



# Little Toot

## AL Capehart retires from NCRT board after 21 years



Photo by Dave Connelly

John Morck (left), chair of NCRT, presents the George Smart-endowed Carolyn R. Townsend Volunteer Award to AL Capehart, a founder of NCRT upon AL's retirement from the board in October.

What began as determination to find a safe bicycle path from downtown Durham to the Research Triangle Park led AL Capehart to contribute more than 20 years of volunteer service to North Carolina Rail-Trails, Inc. The result was the creation of almost 100 miles of rail-trails across North Carolina.

His retirement and many accomplishments were recognized recently at the 21<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of the Board of Directors of NCRT. He was presented with the George Smart-endowed Carolyn R. Townsend Volunteer Award for 25 years of rail-trail volunteer work by Board Chair John Morck. One year ago he also received the North Carolina Land Trust Council's Lifetime Achievement Award.

The highlights of AL's volunteer service accomplishments underlie the growth of NCRT and rail-trails in the state. In 1983 AL represented the Carolina Tarwheels Bicycle Club of Durham and Chapel Hill on the Durham Urban Trails and Greenway Commission to help establish a bicycle committee looking for a safe bicycle commuter route from downtown

Legacy (Continued on page 4)

## NCRT names first executive director

### Let's talk

Communicating with you—our members—is a top priority for the North Carolina Rail-Trails team. We want the information that we provide to you to be interesting, useful and timely.

One way to better communicate with you is to transition *Little Toot* to an electronic newsletter. This would save on printing and mailing costs and allow us to reach you with information faster. If you would like to receive *Little Toot* via email please send your address to [execdirector@ncrailtrails.org](mailto:execdirector@ncrailtrails.org).

If you do not have access to email, please call me at (919) 428-7119. This is *your* newsletter and we want it to meet your needs. Please tell us what you think about receiving a newsletter from NCRT by email. -- Carrie Banks --

*North Carolina Rail-Trails achieved a monumental milestone in July with the hiring of its first paid employee, new Executive Director Carrie Banks. We asked Carrie to share a little about herself and her thoughts on her new job.*

**Q Let's start with some background information. What work history and education do you bring to this position?**

**A** I have a Master's of Science in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management from N.C. State University and a bachelor's in Environmental Studies from UNC-Chapel Hill. From 2002 to 2007, I was conservation coordinator for the N.C. chapter of The Nature Conservancy. In this role, I worked with the protection staff on acquiring thousands of acres of land for conservation.

**Q What interested you in taking on the role of executive director of North Carolina Rail-Trails?**

Director (Continued on page 2)



Carrie Banks assumes duties as NCRT's first executive director.

North Carolina Rail-Trails  
<http://www.ncrailtrails.org>

## Director

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**A** I have a strong personal interest in seeing the natural areas of our state preserved in ways that will have the most long-term benefit for everyone. Directing the activities of North Carolina Rail-Trails is a wonderful mix of environmental protection along with creation of recreation opportunities and tourism growth across North Carolina.

**Q What do you see as the challenges in this job? The opportunities?**

**A** The challenges are mostly the same ones that every non-profit encounters – accomplishing as much as possible with limited resources. At the same time, those challenges really become our opportunities as we look for ways to maximize our potential. We have an impressive group of highly motivated people on our Board of Directors. We also have devoted members who support our work. I'd like to see our membership and volunteer bases grow.

**Q Is that your highest priority – growing membership?**

**A** It's definitely one of my priorities. Raising the visibility of our organization goes along with that. Right now I'm focused primarily on making connections: connections with our members, connections in local communities with rail-trail interest, connections with possible partners in the non-profit world and connections in state and federal government sector. We also have an exciting opportunity to play a role in the Southeast High Speed Rail discussions. We are pushing for a trail to run parallel to the train corridor for bicycle and pedestrian use all the way from Richmond to Raleigh! This would be an amazing asset to the rural communities that are being bisected by the high-speed rail which will not stop in most towns. As you can see, I have plenty to keep me busy!

(Continued in next column)

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## Documentarian receives Golden Spike



Photo by Dave Connelly

Carol Thomson (right) receives NCRT's Golden Spike from NCRT President Emeritus AL Capehart for her multimedia documentary on the American Tobacco Trail.

At its October board meeting, North Carolina Rail-Trails presented a Golden Spike award to Carol Thomson of FireStream Media for her long-term efforts in preparing and distributing the multimedia documentary *Bridging Rails to Trails: Stories of the American Tobacco Trail*.

