

April 7, 1997. Fellow ATA board member Rick Malmstrom and I took off to Harrisburg to pay a visit to then DCNR Sec John Oliver. Mackin Engineering had just completed a study that estimated the cost to finish the trail. We went Harrisburg to begin the process of finding the \$20 million that we thought we would need for construction.

John told us we needed to go see Rep Rick Geist, whom I had never met. John said he was a real bicycle advocate, and we needed to see him right away. The trail was not in his district, not even next door. But luck was on our side, and a mere three hours later we were meeting with him in his office. Within 20 minutes, he heard our story and had written us two line items for the state capital budget, one for \$10 million for finishing the trail, and one for \$6 million for Big Savage Tunnel. We drove home that afternoon in a state of disbelief; we could not even absorb how successful our day had been.

Rick Geist's help did not stop there, though. He marched with us to the Budget Secretary as we pleaded our case for release of the funds. He introduced us to elected officials and agency people. He encouraged our relationship with Delta Development. Harrisburg knew the Great Allegheny Passage story better than anywhere. He became our best ally and strongest advocate.

Funding this project was very challenging and became nearly hilarious as a predictable pattern emerged. We would have an estimate, find the funds, then the cost would go up. Find more, but the cost would go up again. And again. And again. Early estimates called for about \$2 million. Then it went to \$5, then \$7 million, then \$9 million. And, as you probably know, the final price tag was close to \$12 million. Time and time again, the project was threatened to be stopped/ canceled because of lack of funds. Time and time again we had to reach out further and deeper to fund this.

In the end, the Commonwealth of PA, through DCNR, provided about \$9 million for the tunnel and we are very grateful to the Department, Sec DiBerardinis, for their tremendous support. The Land and Water Conservation Fund provided \$2 million in funding, at the request of DCNR and our true-blue friend Larry Williamson. PennDOT provided funding by swapping federal for state funds with DCNR,, Dan Accurti, you are amazing.

The private sector also stepped forward and we received major support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the Heinz Endowments, the Hillman Foundation, the McCune Foundation, the Laurel Foundation, Columbia Gas, and some people I'm related to. Many of you provided support by sponsoring a foot or more. Somerset County's Eileen Melvin used her good offices time after time to kick the funding back on track. Jim Linaberger used his secret weapon, his daughter, to arrange some very important and productive meetings. Teeter Associates, as always, capably helped us in many ways. We thank you all.

But in the end, it was the trail, its fabulous potential and compelling story, that kept the funding coming. What a great opportunity, for us here in SW PA and W MD, to host one of the world's premier trails. A trail that needed to get through this mountain.

It's now my honor to publicly recognize Rep Geist and thank him for his tremendous assistance. It's taken nine years to get to this point, where the project is done and we can show our appreciation. I would like to now introduce our friend from Altoona, Rep Rick Geist. We are standing here in a ghost town. Three years ago this place was bustling with activity. There were over a dozen buildings here, running water, a generator, two shifts of rugged Canadians doing the very tough work of fixing this tunnel. We even thought since this place acquired a name, Victorville, named after the project supervisor, that it should really have its own zip code.

The contractor, ACT, Advanced Construction Techniques, arrived on site in early 2002, and finished about two years later. 7 thousand rock bolts, 4000 cubic yards of cellufoam grout, x cubic yards of shotcrete later, and lots of good, productive, soul-cleansing arguments later, the job was done. And we thank them.

We thank their very capable team of engineers from Gannett-Fleming, and Paul Lewis is here today from that team. And we hope we can round up the money so you can tackle Pinkerton Tunnel for us.

There were two individuals who played a critical role in getting this tunnel project completed and we'd like to recognize them now. Rolland Rhodomoyer and Jim Eppley, please come up.

Rhody had just retired from Facilities Engineering and Construction in DCNR and Somerset County hired him to be the project watchdog. We needed someone big and tough and tenacious. Rhody became the personification of the tunnel project, giving lectures to local groups about the tunnel and the railroad and even dressing up in tunnel-wear.

He had worked for Jim Eppley, a long-term genius in DCNR who could make miracles happen. Finishing this tunnel was nothing short of a miracle.

Jim ached with every obstacle that this project threw up, but addressed them professionally and efficiently. His knowledge and respected reputation within state government and with the contractors moved the project out of stall many, many times. And I think that thanks to Jim, ACT was actually finally paid for their work here.

I am pleased to present these special tokens of our esteem and appreciation to Jim Eppley and Rolland Rhodomoyer. Their efforts on the tunnel and the trail's behalf were outstanding.

This gift is utterly appropriate. It's a sand timer and I hope you will accept it as a reminder of our time up here on the mountain. It is filled with the soft running sands that plagued the tunnel, harvested just on the other side of the tunnel.

Thank you for your outstanding efforts.