

Jacksonville breaks trail

Jacksonville, the home of the Marines' Camp Lejeune, got a bit of Norway and a look at its' recreational future Dec. 13 when ground was broken on a 5.2-mile trail that will become part of a proposed 172-mile trail system in eastern North Carolina.

"This is such a great day and has been so long-awaited by the Trails and Greenways Committee and city councils past," Mayor Jan Slagle told Jacksonville's "The Daily News."

Marine Corps Col. Adele Hodges said the trail plans remind her of her posting in Norway where cyclists could ride on bike paths across the entire country. "I thought that was pretty awesome," she said.

The \$4.1 million first phase of the city's Rails to Trails Greenway project travels along Marine Boulevard to Camp Lejeune's main gate along abandoned railroad routes. The Marine base is donating 54 miles of its own paths to the trail system. Completion of the first phase is in 15 to 18 months.

"Just like you wouldn't celebrate Christmas without a Christmas tree, you can't have a community without trails," former city manager Ken Hagan said.

State Department of Transportation funding is being sought in the 2008 funding cycle for the second construction phase, which will extend the trail along Lejeune Boulevard to downtown Jacksonville. The Trails and Greenways Committee was formed in 1989 and began pushing for the trail in the early 1990s.

In 1990 North Carolina Rail-Trails began working with Jacksonville and Onslow County to develop the trail. The process included identifying stakeholders and financial resources and fleshing out a rail-trail plan in Onslow County.

Combining long hours and perseverance, Rhonda Parker, Jacksonville's planning administrator, wrestled the rail-trail into reality. Congressional legislation was necessary to transfer over 50 acres of Camp Lejeune land into the trail system.

Briefs

Approval of the **Brevard Bike Path's** underpass at U.S. 64 and the Davidson River remains on hold with the state Department of Transportation, but construction begins late this winter on a phase that pushes the planned five-mile path closer to downtown Brevard.

The new link is just under a mile and will be finished by July 1, says Joe Albright, Brevard city manager. A 2010 completion date has been set for the entire path that will link downtown Brevard with the Davidson River Recreation Area in Pisgah National Forest. To date, 2.6 miles of the path are paved.

Construction of the new section begins in late February or March. The new asphalt path will pick up at the completed part of the path at the Transylvania Campus of the Blue Ridge Community College, cross U.S. 64 and stop at McLean Road. Part of the construction will be on .5 miles of the old Norfolk Southern rail bed, which Brevard Middle School students have used as a short cut over the years.

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Photo by David Newton

John Morck, weekend engineer.

Weekends on the rails

John Morck can't resist a train.

"It's partly the romance. I also like big mechanical things that move," says Morck, a land use planner for the state Department of Commerce and a North Carolina Rail-Trails board member.

The first Sunday of each month, May through December, Morck, 45, is an engineer at the throttle of a 1942, 65-ton GE center cab or a 1953, 80-ton GE center cab diesel locomotive owned by the New Hope Valley Railway. The locomotive pulls five cars, three of which are filled with families and train enthusiasts on the 45-minute, eight-mile roundtrip outside of Bonsal, a crossroads town 20 miles southeast of Raleigh on old U.S. 1.

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

The railroad or "museum railroad" is the last operating remnant of the rail line that ran north through Chatham and Wake counties to plug into Buck Duke's American Tobacco Co. in Durham. Today 6.5 miles are paved and most of the 22 miles of the American Tobacco Trail are usable by bicyclists, walkers and equestrians. (See "American Tobacco" on page 3 for an update.)

As a NCRT member, Morck works to preserve and return to use the 2,800 miles of railway abandoned in North Carolina. He knows the sound and culture of railroads and the importance of corridor preservation.

The Chicago & Northwestern commuter and freight line run by his childhood home of Arlington Heights, Ill., to Chicago. His rela-

On the rails (Continued on page 2)

On the rails

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tives worked for The Rock Island railroad. As a teenager he volunteered at the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, Ill.

"When I moved here, it was natural to find another place to volunteer," says Morck, who has been a volunteer with the New Hope Valley Railway for 13 years, six of those years as an engineer.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee graduate in city planning worked in Guilford County and Monroe before settling in Raleigh six year ago for his second stint with the state Department of Commerce.

To sit on the engineer's bench, hit the throttle and hear the forged iron couplings clank means starting at the bottom of the railroad hierarchy. Morck began as a car host and moved up to brakeman and assistant engineer while remaining a regular on the track crew.

"The toughest thing is to try to operate smoothly so passengers don't feel any changes with brakes or the throttle ... so you're not jerking people around," he says of being an engineer.

The train travels 15 mph. Rain or oil on the tracks make braking difficult. Deer

are a potential hazard, but Morck has never hit one. On a typical Sunday last year, Morck was scheduled to work as an engineer for one of the five trips the three engineers divide.

