

Eric Lidji: Today is October 15, 2018. I'm Eric Lidji. This is the Great Allegheny Passage Oral History Project and I'm speaking today with Brad Clemenson and Karen Post, and we're in the Education Room at the Johnstown Heritage Discovery Center. We're going to be talking about Representative Murtha and his involvement in the trail. So, the thing I think we need to figure out at the beginning of this is how all these different pieces of federal legislation fit together. So, what's the first thing in the link that leads up to the money being given to the trail? Is it the SPHPC?

Brad Clemenson: So, the thing that goes back before that, the 1889 Johnstown flood was a catalyst for Dick Mayer and some other Johnstown Community leaders to meet with Mr. Murtha and encourage the congressman to develop a connected tourism initiative. Initially, they were thinking in terms of Johnstown and Altoona as being pretty close by and the idea being that if you combined the assets of the rail story in Altoona, Hollidaysburg with the steel story and coal story more in Johnston and Windber, you could come up with a pretty nice cluster of tourist attractions. So, that prompted the first legislation to do a study of the feasibility of creating a National Heritage Area on that footprint. But, as the study progressed, they got to talking to people in Pittsburgh about how Johnstown steel history and Pittsburgh steel history overlapped and ended up expanding the area significantly to take in parts of eight counties. So, it was a much bigger, broader footprint that came out of the legislation.

Eric Lidji: Maybe we should even go one step back. Where did the idea that tourism was a solution to the bigger problem come from?

Brad Clemenson: Well, there were a number of people who felt, particularly with the 100th anniversary of the historic 1889 Johnstown flood, that that would be an opportunity to promote this region to a national audience, that that would be national media attention that could help promote tourism here. At the time, I'm not sure anybody thought it would be the complete salvation of the area's economy, but people recognized that it could be an important catalyst for economic improvement and so forth.

Eric Lidji: So, this commission was created with the idea of capitalizing on the 100th anniversary of the Johnstown flood?

Brad Clemenson: The legislation was introduced and pushed by Congressman Murtha as a result of the interest in the 1889 flood, but when the National Parks Service brought their consulting folks in and they put together a plan, the plan that came out was much more broad than just that. So, the commission came into business to promote the rail, the coal, the steel, even some of the backwoods kind of history of this area, to connect all these sites in this region that had a lot of overlap and interesting history.

Eric Lidji: And, that was what is the SPHPC

KAREN: I also agree maybe spelling AIHP and SPHPC in the beginning to provide clarity because I know that everyone always got them confused over the years. I would say the simplest way to explain it was that America's Industrial Heritage Project (AHIP) was the project and the Southwestern PA Heritage Preservation Commission (SPHPC) was the means by which the funds were then distributed and earmarked in the appropriations. SPHPC was also the where the staff was and also the board of directors which represented the counties, etc.

Brad Clemenson: Yes.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, that's within the Department of the Interior?

Brad Clemenson: Right. But, coming out of the legislation, the National Park Service was tasked with creating this commission. With input from people in the various counties and then support from Congressman Murtha, they'd helped to solicit people who'd be interested in serving on the commission and really understood what the goals were and who would be helpful and committed to making it succeed.

Eric Lidji: So, the commission had funding and it had a mission, but did it have any projects at that point?

Brad Clemenson: Basically, that's correct.

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Eric Lidji: Just the flood, sort of.

Brad Clemenson: Well, and even that wasn't necessarily... I'm a little fuzzy on exactly how the initial funding got channeled. I think Congressman Murtha actually obtained and earmarked directly for the Johnstown Flood Museum.

Karen Post: And then, Allegheny Portage Railroad...

Brad Clemenson: Yeah.

Karen Post: ...yeah, was the other site – the Lemon House restoration was part of that, too.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: The Lemon House?

Karen Post: Yeah, it was a part of Allegheny Portage.

Eric Lidji: Okay. Do you know why it's called that?

Karen Post: No.

Brad Clemenson: I think there was a guy named Lemon who...

[Chuckle]

I'm serious. I think that's it.

Karen Post: Because that's where the first administrative offices were. That's where Randy worked at when they were developing.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Who's Randy?

Karen Post: Randy Cooley was the executive director...

Eric Lidji: Of the SPHC commission?

