

AL Capehart's remarks at the dedication of the Chatham County (Cary) Section of the American Tobacco Trail June 5, 2010 (National Trails Day) at Pittard Sears Rd and the ATT.

Hello, I'm AL Capehart, President of North Carolina Rail-Trails since 1990 and Santa@SantaAL.com since 1992. I welcome you all to the next step in the fulfillment of our 1985 dream, a rail-trail on the Durham and South Carolina Railroad from Durham to New Hill. On June 2nd Mark Ahrendsen of Durham DOT assured me that the city will complete the ATT I-40 bridge and connect to Chatham County by the Fall of 2011. That is only 26 years from when the dream was articulated, a 22-mile rail-trail on the ground connecting three counties and numerous communities in the Research Triangle Region of NC. The State of North Carolina does not have a rail-trail program in its DOT nor DENR as some other states do. The 87 miles of rail-trail in North Carolina are the results of volunteer local trail groups like the Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy.

I was on the founding board of directors for both Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and North Carolina Rail-Trails as they emerged simultaneously from Ninth Street in Durham. What NCRT learned in the development of the ATT has been replicated across the state. So, that in North Carolina the American Tobacco Trail could be called the Mother of Rail-Trails. In Durham we started with backing from the bicycle community and in Wake County Leslie Kennedy worked to get support from equestrian community. And now we stand in between the ends in Chatham County (Cary the) where both ends of the trail meet in a unique shared trail design.

It began for me in 1983 when Evan Rosoff, the president of the Carolina Tarwheels Bicycle Club, ask me to represent bicyclist on the newly formed City of Durham Urban Trails and Greenway Commission. Soon there was a Bicycle Committee identifying safe bicycle routes, promoting bicycle clinics and rodeos and looking for a safe bicycle commuter route between downtown and the Research Triangle Park. We discovered an unused railroad spur into the American Tobacco Factory. If the tracks were removed and the ballast paved we'd have a rail-trail at least to Riddle Rd and preserve the corridor for future light rail. Durham put the project into the State's Transportation Improvement Plan. And the entire corridor became a transportation project.

The 1992 ATT rail-trail master plan was the first for Greenways Inc. Funded by Adopt a Trail grants from NCRT and Wake P&R and a City of Durham Grant. It became the model for rail-trail master plans of which NCRT has helped promote five others across the state.

NCDOT Rail Division purchased the corridor from Norfolk Southern Railroad in stages with the last section in Chatham County and South Durham acquired August 13, 1998. Because NCDOT acquired a fee simple title to the railroad right of way they were able to lease it to local governments for interim trail use. The other 90 miles of rail corridor owned by DOT cannot be leased because its title is railroad easement. A problem that NCRT sought to address with proposed legislation.

North Carolina Rail-Trails has added to its mission the promotion of Rail With Trail, as there are now only a few railroad abandonments. Railroad corridors are for transportation, which is a public purpose for state government. In my June 2 Letter to the Editor of the Durham Herald-Sun I suggested Durham request Rail With Trail on the North Carolina Railroad corridor when it is upgraded for faster trains as a way to improve the safety for pedestrian and bicyclist.

Thanks for sharing the Dream and helping to get it on the ground.

Below is a list of a few names I would have liked to have mentioned, but was out of time. They appear in no order.

Jon Parker, James Mackay, Vonda France, Darrell McBane, Tom Potter, John Goebel, Robert Payne, Chuck Flink, Terrie Musser, John Mann, Jane Davis, Sylvia Kirkoff, Doug McRaney, CR Townsend, Carol Vilas, Tom Mappes, Congressman David Price, Mark Sullivan, Paul Worley, Patrick Simmons, David King, Curtis Pope, Ellen Reckow, Robert Middour, Tom Norman, Steve Head, Bill Bussey, David Carter, Rick Burt, Thad Howard and thousands more.

