

Shishir Raval Returns Home

Teachers claim to be life-long learners eager to learn, even from their students.

Dr. Shishir Raval made good on that claim in the spring of 1993 when a student suggested that AL Capehart speak about rail-trails to Shishir's landscape architecture class at N.C. State University.

The result?

Shishir got hooked. He lent his expertise and students to rail-trail projects across the state and in 1997 became a passionate advocate of rail-trails as a board member of North Carolina Rail-Trails Inc. (NCRT). In mid-December, Shishir, 47, returned to his native Baroda, India.

"I've been very fortunate to have found people like AL Capehart and others who want to build partnerships and students who believe in this type of work," Shishir said before his departure. "It's truly a labor of love."

NCRT President Capehart termed Shishir a "friend" who brought "spiritual insight" into the planning and development process. "His regard for the environment and human interaction blended the two for the benefit of both," Capehart said. "That commitment gave his students an understanding of rail-trails that was

Shishir (Cont. Page 2)



Erwin Manor B&B overlooks the 5-mile Dunn-Erwin Trail. Photo by Dave Connelly

Trail Pumps Spirit, Health, Economy

Last year Gerry Wallace's doctor put a dint in her walking regimen. Her cholesterol level had jumped. She would have to cutback her walking.

The 69-year-old reduced her 6-days-a-week walk on the Dunn-Erwin Trail from five miles to 3.5 miles, but still felt the same glow.

"When I'm walking, I'm much more bubbly and open," she says. "There is a lift in my energy and outlook." (See **Gerry**, page 5.)

Warren is one of hundreds of people ranging from local bicyclists and Cub Scouts to visitors from Wilmington who walk, run, bicycle or amble along the 5-mile fine-ground granite trail.

The 3-year-old trail has pumped up the local economies slightly. It is also a point of local pride and a motivator for sprucing up the two, eastern North Carolina downtowns.

"There are no hard figures" on trail traffic, says William Leonard, who formerly supervised Erwin parks and recreation. "But I've seen an increase in downtown activity. There has definitely been an impact on the community."

Trail (Cont. on page 4)

Celebration!

The legal transfer of the 5-mile Dunn-Erwin Trail from North Carolina Rail-Trails Inc. (NCRT) to Harnett County will be celebrated May 6 in downtown Erwin with a walk – or bike ride – that begins in Dunn followed by food and games in Erwin. .

Dana Cochran, secretary to the Dunn-Erwin Trail Authority, estimated that 200 people will show up for the fund raiser. Booths, games, a raffle and a dedication are among the activities scheduled from 9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

The day begins at 9:30 a.m. in Dunn behind the Wayne Avenue School where Watauga Avenue crosses the trail. Water and vans will be available

for those attempting the 4-mile stretch into Erwin. Shuttles from Erwin back to Dunn are available during the entire celebration.

The Dunn-Erwin Trail Authority booth is among those opening at 10 a.m. in Erwin. At the Authority's booth, organizations or individuals can adopt a 0.1-mile section of the trail for upkeep.

At 11:30 a.m. the trail will be officially transferred from NCRT to Harnett County. Hotdogs, snacks, soft drinks and \$10, 100 percent cotton T-shirts celebrating the event are available.

<http://www.NCRail-Trails.org>



Shishir Raval

Shishir (Cont. from Page 1)

the basis for his outreach into the communities where NCRT sought to develop the idea and the reality of a rail-trail. Thanks, Shishir." When Capehart spoke to Shishir's class at N.C. State, Shishir was looking for projects from which his students could learn.

"So much of landscape architecture is about corporate campuses or plazas," Shishir said. "While that can be necessary and good, I wanted students to do work for communities and talk with people they may never have met. And I wanted them to appreciate the North Carolina landscape."