That's not a lot of engineering glory for the effort and hours. The 100-member organization is a team effort with 25-30 hardcore members spending parts of each weekend clearing trash from the rail line, shoring up ballast or replacing crossties, 600 of which were replaced last winter. Morck works on the railroad one weekend day two weekends a month.

"She likes it when I get out of the house," Morck jokes of his wife, Debbie, who runs the museum's gift shop.

Increased marketing and a feature on WUNC television resulted in over 10,000 riders last year. "The ridership has really soared in the last three years," Morck says. One Sunday in June, 1,200 people rode the train.

The increased interest led to the addition of a third passenger car for the holiday season the first two weekends in December, which pushed the train's capacity to 250 passengers. Result? During the four days of the two holiday weekends, 3,700 people rode the train.

New Hope Valley Railway's Web site is:
www:hvry.org.

American Tobacco Trail

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director of Chatham parks and recreation. There is a tentative agreement with Cary to complete the trail. DOT's Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation reportedly has a design for a trail and decked trestles ready to go. A newly-elected board of county commissioners is another variable.

Wake County

In mid-December the final mile of the 6.5 miles of trail was completed. There are three trailheads, two of which offer innovative composting toilets and equestrian access.

Bent Backs

TRTC holds a trail workday each Saturday to maintain the ATT. In 2006 about 300 people - some multiple times - helped clear and maintain eight miles of trail in three counties.

With grants from Chatham Development Company, the National Recreational Trails Program and REI, volunteers have constructed a 15-vehicle parking area about a mile south of the Streets at Southpoint mall, which is being transferred to Durham.

"We welcome everyone to help clear, clean and maintain the American Tobacco Trail," says Bill Bussey, president of TRTC. "This is all about air, fun and family. It's great cross training for lots of sports and a great way to stay in shape."

Volunteers can sign up on TRTC's Web site: **www.triangletrails.org**. Click on the volunteering button.

The ATT trail maps can be accessed at the Website: **www.triangletrails.org/ATT.HTM**

Briefs

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The final phase on the town side of the path will travel .5 miles from McLean Road to Probart Street in the town center.

DOT gave preliminary approval in mid-April for the bike path under U.S. 64 where the highway crosses the Davidson River. The final check-off is yet to come. The bike path underpass will link with 800 feet of existing bike path around Lowe's Home Improvement parking lot.

Approximately one mile of trail remains to be built from Lowe's to the Davidson River Recreation Area. Parts of that trail will be on the abandoned rail bed of Carr Lumber Co. as it enters Pisgah National Forest.

The completed bike path has a \$1 million price tag from federal, state and local money, Albright says.

Bob Segal was recently elected treasurer of North Carolina Rail-Trails to capitalize on the High Point CPA's expertise in consulting with local governments and his interest in biking.

"My family has enjoyed the opportunity to ride on several rail-trails and would like to see more rail-trails in North Carolina," says Segal, who joined the board in the winter of 2006. "I thought this was a worthwhile organization in which I could make a difference."

Segal's firm, Robert S. Segal CPA PA, has worked with 62 North Carolina counties to improve their cash flows. Segal replaces Jean Jenkins Middleton, who served as treasurer from April 2004 to October 2006 and remains on the board.

Dave Connelly will chair a committee evaluating "Little Toot," NCRT's quarterly newsletter. Also on the committee are board members Charles Farley and AL Capehart as well as David Newton, who has edited "Little Toot" the past year.

"We want to explore expanding the scope of the Web site and the newsletter," Connelly says. The committee will make recommendations at the spring board meeting.

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NC DOT Rail Planner	Pam Davis	919-733-7245 x-274
NC DOT Bike-Ped. Div.	Tom Norman	919-715-2342
NPS Field Office, RTCA	Deirdre Hewitt	828-271-4779 x-272
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy	Betsy Goodrich	202-974-5122

American Tobacco Trail construction lags

Cool your pedals if you're hoping to bicycle the American Tobacco Trail's bridge across I-40 anytime soon. June 2010 is the estimated completion date for the bridge and the 3.9 miles of trail remaining in Durham and Durham County.

Add the absence of specific costs and timelines for the 4.6-mile portion of the ATT in Chatham County, and prospects are dim for an unbroken 22-mile bicycle trip from downtown Durham to the woods of New Hill in Wake County anytime soon.

The delays in Durham led the Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to hand a 2,800-signature petition to Durham officials in October urging a speedup in trail construction.

"Your goals are our goals," says Ed Venable, an engineer with Durham's engineering department. "We want to grab this project and move it forward."

Here's how the ATT stacks up.