- Karen Post:** Yeah. He was actually a National Park Service employee.
- Brad Clemenson:**** So, to fill in, maybe, some blanks there, the Allegheny Portage National Historic (not storage) Site connects that Pennsylvania Main Line Canal Greenway with the canal except for the part where they went up the mountain and down the other side, and that's the Allegheny Portage (NOT Forge) Railroad. That's a National Historic Site and that became the headquarters initially for Heritage (NOT Harrah's) Preservation Commission. At the time, Randy Cooley had been working for the park service and he sort of just shifted duties to become executive director of SPHPC (Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission).
- Eric Lidji:** Okay. So, this is all in place. And, how does AIHP come out of that, or connect to it?
- Brad Clemenson:** Well, there was a commission that, basically, was sort of the board of directors, and so Randy, in theory, couldn't just go out and say, "We're going to do this." The board would get together and they'd decide, "Okay, these are the projects we're going to approve." And, there were a couple projects that were really cued up and ready to get funded right out of the gate. And, you may recall better than I so.
- Karen Post:** Friendship...
- Brad Clemenson:** Friendship Hill, yeah.
- Karen Post:**** Friendship Hill. The Gallatin House, wasn't it? (The Albert Gallatin House is promoted as Friendship Hill National Historic Site)
- Brad Clemenson:** Yeah, probably.
- Karen Post:** They were all National Parks Service sites.
- Brad Clemenson:** But, the other thing they started doing – there was a number of studies looking at what are the other projects that should be developed. So, over a period of several years, additional

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projects got put in the agenda. Year-by-year, they'd come up with a budget, and the commission would review and approve the budget.

Karen Post: Yeah.

Brad Clemenson:** And then, National Park Service also, I assume, had some review... We're doing an interview here. If you're looking for someone at **JAHA? [? 0:07:50.6]**

Male: Yeah. I want to donate this.

Brad Clemenson: If you go up the steps... You'll find **Adavi. [? 0:07:57.6]**.

Male: All right. Good enough.

Brad Clemenson: Sorry about that.

Male: All right.

Brad Clemenson: Sorry about that for the recording purposes. I thought this would be very quiet.

[Chuckle]

So, where was I?

Karen Post:** Yeah, they took the National Parks Service sites and then they found other sites in the area – Cambria (NOT Cameron) Iron Works, the Altoona Railroad Museum, East Broad Top Railroad. There were other sites like that where designated as connectors.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah. So, the commission, initially, was really focused on heritage tourism. There were some parallel things that started to happen in terms of this study for what became the Great Allegheny Passage. Let's see – way back in 1989...

Eric Lidji: But, before we go to '89, the thing I still don't understand – and maybe I have the dates wrong but – so in 1987 is when the commission gets created?

Brad Clemenson: Correct. Well, I assume that's correct based on your timeline...

Karen Post: In coordination with AIHP America's Industrial Heritage Project. They were one and the same. The commission and AIHP are one in the same.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. So, that's what I don't under...

Brad Clemenson: Well, the federal legislation authorized America's Industrial Heritage Project. And, the way the project was to be developed and administered was through the commission.

Karen Post: The commission.

Eric Lidji: Okay, I get it.

Brad Clemenson: So, there's a project, but the commission is the folks who actually call the shots and they're like sort of the Board of Directors for AIHP.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, let's talk about AIHP a little bit. There's industrial sites all over this part of the country. Why was Congress willing to localize this project to one part of one state?

Brad Clemenson: There was so much history, especially in the railroad and steel-based right here in this local area. The Bessemer steel process was invented in Johnstown at the same time it was invented in England. And, the Brits won the patent fight, so it became the Bessemer steel process. But, in the 1800s, Johnstown, Pennsylvania was the number one steel producer in the world. And, the Antebellum development of the United States came about because rail lines works were put into the heartland of the country to include the South and a vast amount of those, at the time, iron rails, were produced in Johnstown. So, we had a huge role in the national history, our development as a nation. And, there were also a number of interesting things going way back to the French and Indian War. The folks came right through this area who were carrying out that battle and so there were a number of sites here. Fort

Necessity, for instance, in Fayette County, had a big role back then. And, if the Brits hadn't beaten the French at, what at the time was Fort Duquesne, it would not have become Fort Pitt, and the heartland of America would have been French instead of British. So, even that level of history was an important story here that overlapped with that later industrial history. So, when the park service came in and did a survey of nationally significant historic sites in this region, they were really pretty amazed at how many sites they determined had national significance in this small footprint of a number of counties. And, that was really part of what enabled the justification of, "Yeah, let's make this commission a unique thing for this area."