The documentary explores the 100-year evolution of the American Tobacco Trail from a railroad crucial in tobacco manufacturing into a unique linear park. The documentary was formally shown at the Durham Arts Council in March. After completion of the proposed I-40 bridge and southern Durham section of the ATT, Carol will add a final segment.

NCRT awards Golden Spikes to people whose work results in rail-trails or raises consciousness about rail-trails. CDs of the documentary have been provided to local school systems. The current version can be viewed at [www.bridgingrailstotrails.com](http://www.bridgingrailstotrails.com).

## NCRT on WUNC-TV

North Carolina Rail-Trails' Vice Chair Dave Connelly, President Emeritus AL Capehart and Executive Director Carrie Banks discussed the American Tobacco Trail in an interview on UNC-TV's North Carolina Weekend program in early November.

NCRT was involved in the creation of the Tobacco Trail which stretches 22 miles through Wake, Chatham and Durham counties for pedestrians, equestrians and biker users. The episode on the American Tobacco Trail aired Nov. 5 and 6 but can be viewed on UNC-TV's web site at <http://www.uncvtv.org/ncweekend/>

**Q Is there anything else that you would like members of NCRT to know about you?**

**A** I am very excited to be their first executive director! I am committed to continuing the great work begun by the organization's founders and board members. I believe strongly in the health, economic and recreation benefits that rail-trails bring to communities and the entire state. Lastly, I look forward to keeping in touch with our members and providing updates on our activities.

**Q How can members reach you if they have a question or comment?**

**A** Email is the best way to reach me at [execdirector@ncrailtrails.org](mailto:execdirector@ncrailtrails.org). They can also call me at (919)-428-7119.

## NCRT committees

As North Carolina Rail-Trails heads into the coming year, the following standing committees are being organized:

- ø Bylaws
- ø Membership
- ø Fundraising
- ø Fundraising
- ø Public relations/Marketing
- ø Legislative and Governance

Get involved! If you would like to join one of these committees, please contact Carrie Banks at [execdirector@ncrailtrails.org](mailto:execdirector@ncrailtrails.org).

[www.nconconservationnetwork.org](http://www.nconconservationnetwork.org)  
Charter Member

### Resource Contacts

NC State Trails Program  
NC DOT Rail Planner  
NC DOT Bike-Ped. Div.  
NPS Field Office, RTCA  
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

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Pam Davis  
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Kelly Pack

919-715-8699  
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919-715-2342  
828-271-4779 x-272  
202-974-5148

## NCRT pushes for rail with trail on SEHSR

You have probably heard that a high-speed rail from Richmond to Raleigh is under serious consideration. You may not know that North Carolina Rail-Trails has been involved in discussions to include a trail with the planned Southeast High Speed Rail (SEHSR).

The proposed hiking and biking trail in North Carolina would follow the same corridor as the high-speed train and is included in all of NCDOT'S environmental assessment studies. The benefits of the trail are much the same as those already enjoyed on existing trails: improved health through exercise, attracting first time visitors to an area and money spent in a community by trail users.

In addition the proposed trail would reconnect communities that are fractured by SEHSR. Perhaps most exciting is the possibility that rail with trail would be part of the East Coast Greenway, a long-distance trail that will stretch from Maine to Key West, Fla., upon completion.

A recent study\* found that the Virginia Creeper Rail Trail in southwest Virginia has generated \$1.6 million in total economic activity. A similar influx of tourist dollars could greatly improve the economies of Franklin, Vance and Warren counties through which SEHSR will pass.

Current plans call for federal and state government to foot the bill. Local communities would pay for their section of the trail. NCRT, however, is pushing to have the federal government pay for the land and trail construction, thus removing the financial burden from local communities through which trails would pass.

Obviously the development of rail with trail is more complicated than most rail projects. SEHSR has its own controversies as communities and local governments struggle with the pros and cons of a high speed rail line passing through their towns and neighborhoods. Cre-

*(Continued in next column)*

## A NCRT founder celebrated



Photo by Nancy Pierce

Retiring president of North Carolina Rail-Trails, AL Capehart, greets partygoers at a Nov. 4 gathering in Carrboro celebrating his 21 years with NCRT.

Twenty-four rail-trail supporters from across North Carolina celebrated the contributions of AL Capehart, one of the founders of North Carolina Rail-Trails, with a buffet dinner and party Nov. 4 at a Carrboro restaurant.

Capehart, a Duke Divinity graduate, former poverty worker and Ph.D. in human resources psychology from N.C. State, was led into the surprise party by his wife, CR Townsend, also a founder of NCRT.