That interest in the less glamorous and more concrete side of landscape architecture led Shishir and about 50 of his students to design four projects from 1993-2002:

- *The 5-mile Dunn-Erwin Trail.
- * The Roanoke Valley Trail, a 32-mile rail corridor from RoanokeRapids to Norlina that has yet to be converted to recreational use other than a 1.2 mile section in Littleton.
- *Deep River Park, located five miles from Sanford, which has plans for a 4-mile trail.
- *A 28-mile stretch of unused state-owned rail corridor in Pender County which the General Assembly recently designated for a return to railroad use.

Shishir praised his students for their capacity to "envision and provide more kinds of lively solutions than what the community ever thought could be done with the corridor." Those solutions included connecting schools with wetlands, designing spots for solitude and reflection and designing economic development into the trail while maintaining the rural quality of the community. Rail-to-trail design is just technical at one level, Shishir said. "At other levels it is really a lifeline that can rejuvenate history, address contemporary issues and provide hope for the future." He figured that while old rail corridors may be linear, they have lateral connections with history and future land use that cross many cultural and natural elements.

"Once you discover the levels of action, the whole thing blooms," he said. "That is what it (rail-trails) is capable of." Rail-trails also provide an appreciation of "the day-to-day lives of common people and celebrate the diversity of the people and the natural systems," he said.

"I always worry about who will take on the baton," Shishir said. He has encouraged NCRT to create voluntary positions within the organization to expose students to the cultural and recreational potential of rail-trails .

Shishir was in the United States for 20 years. After earning a bachelor's degree in architecture and a master's degree in landscape architecture in India, he attended the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where he received a master of science and natural resources and a Ph.D. in landscape architecture. He arrived at N.C. State in the fall of 1991.

In August 2002, family illness led Shishir to move his family back home to Baroda, which is located 250 miles northwest of Bombay. He returned alone to Raleigh for the 2003-04 academic year followed by a leave of absence which permitted him to return to India. After his father's death in February 2005, Shishir taught in Raleigh for the fall semester before re-joining his wife, and young son and daughter in India. Shishir is talking to several schools in Baroda about part-time teaching positions. He wants to "practice what I've been preaching" by putting "landscape activism" to work in communities, he said.

Shishir is philosophical about his contributions to NCRT. "It is nothing," he said. "There is a bigger chess (game) up there in the sky. Who are we but people on this planet for a short piece of time?"

Thermal Belt case

A legal precedent that could open up untold miles of dormant rail corridors to public trails in North Carolina will be argued March 8 in Raleigh before the N.C. Court of Appeals.

"The precedent could be applicable to many, many miles of rail corridors throughout the state," said Mike Domonkos an attorney and a North Carolina Rail-Trails board member. He is arguing the case for the Raleigh firm of Bailey and Dixon, which does pro bono work for NCRT.

If the precedent set by a Rutherford County Superior Court in June is upheld by the appeals court, "A lot of rail corridors thought to be lost could now be recoverable for public trails," said Domonkos, who practiced law for more than 30 years in Michigan before moving to Brevard.

"It's an important precedent and may very well go to the Supreme Court (North Carolina)."

Under federal rail banking law, when easement rights of way are railbanked in the prescribed time limits, they do not revert to the adjoining landowners and can be used for a public trail. If the railroad's property was a mere easement, the adjoining landowners, nevertheless, may have rights to subsurface and air space rights.

The Thermal-Belt case deals with a category of ownership in which ownership of the property was formerly thought to revert to adjoining landowners upon cessation of rail use. In this type of ownership, however, the land does not revert to adjoining landowners even without federal rail banking.

A 2003 decision held that Bechtler Corporation properly railbanked the Thermal Belt Rail-Trail. Bechtler is the non-profit owner of the 8-mile trail that runs from Spindale west to Gilkey. The two towns are located west of Charlotte.

Plaintiffs argued that despite the railbanking, they were entitled to revenues derived from fiber optic cables they thought were placed in the rail bed as well as damages for utility, sewage and other encroachments allegedly wrongfully permitted by Bechtler and the former railroad companies.

A Rutherford County Superior Court judge ruled that Bechtler owns the property outright and not merely as an easement because of a North Carolina law that voids certain reversionary language in old deeds, including railroad deeds.. The plaintiffs, who own land adjoining the rail corridor, disagreed and consequently filed the appeal.