Eric Lidji: What were you doing for Representative Murtha at this time in the late '80s?

Brad Clemenson: I was his press guy, his communications director.

[Chuckle]

Brad Clemenson: So, for the most part, I would write news releases and if he was having events, I'd help to coordinate the events and invite the media to come and that kind of thing. And, as I was getting more comfortable in doing those things, there were times when there was an important meeting, you know, he had a pretty small staff. Then I said, "Well, I can spare some time. I'll go and represent the Congressman at that meeting," because I had a real interest in history and I sort of took on the role in the Murtha staff as being the guy who coordinated a lot of recreation, environmental, and tourism-related projects.

Eric Lidji: Did you have an interest in that before you joined?

Brad Clemenson: Oh, yes. I'm not sure where that came from, exactly, but I've long had an interest in those kinds of things.

Eric Lidji: Are you from the region?

Brad Clemenson: Yeah, I grew up in Johnstown, a Johnstown High School graduate, class of 1970. Telling my age here.

[Chuckle]

So, my dad actually worked for Bethlehem Steel and as a high school kid, I was taken on a tour through the Johnstown mills. It was an amazing operation that they had here back in the day. Here, at the Heritage Discovery Center, they have a Mystery of Steel Museum and a movie where the last time that they made raw steel in Johnstown – I think through AIHP – there's some funds to put tog...

Karen Post: Oh, yeah – for the movie.

Brad Clemenson: ...to do a movie – thirty-five-millimeter, big screen kind of a movie of that process and it's a pretty dramatic film. People who have no idea what steel making is all about are pretty impressed by that. All that was, again, part of some of the things that came out of the AIHP, the project, and some of the things that were the justifications for this being a National Heritage Area. This wasn't the only National Heritage Area, though. If you wanted to, I could try to get some information together on...

Karen Post: There are other National Heritage Areas.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah. There was a number of them. So, this wasn't unique in the whole country.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Brad Clemenson: I want to say there were – heck, there were probably 15 of them?

Karen Post: Yeah. I wanted to say 12. But, yeah, there were National Heritage Areas all over the United States.

Eric Lidji: What was your job with Congressman Murtha?

Karen Post: I did not work for Congressman Murtha. I worked for the Federal Commission. I started in 1988.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, you were with the SPHPC?

Karen Post: Yes.

Eric Lidji: What was the path to that?

Karen Post: My path?

Eric Lidji: Yeah. I mean it was something that was created so I'm guessing you were in the...

Karen Post: I had a strong administrative background. I came from the insurance industry and a lot of administrative, and I started in 1988 as a federal employee.

Eric Lidji: Were you from the region, as well?

Karen Post: Yes. I'm from Bellwood, Pennsylvania. Graduated 1976 and my father worked on the railroad, so I had a passion for it.

Eric Lidji: On the Western Maryland?

Karen Post: No. In the Altoona Railroad system that was a part of the project that they were looking to fund.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, you started with the Federal government with this commission?

Karen Post: Yes.

Eric Lidji: Okay. I think we've covered the creation of the – at least for my purposes...

[Chuckle]

Karen Post: Good.

- Eric Lidji:** The next thing I have is this moment when the congressman gets the planning money for the Allegheny Highlands Trail. Were you guys involved in that?
- Karen Post:** That money came to the commission through a cooperative. They did cooperative agreements.
- Brad Clemenson:**** The commission had people from each of the counties. You'd ask the people from Somerset County, "What do you think would be the best projects for us?" And, so the local representatives on the commission recommended this trail as being something that could be a real catalyst for Somerset County's economic development and so forth. So, they said, "Well, we'd really like to develop this site (NOT state), but we're looking at the potential to create this trail connecting the C&O Canal towpath the whole way into Pittsburgh. That happened in '90... When did they have the first meeting out at Seven Springs where the idea of getting the Allegheny Heritage...
- Karen Post:** What – 1990?
- Brad Clemenson:** The Yough Trail...
- Eric Lidji:** Are you talking about the spine line – the Allegheny Trail Alliance? That?
- Brad Clemenson:** Yes. I think that was in 1995.
- Eric Lidji:** That's my understanding.
- Brad Clemenson:** Yeah, okay. So, all of this predates.
- Karen Post:** Yeah.
- Brad Clemenson:**** And, I was at that meeting. Linda Boxx called the meeting in '95 where there were people from Maryland, there were people from Somerset County trying to do the Allegheny Highlands (NOT Highways) Trail, there were people from the state park who were trying to do the Yough north and people