The surprise lasted about 20 seconds before the burly former high school football

player from Richmond, Va., stepped forward to thank everyone for coming. Then he launched into an explanation of the importance of rail-trails for the state. Practically every official in each of North Carolina's 100 counties has heard parts of the same speech.

NCRT's determination to plant rail-trails across the entire state was evident. The buffet had eastern and western style barbeque. Fittingly enough, the event was held at The Station, which offers dining in an old railroad car sitting on tracks in the middle of Carrboro.

Stay tuned as we keep you updated on developments with this exciting proposal.

\*Bowker, J.M., J.C. Bergstrom, J., Gill. "Estimating the Economic Value and Impacts of Recreational Trails: A Case Study of the Virginia Creeper Rail Trail." Tourism Economics

ation of rail with trail may not rank high on their list of concerns, but NCRT is working hard to include a trail in the early planning stages.

NCRT believes the trail should be included in the planning, funding and land acquisition for SEHSR in order to benefit impacted communities.

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**NCRT annual memberships: Individual - \$25, Corporate - \$100**  
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On line at [www.ncrailtrails.org](http://www.ncrailtrails.org)

NCRT is a 501-c(3) public non-profit tax exempt organization founded in 1990.  
 All contributions and donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

**"To Protect Rail Corridors for Trail and Rail with Trail Use"**

# AL reflects on 21 years working for rail-trails

*AL Capehart, retiring president of North Carolina Rail-Trails, made the following remarks at the Oct. 9 board meeting in Durham. He termed them in part "A Gift from Santa AL," a reference to his holiday work as a professional Santa Claus.*

In preparing for my retirement, I began by reflecting upon the beginnings of what is now North Carolina Rail-Trails, Inc. Representing the Carolina Tarwheels Bicycle Club of Durham and Chapel Hill on the newly-formed Durham Urban Trails and Greenway Commission in 1983, I helped establish a bicycle committee looking for a safe bicycle commuter path/route from downtown to the Research Triangle Park. We discovered the unused American Tobacco spur off of the Durham & South Carolina Rail line; it passed close to the western edge of RTP. If we could convert the rail bed to a trail we would have a safe, separate bicycle commuter connector between Durham and the RTP.

We needed to organize a citizens group to advocate for and help make the conversion. I was a founding board member of both the Triangle Rails to Trails Conservancy and NCRT as they evolved simultaneously in Durham. TRTC focused regionally, NCRT statewide. NCRT partnered with the NC Trails Association, the NC Bicycle Federation, the Sierra Club and the Conservation Council on state legislation to

preserve and protect the state's rail infrastructure while allowing trail use. North Carolina General Statutes 136-44.35., 136-44.36A., 136-4436B. and 136-44.36D. reflect that effort. With the help of like-minded friends, I called and chaired the first meeting of a rail-trail steering committee in 1985, edited the first *Little Toot* in 1989 and helped



Photo by Nancy Pierce

Another commemorative memento for retiring NCRT President AL Capehart at an appreciation dinner and party.

NCRT incorporate as a 501(c)(3) in 1990 as more volunteers joined our ranks. The newsletter mailing list grew to nearly 1,500 (1,472).

Efforts to get the land trusts and state and local government to use the federal railbanking tool for rail corridor preservation failed. About 2,500 miles of the state's 5,200-mile railroad infrastructure in 1936 had been lost through abandonment and reversion. NCRT became a land trust and did the state's first federal railbank (Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad), the Dunn-Erwin Trail, in 2000. NCRT accomplished an initial goal of three regional rail-trails: the Thermal Belt Rail-Trail in Rutherford County; the American Tobacco Trail in the Triangle; and the Dunn-Erwin Trail. We knew folks wouldn't understand a rail-trail until they have been a mile on a rail-trail.

I leave behind nearly 100 miles of rail-trails, several local greenway trail groups and organizations, a mature and seasoned board of directors with over \$150,000 in the bank and North Carolina Rail-Trails, Inc., a recognized state-wide nonprofit and land trust with young and newly hired leadership that is seeking to "protect rails corridors for trails and rail with trail."

Thanks to ALL the friends of rail-trails and especially the past chair of the NCRT board and my partner, Carolyn Renee "CR" Townsend.

Peace! Hope to see you on a rail-trail, soon. Regards, AL Capehart

## Legacy of almost 100 miles of rail-trails, state-wide impact

(Continued from page 1)

Durham to RTP. The committee discovered the unused American Tobacco spur off the Durham & South Carolina Rail line that passed close to the western edge of RTP. Converting the railbed to a trail would provide the safe commuter connector they were seeking. The American Tobacco Trail was the result.