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Tobacco Heritage Trail opens

The first link in Southside Virginia's Tobacco Heritage Trail opened Sept. 6 as then-Gov. Mark Warner cut the ribbon on a 4-mile section from La Crosse to Broadnax.

More than 150 miles of abandoned railroad corridor in a 5-county area have been identified for conversion to trail use by Roanoke River Rails-to-Trails (RRRT) Inc. the non-profit organization spearheading the effort. The trail system is touted as a tool for economic development and improved quality of life as well as a greenway and linear link to nature.

The opening in La Crosse was followed by a reception at the Brodnax Fire Department. After the festivities participants took to the trail afoot and on bikes and horses. A second section of the trail, Clarkton Bridge to Red Hill, opened Oct. 7. The trail links two Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail sites.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail runs through the Southside counties of Brunswick, Charlotte, Halifax, Lunenburg and Mecklenburg. Easements for utilities and/or water and sewer will be tied into the trail network when rail corridors are not available. On-road connections will be noted with uniform signs. The trails will be available to foot traffic, bicycles and horse riders. Motorized traffic is banned.

Formed in 2003, RRRT was on a financial roll in 2005.

*April. The Virginia General Assembly approved \$775,000 for purchase of portions of the Norfolk Southern rail corridor stretching from Lawrenceville to Jeffress.

*June. The Virginia Department of Transportation approved a \$230,000 enhancement grant for rail-trail segments in Brunswick, Mecklenburg and Halifax counties.

*July. A Department of Conservation and Recreation Recreational Trails grant of \$39,855 was approved for trail construction from La Crosse to Broadnax.

*December. The Virginia Conservation Foundation Fund Grant approved a \$352,000 grant to purchase a right of way in Halifax County. The \$775,000 grant for Phase I includes Jeffress to South Hill, 24.34 miles; Rocky Branch to Brodnax, 4.09 miles; and Brodnax to Lawrenceville, 10.55. The final closing and

payment to Norfolk Southern for the trails is projected for June 2006.

The Tobacco Heritage Trail's future appears bright. Gov. Warner's 2007 budget has earmarked \$950,000 for the extension of rail-trails in Southside Virginia. The state of Virginia is in communication with Norfolk Southern for Phase II purchases.

The following sections of the rail corridor have been earmarked for Phase II: Clarksville west to the Halifax County line, .87 miles; a 10.77-mile segment in Mecklenburg County in the direction of the North Carolina line; and Virgilina to Alton, 20.99 miles. There are no plans to purchase the 2.93-mile section of the railroad that drops into North Carolina.

The 20.24-mile section from South Boston west to the Lunenburg-Brunswick county line and a 4.7-mile slice in the vicinity of Drakes Branch and Keysville are in the purchase plans. Also included is a 34.65-mile stretch from Briary (depot) to the Lunenburg-Brunswick county line

and a 32.58-mile segment that continues from the county line to Purdy.

When fully developed, the Tobacco Heritage Trail is expected to link with trails in other Southside counties, including Greenville and Pittsylvania, and join with trails in additional counties.

There is potential for connections east to Hampton Roads along the Virginia

Beach Pipeline, much of which is located on the abandoned Virginian Railroad.



Left to right, Sandra Tanner, RRRT's executive director and developer of the trail for Virginia tourism, NCRT's AL Capehart and former Gov. Mark Warner celebrate.



Bob Segal

CPA joins board

North Carolina Rail-Trails improved its contacts with state governments recently when High Point CPA Bob Segal joined the board. Segal's consulting firm, Robert S. Segal CPA PA, is dedicated exclusively to non-personnel expense reduction which has brought him into contact with local governments throughout the state.

Segal's firm has worked with 62 North Carolina counties to improve their cash flow. "We know almost every county manager in North Carolina and many city and town managers," Segal said. "Our government contacts may be helpful to North Carolina Rail-Trails."

Rail-trails are a family affair for Segal, his wife, Alethea and their three children, Annie Catherine (13), Richard (12) and Caroline (10). The family has bicycled the Virginia Creeper and New River trails in Virginia.