going to the other part of the Yough Trail, and people from Pittsburgh. But, she got them all together at Seven Springs. So, that happened significantly after. So, the Allegheny Highlands (NOT Heritage) Trail, at that point, was pretty much a local initiative. Hank Parke was very active in the community at the time and became the chair of Somerset County Rails-to-Trails at the time. And so, he knew Congressman Murtha and I think he was probably one of the guys, one of the people who encouraged the congressman to support this and got the commission to... I'm not even sure it was funded by the commission.

Karen Post:

I'm thinking it was funded by the Pennsylvania Community Affairs, which was DCNR ahead of that because what the commission did was also work with other state agencies and then they had a cooperative agreement with state agencies to work with some of the early planning of some of these projects early on.

Eric Lidji:

So, the commission has this pot of money, it has this board that's made up of representatives of these nine counties, it has an executive director. From day one, there are some projects that are kind of teed up and those get started, but then it becomes this process of going to each of these counties and saying, "What is a good project in your county?" And then, start deciding whether to pursue these or not. But, the Allegheny Highlands Trail is not one of those, you're saying?

Karen Post:

No. The Allegheny Highlands Trail – it was written in the legislation, if I'm correct, as trail development.

Eric Lidji:

So, it was part of it.

Karen Post:

Yeah, it was part of it, but there were no plans yet.

Brad Clemenson:**

It does say in this timeline that you have here, Allegheny Heritage Trail, Maryland, study published by National Parks Service. (NOTE: the timeline we were given may have called it Allegheny Heritage Trail or maybe Karen or I used the wrong

name, but for the record, it was the Allegheny Highlands Trail through Somerset County.)

Karen Post: National Parks Service.

Brad Clemenson:** And then, Allegheny Highlands (Heritage) Trail – Pennsylvania study published a little bit later that same year. The fact that the National Park Service did those studies tells me it came right out of AIHP.

Karen Post: Yeah, it was federal money. We got the federal money and did the planning.

Brad Clemenson: I'm not sure – what's SCRTA?

Eric Lidji: Somerset County Rails-to-Trails.

Brad Clemenson: Okay, okay. That's Hank Parke – was actively involved. Okay, yeah.

Karen Post: That was... Yeah.

Brad Clemenson: So, my recollection that Hank Parke was driving a lot of that is on... This ties in exactly with your timeline that you have there.

Eric Lidji: So, the commission provides the money for the National Parks Service to do a study of the feasibility of a trail from Confluence to Cumberland. Is that right?

Brad Clemenson: Yes.

Eric Lidji: Okay. So, Karen, is that something you would have been involved in?

Karen Post:** Yeah. And, the other person that was probably involved in is Karl (NOT Carl) King. He was the one that did a lot of the trail work if you remember.

Brad Clemenson: Oh, yeah.

Karen Post: He did a lot of the ISTE A Funding that came in through Shuster. He worked with PennDOT a lot on a lot of the trail projects.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Before we get to ISTE A...

Karen Post: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: ...was Congressman Murtha interested in trails as trails? He supported this trail in a lot of key ways. Did you get a sense of why the project seemed valuable to him?