Overview

The ATT kicked off in 2000 with a 3.5-mile paved section from the Durham Bulls Athletic Park south to U.S. 54. A three-mile section pushing further south and the 1.3-mile Riddle Road Spur were paved and came on line in 2002.

When completed, the 22-mile rail-trail will wind south from Durham through northeastern Chatham County and end in the western corner of Wake County.

The trail has 6.5 miles in asphalt along with a 1.3-mile asphalt spur. The remainder of the trail has gravel screening or is in its natural state.

More than 90 percent of the trail is usable thanks to the work of hun-

dreds of volunteers organized by TRTC over the past four years. The problem areas are: A .75 mile-long gap in the section between U.S. 54 and Massey Chapel Road, which includes the long-anticipated I-40 bridge; and 400 feet of undecked trestles over Northeast and Panther creeks in Chatham County.



The longest unbroken stretch is 8.25 miles from the New Hill/Olive Chapel Road trailhead north to Panther Creek.

Durham Section

The section is projected for completion by June 2010 with the paving of a 3.9-mile section and construction of the I-40 bridge. Cost: \$5 million.

In July the project moved from parks and recreation to the engineering department whose expertise with the state Department of Transportation should facilitate bridge approval and construction.

"It took us a while to get our feet on the ground about what the project involved," Venable says.

The city has \$2 million on hand for the project. Prior to the summer, Durham had a \$2.5 million request in the DOT pipeline and requested an additional \$500,000 in the summer.

"We were expecting DOT to answer in October," Venable says. "We still haven't been told who's getting what. Everybody's a little bit nervous at this point."

After the city receives the DOT money for the trail and bridge, the following bureaucratic hoops await: contract for design; approval of contract by city council; public input on design; changes, if necessary; city council approval of design; letting bids for construction; city council approval of construction contract; actual construction.

Venable estimates that the design process will take a year.

An indication of the glacial progress is the deterioration of the four-year-old, .75-mile trail section around the Streets at South Point mall. "It's fallen into disrepair," says Beth Timson, assistant director of parks and recreation. "The city will need to touch it up."

I-40 Bridge

"We've always wanted a designed bridge," Timson says of the projected 800-foot span over I-40. An off-the-shelf bridge has been mentioned. But officials are not blind to the instant civic landmark created by an arched pedestrian bridge built over the I-440 Raleigh Beltway near Wade Avenue.

Durham's I-40 pedestrian bridge will be similar to the Downtown Gateway Bridge that will cross the Durham Freeway near Alston Avenue.

The single span, arched bridge will have brick supports in the style of local tobacco warehouses. "Durham blue" LED (light-emitting diodes) lights will trace the base and arch of the bridge.

Venable could not say exactly what "Durham blue" is, but suggested the color is something between (or outside?) the Duke and Carolina hues. The expected designer is Parsons Brinckerhoff, a New York-based firm with a Morrisville office.

Chatham County

No cost estimates or completion dates are available for the 4.6 miles in Chatham County, reports Tracy Burnett, **American Tobacco** (Continued on page 2)

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A call for land conservation

Below is an edited version of North Carolina Rail-Trails Director AL Capehart's remarks on Jan. 10 in Greensboro at one of three, state-wide hearings by the General Assembly's Land and Water Conservation Study Commission.

We want to see preserved and put into use the state's 28,000 acres of abandoned railroad rail corridors. Once there were 5,200 miles of a railroad infrastructure that got North Carolina out of the mud and connected cities, hamlets and towns. Today only 2,400 miles of this infrastructure remain in service.

We want to put that transportation network back to work. We want bicycle and pedestrian transportation returned to these old rail beds. Several states know the economic and community value and benefits of rail-trails and have over a thousand miles of trails on old rail beds. As of today North Carolina has 78.6 miles of rail-trails, including the Libba Cotton Bikeway rail with trail in Carrboro-Chapel Hill.

One of the cost categories in the proposed \$1 billion Land for Tomorrow bond is rail corridor retrieval for bicycle and pedestrian transportation and greenways. Perhaps a return of the locomotive diesel fuel tax for the purchase of old railroad rights of way could be a way of funding alternative transportation development, which would return the public transportation purpose to the state's historic railroad infrastructure.

We ask you therefore:

1. To support the Land for Tomorrow initiative.
2. To require that state-owned rail corridors be open to public transportation.
3. To require the state to protect the existing rail corridor infrastructure by not allowing any abandonment of the public purpose in railroad rights of way.
4. To find funding to encourage retrieval of abandoned and unused corridors for alternative and public transportation.
5. To seek the "best possible use of the state's rail corridor assets."

Let us put back to work the old railroad infrastructure built by our grandparents for alternative transportation for our grandchildren.

NCRT Spring Board Meeting

Saturday, April 14, 10:30 a.m.
Louisburg Training Center
104 Wade Ave.
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