"We believe rail-trails in North Carolina could be successful on the basis of improving health and tourism, and we want more trails in North Carolina," Segal said.

Segal said his family was living in Wilmington when the city muffed an opportunity to convert a rail corridor to a trail. "We are willing to assist North Carolina Rail-Trails expand this concept throughout North Carolina," he said.

RESOURCE CONTACTS

NC Parks/Trails Coordinator	Darrell McBane	919-715-8699
NC DOT Rail Planner	Shirley Williams	919-733-7245
NC DOT Bike-Ped. Division	Tom Norman	919-715-2342
NPSSE Region RTCP	Chris Abbett	404-730-2311
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy	Betsy Goodrich	202-974-5122

Trail (Cont. from Page 1)

Donnie Pope, proprietor of the Peerless Café in Erwin, says that 10 percent of his business in breakfast, burgers and fries comes from the trail.

Dana Cochran, the marketing director for the Dunn Area Chamber of Commerce, says the chamber gets about a dozen calls a month from people out of town inquiring about the trail. "That's new dollars," Cochran says of the food and fuel purchased by visitors.

Dunn (pop. 10,000) and Erwin's (pop. 4,700) ties to the trail appear very different because the trail doesn't quite make it to the center of Dunn. But the trail spurs civic pride in both towns. The trail runs to Erwin's center, a block-long section of grass flanked by six lampposts, benches and a centennial clock. The 4-sided, 15-foot 7-inch cast iron clock celebrates Erwin's birth in 1903 when Duke money built a mill there. In 2000 Swift Textiles closed, which threw over 700 people out of work. Two years later, the \$200,000 Dunn-Erwin Trail was completed. Anticipating the centennial celebration the next year, town fathers concentrated the decorative lampposts, benches and clock around the trail.

"I don't think we would have had the enhancements" if the trail had not been in place, says Debbie Chestnut, administrator of the Erwin Chamber of Commerce. Community pride is evident in the several hundred commemorative bricks in the mini-park along the trail. The laser-printed bricks cost either \$50 or \$250, depending on the size, and honor families, high school classes and departed loved ones.

The annual Denim Days on the first Saturday in October centers around the mini-park. A car show at Denim Days earned \$250 last year, which has been donated to the chamber for improvements to the park.

"It's (the trail) had a positive effect showing that through all the adversity of the mill closing and loss of jobs, that Erwin is still moving forward," says Chestnut.

Some of the positive effects flow into Pope's Peerless Café, a '50s style diner with chrome, a black and white checked linoleum floor and red booths that seat 52 people. Pope says the trail wasn't a factor in opening the Peerless in April 2005 after Sherry's Bakery #2 had operated in the same space.

But he has rung up the benefits of having a ringside seat to the trail.

Many days Barbara Holmes drops by in the late afternoon for a grilled chicken

sandwich and pastry made by Pope's wife, Lisa. Holmes, 62, is retired from 34 years of teaching music in the Cumberland County schools. She drives 30 minutes to Dunn then rides her bike to Erwin and back.

"This is my entertainment," she says of the ride along cotton fields and wetlands that team with wild flowers and animals. Church youth groups, scout troops and joggers use the trail and frequently stop at the Peerless for a burger and shake, Pope says. Chinese and Italian restaurants and a pharmacy are also downtown. The trail has spurred community consciousness. Boy Scout Troop 157 of Erwin maintains one section of the trail. The two-story Erwin Manor B&B, the home of William Erwin who built the mill at the turn of the last century, would appear to be a perfect catchment for overnight users of the trail. "Business is non-existent" from trail users, says Eunice McLaurin, who along with her

Dunn (pop. 10,000) and Erwin's (pop. 4,700) ties to the trail appear very different because the trail doesn't quite make it to the center of Dunn. But the trail spurs civic pride in both towns.

husband, Colon, has run the B&B since 2001.