Brad Clemenson: He had a way of doing business where he felt he wasn't the guy who would understand the local opportunities and what would really make a difference. He would reach out to people or people who he knew. He'd have conversations with them. Sometimes he'd say, "I'm coming down to Somerset. These guys all come in together and sit around and talk to me, and have them tell me what they think the priorities should be for Somerset County or Fayette County." He was very insistent that he wasn't going to pick the projects. He wanted people in the community to pick them so he'd know there would be local champions, and that the local leadership was brought in and was going to try their best to make it happen because as a fellow legislator going back and forth to Washington, he could not implement a project. And so, he wanted to make sure that there was this kind of buy-in and the recommendations came from people on the ground. And so, that's just the way with the trail idea... It wasn't his idea at all. It was these locals came to him and said, "Mr. Murtha, we think that if we can build this trail people are going to come and it'll improve the quality of life, and..."

Karen Post: And, be an economic development driver.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah.

Karen Post: I think a lot of these small towns were struggling where the trail was going through, and everybody thought it was going to enrich them a little bit, but they needed help to know what they

should do whenever they started coming through. But, people did see it. Early on there's studies that says they wanted to use it as an economic development driver for these rural communities that were struggling.

Eric Lidji: What did he see his role being in all this?

Brad Clemenson: He was on the Appropriations Committee and at that time he was a senior member of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, which provides funding – the National Park Service is one of the Interior Department agencies. So, he was very well-positioned to advocate in Congress for the funding to come through the AIHP

Karen Post: And, there were a couple other congressmen in the area, too Shuster and Murphy and they were onboard, too.

Brad Clemenson: Right.

Eric Lidji: So, the nine counties were not all Murtha district?

Karen Post: No.

Eric Lidji: It was three different districts?

Karen Post: Yeah.

Brad Clemenson: Right. He had a really strong relationship with Bud Shuster.

Karen Post: Bud Shuster.

Brad Clemenson: That's an interesting point you bring up. Bud Shuster represented the Altoona/Hollidaysburg area and Jack Murtha had Johnstown, Westmoreland – Cambria, Westmoreland, and Indiana, Fayette. So, they actually worked together and there were some trade-offs between them where Jack Murtha included Altoona projects in the AIHP initiative and Bud Shuster, who was chair of the transportation committee, helped with a couple highway projects.

[Chuckle]

So, they worked very cooperatively on a regional basis in that regard.

Eric Lidji:

That sort of gets to the larger thing which is there was a congressional system in place at that time that accommodated ventures like this. Right?

Brad Clemenson:

Yeah. It was a very different time. Jack Murtha said a hundred times if he said it once that when he went to Washington the left wingers would get up to make their speech and the right wingers would get up and make their speeches. And, at the end of the day, the moderates from both parties could come together and make a compromise and move things forward. Even when he was still in Congress, he was lamenting how polarized and partisan things were becoming. And, that's just gotten worse since he's gone.

Eric Lidji:

So, you don't think a project like this could proceed in the current climate?

Brad Clemenson:

Well, back then, earmarks were quite common. If you remember Congress, if you approached the other people in Congress the right way, you could get them to fund things in your area. And, there was a whole system of earmarks and it was quite controversial at the time. People started calling them "pork barrel." And, in some cases, there were projects that got through this probably deserved to be criticized, but there were a lot of things that got funded that really made an impact in local communities with **Harry's [? 0:27:30.6]** stuff being one of them. Over the past 8 or 12 years or so, there was such a backlash against that that now you don't see very many earmarks. Congress doesn't operate that way. It's more a matter of the political ideologies. Back in the day of Bud Shuster and Jack Murtha, it was more about representing your area. And, they would often vote the same even though Shuster was a Republican and Murtha a Democrat. If there was a regional interest, they voted in the regional interest. They didn't vote based on what some party leader was telling them.

Karen Post: They cared about their community.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: So, I think the next thing is discussing the ISTEA part of things.

Karen Post: Mm-hmm.

Eric Lidji: Can you explain what that piece of the transportation bill was? What was different about it that allowed it to be relevant to this project?

Karen Post: I think they were more inclusive. They wanted to include recreation and trail development that was never included in a lot of that money before. And, that's where Shuster came in.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah.

Karen Post: This is where he helped.

Brad Clemenson: Shuster's on the Transportation Committee and ISTEA was the transportation legislation.

Karen Post: Yeah.

Karen Post: And, they allowed for trail development. Someone read that in the regulations and a lot of projects were put through. You had to go through PennDOT guidelines. We were fortunate the PennDOT district office was right beside our office, so we had access to PennDOT at that point in time. But, after the projects were approved – you had to go through your due diligence, but you had to go through a process with them – with the ISTEA funding.