The first step was to organize a citizens group to advocate for and help make the conversion. AL was a founding board member of both the Triangle Rails to Trails Conservancy (TRTC) and NCRT as they evolved simultaneously in Durham. TRTC has a regional focus while NCRT covers the state. NCRT partnered with the NC Trails Association, the NC Bicycle Federation, the Sierra Club and the Conservation Council on state legislation to preserve and protect the state's rail infrastructure while

allowing trail use. With the help of like-minded friends, AL called and chaired the first meeting of a rail-trail steering committee in 1985.

Over the years with the help of volunteers the organization grew and AL continued to lead and contribute in a variety of ways. He edited the first edition of the group's newsletter *Little Toot* in 1989 and helped to get NCRT incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in 1990 as still more volunteers joined the ranks.

In 2000 NCRT became a land trust and completed the state's first federal railbank of Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad to create the Dunn-Erwin Trail. Through the dedicated and generous volunteer work of AL and others, NCRT has exceeded its initial goal of rail-trails in each region of North Carolina: the mountains, the Pied-

mont and the Coastal Plain. The Thermal Belt Rail-Trail in Rutherford County, the American Tobacco Trail in the Triangle and the Dunn-Erwin Trail in Eastern North Carolina are among the concrete results of his vision.

As AL transitions from his extremely active responsibilities with NCRT to the role of president emeritus, he leaves behind a great legacy: almost 100 miles of rail-trails, several local greenway trail groups and organizations, a mature and seasoned board of directors and a recognized statewide nonprofit and land trust. Thanks to AL's dedication and years of service, countless people will have rail-trails to use and enjoy in North Carolina for many years to come.

## Ecusta Web site explains rail-trail plan

What began several years ago as talk about a rail-trail along the 18.5-mile unused rail line between Hendersonville and Brevard took a big first step toward reality in August when the recently formed Friends of Ecusta Trail launched a Web site that explains its vision for the mountain rail-trail. ([www.ecustatrail.org](http://www.ecustatrail.org))

More than 1,000 residents of Henderson and Transylvania counties have signed an on-line petition supporting the rail-trail while several municipalities have passed supporting resolutions, among them Hendersonville and Laurel Park. Henderson County Commissioners recently passed a resolution to evaluate the project.

"Our board has been meeting for more than a year to examine the possibility of converting the rail line to a multi-use public park trail," said Mike Oliphant, a Henderson County resident, who is president of the board of Friends of Ecusta Trail. "What we've discovered in our diligent assessment is that the idea is incredibly exciting for our area and that we need to approach our goals in phases."

The first step will be to study the economic feasibility and impact along with the logistics of trail construction. Hendersonville has agreed to take the lead in securing a study with support from Brevard and Henderson County.

Once an economic analysis is completed, Oliphant said, more comprehensive discussions will take place with political leaders, economic development agencies and Norfolk Southern, the operator of the rail line. A key component in the discussions will be the federal railbanking program, which would protect the corridor for future railway use should that need arise again.

A crucial part of the Friends' work is to reach out to property owners along the rail line. "It is very important for us to conduct our work in a transparent manner, which includes dialogue with those who live along the line," said Paul Parker, vice-president of the Friend's board and a Transylvania County native. He said case studies show that property values usually increase along such trails.

Chris Burns, treasurer of the group, and a past president of the Hendersonville Chamber of Commerce, said such a trail would be "an important investment in the future of our region and will provide numerous benefits for our residents and visitors."

The proposed Ecusta Trail passes through Laurel Park, Horse Shoe, Etowah and Pisgah Forest and would connect existing trails in Hendersonville and Brevard. Ecusta is the Cherokee word for "rippling waters," according to old maps. Ecusta Corporation borrowed the name when it opened near Brevard in 1939 as one of the largest paper mills in the Southeast.

The map of the proposed trail is at [http://www.ncrailtrails.org/pdfs/ECUSTA\\_Map.pdf](http://www.ncrailtrails.org/pdfs/ECUSTA_Map.pdf)



Family enjoys Brevard Bike Path which recently added a mile.

## Triangle trails celebrated

Nearly 200 cyclists biked 39 miles from the N.C. Museum of Art in Raleigh to the Durham Bulls Athletic Park Oct. 22 on a beautiful autumn afternoon that celebrated progress in building Triangle trails.

The ride drew attention to the need for elected officials to complete the Triangle trail system whose goal is a family-friendly system that connects Triangle communities via greenways and trails and provides healthy, green commutes and recreation.

Ride organizers believe the Cross Triangle Greenway can play an important role in local economic recovery by providing jobs and low-cost transportation while lowering health costs through better fitness and improved air quality.