She said she and her husband don't advertise because their establishment is "too close to I-95" and they are reluctant to offer lodging to all comers. The one case of bicyclists using the B&B was several years back when long distance bikers came through town. Otherwise, families provide most of their business, she says.

In Dunn the trail doesn't quite make it to the center of town, which is the intersection of Broad and Wilson streets. The trail ends three blocks to the east of Harnett Primary School on Ellis Avenue by U.S. 301. To date, no one has established an eatery to snare business on the Dunn end of the trail.

The abandoned depot now houses a flourishing concrete business one block from the end of the trail.

Cochran says Dunn has a "vibrant downtown" of 80 storefronts. A facelift

is in the works over the next few years. Power lines will be buried and street lamps will receive a makeover.

The Chamber of Commerce is spearheading a downtown revitalization plan that considers bringing the trail into the downtown, says Cochran. A caboose on site is being eyed to play a role in sprucing up the downtown.

While many trail users don't go the additional three blocks into the heart of Dunn, some users do make donations to the trail, Cochran says.

Local residents have taken the trail to heart.

The Royal Rangers Outpost No. 19, a Bible-based ministry for boys, tends the trail around Watauga Avenue where its sponsor, Gospel Tabernacle, is located. Two years ago the group found the headstone of a Confederate soldier's grave about 50 feet south of the trail. The Rangers, composed of boys five to 15 years old, have built steps from the trail to the grave site.

The group is considering adding a park bench, flowers and other landscaping enhancements along the trail. The Rangers have also discussed putting a picket fence around the grave and installing a Confederate flag.

The gated retirement community of Gleneagles is constructing a parking lot by the trail. Gleneagles has also talked about building a trail from their community to the Dunn-Erwin Trail, Cochran says. For 27 years Janice Lucas has operated Janice's Hairstyling out of her home on Red Mill Church Road between Erwin and Dunn. About eight years ago, when the rail bed was still just that, she began planting flowers on the bank that slopes down from the rail bed toward her house. Today her petunias, marigolds, zinnias, day lilies, irises and ginger lilies re-seed themselves each year along a .2-mile stretch of the trail. Over time she has erected 10 birdhouses.

One trail appears to beget another. While Dunn figures the angles on moving the trail three more blocks into its downtown, Leonard reports that there is discussion about pushing the trail three to four miles west of Erwin to the Cape Fear River. The rationale? To link up with a talked-about 15-mile trail along the Cape Fear from Erwin north to Lillington. Right now Erwin and Dunn are waiting for the state Department of Transportation to process the paperwork which will authorize Harnett County to take possession of the Dunn-Erwin Trail, as well as the responsibility for maintenance.



Photo by Rick Howell

The N.C. DOT is reviewing engineering for an almost 2-mile expansion of the Brevard Bike Path that will push toward downtown.

Gerry Warren walks Dunn-Erwin daily

Gerry Warren is a regular among the Back Table Ladies...kinda'. (See **Trail** on page 1.) Every morning Tuesday through Saturday about 10 women gather for coffee at 8 a.m. amidst the gleaming chrome, black and white-checked linoleum and red booths of the '50s style Peerless Café in downtown Erwin (pop. 4,700).

They talk themselves out over the usual topics expected among women 62 to 75 years old. Warren, 69, fits right in until about 9 a.m.

Then she stands up and breaks the mold of a Back Table Lady.

She walks outside, slips into her red, power walking vest ordered from "Prevention" magazine, jiggles the up to 10 pounds of weights and lights out for an hour-long, 3.5 mile walk along the Dunn-Erwin Trail.

"I can't get any of'em to walk. They think it's dangerous," says Warren. "They're silly."

At age 42 Warren stopped smoking. She has been walking ever since. A diagnosis of high cholesterol at age 48 reinforced the habit.

When the Dunn-Erwin Trail was built in 2002, she stopped driving from her rural home near Dunn to Raven Rock State Park for her walks.

Now Monday through Saturday she pounds out the miles on the Trail, "if the weather isn't bad," she says. When the heat hits in the summer, she walks prior to her 8 a.m. rendezvous with coffee and chatter.

