trail projects have been selected to received National Recreation Trails Fund development grants this year. The projects must still pass state and federal administrative reviews.

Two Ashe projects on the Carolina Creeper route each were selected for \$50,000 awards. The Town of Lansing will apply the funding to acquire easements for one mile of trail and trailhead facilities. The Todd community is developing an island park in the New River's South Fork, adjacent to Railroad Grade Road, the southern segment of former Virginia-Carolina Railway.

The Town of Rutherfordton and the nonprofit Bechtler Development Corp. were allotted \$40,000 and \$49,000, respectively, for developing segments of the Thermal Belt North rail-trail.

Greensboro was selected to receive \$50,000 for phase three development of the Lake Brandt Greenway trail, which connects the city with BurMill Park. Greensboro also was awarded a \$5,000 state Adopt-A-Trail grant for new decking and fencing on a Lake Brandt Greenway bridge.

Wake County was awarded \$50,000 for improvements to four bridges on the south end of the American Tobacco Trail in that county.

In addition to these rail-trail projects, 21 other state trail projects were selected for grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000. The federal grants are administered by the state trails program with the state trails advisory committee participating in the selection process.

### NCRT board meetings

**Summer: 10:30 a.m., July 8, Railroad House Museum at Hawkins and Carthage streets in downtown Sanford.**

**Fall: 10:30 a.m., Oct. 8, Durham. Annual Meeting.**

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