Recent progress on the American Tobacco Trail and other regional corridors are perfect stepping stones to a trail system that unites the Triangle. A completed Cross Triangle Greenway will give the region national prominence as a leader in sustainable and healthy transportation and make the region a key tourist hub along the East Coast Greenway that extends from Canada to Key West, Fla.

The majority of the ride was off road on greenways and included Umstead State Park, Godbold Park in Cary and the American Tobacco Trail. Maps of the ride and Cross Triangle Greenway are available at <http://CrossTriangleGreenway.org>.

The ride ended at the Durham Bulls Athletic Park. Among the speakers were N.C. Secretary of Transportation Gene Conti, Durham City Council member Mike Woodard and North Carolina Rail-Trails Executive Director Carrie Banks.

The East Coast Greenway Alliance was the lead organizer along with nonprofits, government leaders and businesses. North Carolina Rail-Trails and NCRT Vice Chair Dave Connelly were among the 13 sponsors of the event.

## Brevard is busy

Brevard has recently linked its bike path to the Pisgah National Forest and constructed a multi-use path with a pocket park. Meanwhile, proponents of an 18.5-mile rail-trail from Brevard to Hendersonville have kicked off their efforts by building a Web site.

The Brevard Bike Path, formerly four miles long, has been extended by more than a mile. The new construction brings it into the Pisgah National Forest to join the Art Loeb Trail, which in turn becomes part of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

The surface of the new section is compacted, fine gravel. The trail mostly follows the dismantled Carr Lumber Company rail bed along the Davidson River, which is a pristine and renowned trout stream. Views of the river pop up frequently along the way. Access to and from the new section requires crossing busy US 64 (Asheville Highway), but that is no problem. A push button delay traffic signal gives ample time for a safe and unhurried crossing.

A 10-foot wide multi-use path along Gallimore Road has also recently been completed, thanks in large part to an NCDOT Safe Routes to School grant. The path is a mile long and connects an elementary school, Brevard's high school and a Boys & Girls Club. The initial groundwork facilitating the application for the NCDOT Safe Routes to School grant was assisted by NCRT. Brevard received a demonstration grant as one of the first grant recipients under the new program. Rail-trails that facilitate safe walking or biking by students to and from school are similarly eligible for an NCDOT Safe Routes to School grant.

A pocket park on land donated by an adjacent medical clinic is under construction along the Gallimore Road multi-use path. The elegant little park will be paved in part by donor-inscribed bricks donated for the path at \$100 for each brick. The brick paver program resulted in local citizens donating in excess of \$40,000 for the path. All in all, the path and the pocket park are wonderful additions to the Brevard area.

The Friends of Ecusta Trail has launched a Web site [www.ecustatrail.org](http://www.ecustatrail.org) (See story on this page.) to promote a rail-trail between Hendersonville and Brevard. The trail would run on the unused 18.5-mile Norfolk Southern Railway rail corridor. The proposed trail was named in recognition of the Ecusta paper mill, which was one of the largest "fine paper" mills in the world and was the major freight customer. The NCRT Web site ([www.ncrailtrails.org](http://www.ncrailtrails.org)) contains more detailed information about the Ecusta Trail project.

# Working Spikes awarded



Perry Conner (left) and Dilys Bowman (right) recently received Working Spikes from North Carolina Rail-Trails President Emeritus Al Capehart (middle) for their tireless efforts to make the Deep River Rail-Trail a reality.

Perry worked with Harvey Harman, owner of a section of the Atlantic and Yadkin Ramseur Branch, to locate the rail-trail on his property and successfully pushed for high priority funding from DOT for the Rural Planning Organization's non-motorized requests. Perry credits NCRT with saving Franklinville's Recreational Trails Program grant, but his support and dedication has kept the project alive in Franklinville!

Dilys, a director of NCRT's board, donated hours of expertise to the Deep River Rail-Trail project and spearheaded the development of a soon-to-be-released trail brochure. Dilys also created several maps for the project, which are invaluable assets in trail planning.

The more than 100-years-old spikes were found in 2009 on Harvey's land in Franklinville when the old rail bed was graded for the trail. They were wire brushed and painted with rust converter and several coats of black paint. White lettering on the spike reads: "Deep River Rail-Trail, A&Y-Ramseur 1887, Franklinville 2009, North Carolina Rail-Trails." Congratulations Perry and Dilys!

## NCRT Winter Board Meeting

Saturday, Jan. 8

Site in Pender County to be determined.

Please check NCRT Web site  
as date approaches

## NORTH CAROLINA RAIL-TRAILS, INC. BOARD and SUPPORT

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