"It's sorta' my meditation time," Warren says.

"One time I had to turn around because of a dog," she recalls. "He wouldn't turn around like he was supposed to."

Black rat snakes, rabbits, foxes and deer are her usual companions along with fellow walkers, runners or bicyclists.

"I saw an unusual squirrel," she says. "I thought the Lord had sent me the biggest I've seen in my life. He was black with a white undercoat. As big as a young cat. And the most beautiful eyes. So beautiful."

Warren's husband doesn't walk with her. "He works all the time" she says. Warren, her husband and her son own Warren Cricket Farm, which ships crickets as far as Tennessee and Pennsylvania.

"I love walking," Warren says. "But tell you the truth. If I didn't have high cholesterol, I would be less inclined to walk as much."

\$1,000 NCRT grant helps write trail history

A \$1,000 grant from North Carolina Rail-Trails (NCRT) last year is helping a Durham woman push to completion a multi-media documentary about Durham's American Tobacco Trail.

Carol Thomson's *Bridging Rails to Trails* explores the 100-year evolution of Durham's American Tobacco Trail from a railroad artery crucial to Buck Duke's American Tobacco Co. to its use today as a recreational trail. When completed the trail, will stretch 22 miles south from Durham's revitalized city center through Chatham County and end near New Hill in rural Wake County. Roughly three-quarters of the trail is now open.

"The funds I received from North Carolina Rail-Trails were early in my fund raising activities and were essential in getting started and raising more funds," Thomson said. "It's really important having the support of the rail-trails community."

A public showing of the partially-completed CD-ROM this fall at Duke University drew an enthusiastic response.

The interactive CD-ROM permits viewers to click on buttons to see and hear oral histories, video segments, photographs, an historical time line, interactive maps and related websites offering additional information. A Website will be spun off from the project. The completed CD-ROM will spur public awareness of the existing recreational trail, encourage greater use of the trail, promote healthier life styles and increase fundraising and volunteer efforts to finish the bridges and gaps in the trail.

Thomson is making the documentary as part of her course work toward certification at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, which she completed in December. NCRT was one of several groups that contributed to the project, which is almost halfway completed. Thomson anticipates finishing the project by the end of the year contingent upon additional funding.

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(Winter 06)

Coastal Carolina Trail under U.S. 17

Persistence paid off for rail-trail enthusiasts in September when the state Department of Transportation (DOT) agreed to route the Coastal Carolina Trail (CCT) under the new U.S. 17 bypass bridge in Washington.

But the planned route along the city's Pamlico-Tar River waterfront almost didn't happen. During the planning process, then-City Council member, Judy Jennette, was informed that requested plans for a trail intersection north of State Road 1404 and south of the 15th Street Extension were not included in the DOT plan.

As an advocate of enrichment of the city through walking and bicycling opportunities, Jennette, who is now mayor, successfully called for the trail to be inserted in the bypass plan. A Dec. 13, 2004, resolution by the council put the trail back in the bypass design.

Representatives of the CCT and North Carolina Rail-Trails Inc. were at the first public hearings for the U.S. 17 bypass in November 2002. CCT representative Marsha Wyly, a landscape architect, requested that the Atlantic Coast Railroad corridor be included in the proposed bypass route as part of the CCT.

Getting the trail under the bypass and back in the railroad bed required extending the bypass bridge and contouring a berm to hold the 14-foot-wide trail. With the City of Washington taking the lead, the DOT's Highway Division and Division of Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation hammered out an agreement with the CCT and the City of Washington on Sept. 20, 2005.

Plans call for the Coastal Carolina Trail to run 30 miles through Beaufort, Martin and Pitt counties. Originally plans called for using the Washington-to-Oak City spur of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad. While wrestling with the bypass question, the Washington City Council decided to push the southern terminus of the trail further south along U.S. 17 to Chocowinity in order to connect the two communities.

NCRT Spring Board Meeting
10:30 a.m., Saturday, April 8, at the Granville County
Health Department, 101 Hunt Dr., Oxford NC 27565

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