Eric Lidji: Did Shuster put that trail development clause in there?

Karen Post: I don't...

Brad Clemenson: I don't think it was actually earmarked. I couldn't swear to that, but it could have been. I don't know the history of this, but

somewhere along the way, it was put in to every highway bill – there had to be, I think, 10% had to go into historic preservation and alternative transportation kinds of projects, in part because over the years they would build a highway and they would just blow out whatever was there. There was no interest, there was no advocacy, for preserving the nation's history. So, as a payback, they wrote into the legislation that a certain percentage of every highway dollars had to go into these kinds of projects.

Karen Post: Yeah, for certain sections...

Brad Clemenson: This was a fairly new idea and, probably, PennDOT was looking for some good ideas at the time, as well. And, certainly, if you're the leaders of PennDOT and you have a congressman in your state who is chair of the Federal Transportation Commission, yeah, you're going to be his friend. You want him to understand what other projects are important for Pennsylvania, so he'll help you with all these other things. And, if he suggests to you, "Boy, I'd like to have this trail funded," it's probably going to get funded.

Eric Lidji: But, these clauses in there about trail development, about historic preservation, they helped the Great Allegheny Passage, but they weren't there because Great Allegheny Passage people lobbied for them to be there?

Brad Clemenson: This still predates the creation of Allegheny Trail Alliance.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Brad Clemenson: So, this is still one, I think, is just the locals in Somerset County who were advocating for this. And, at the same time, obviously, there are people in Pittsburgh creating the Steel Heritage Trail and...

Karen Post: Augie Carlino was part of that one.

Eric Lidji: Who's that?

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- Karen Post:** Rivers of Steel. It's a National Heritage Area right in Pittsburgh.
- Brad Clemenson:**** Yeah, yeah. Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area – it's one of the other... There's several other National Heritage Areas.
- Karen Post:** And, if you want to know something about National Heritage Areas, he's the one to talk to. He would know all the players...
- [Chuckle]
- Brad Clemenson:** Mm-hmm.
- Karen Post:** ...because he really did.
- Eric Lidji:** My other understanding about ISTEA is that it changed the funding structure and it put more emphasis locally. Is that correct?
- Karen Post:** I would say it did because it helped fund the Altoona Railroaders Museum, it helped fund the Meyersdale Train Station. A lot of those historical buildings, the ISTEA funding actually helped with.
- Eric Lidji:** It did the Salisbury Viaduct too, right?
- Karen Post:** Yeah.
- Eric Lidji:** I want to say something like – almost like “block grants” now – where maybe money was given locally and then the local outfits could spend. Does that sound right?
- Brad Clemenson:** I'm not sure.
- Karen Post:** I'm not positive. But, I know it had to go through the district offices of PennDOT.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay. So, there's this moment when the project – I guess this is not actually ISTEA, it's the TEA-21.

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- Karen Post:** Yeah. That's probably Rick Geist.
- Brad Clemenson:** Every five or six years, Congress passes a new transportation authorization. And, one year was ISTEA, and six years later they had to renew the same basic stuff, but they called it a different name – TEA-21.
- Eric Lidji:** And, that's what gave you the \$6 million for the Allegheny Trail Alliance. Is that right?
- Brad Clemenson:** Yeah. I couldn't verify that for sure, but these notes probably are pretty accurate. I would believe that this is accurate.
- Eric Lidji:** Were you guys a part of that?
- Karen Post:**** Karl King (NOT Carl) worked on our staff. He worked with Rick Geist on those ones, yeah.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay. So, by that point, you were already at Progress Fund, Karen?
- Karen Post:** No, I was the last one to leave the commission.
- Eric Lidji:** In what year?
- Karen Post:** I worked for both organizations for a while.
- [Chuckle]
- Eric Lidji:** For both the Progress Fund and the commission?
- Karen Post:** Yeah. I had to close-out the commission with another staff member and our board chair at that time. It officially sun-setted in September 2008?
- Eric Lidji:** That was built into the original legislation?
- Karen Post:** Yeah. It had a ten-year life and then they had two ten-year extensions. It's hard to get rid of a federal agency.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: Karen, do you have any other memories of your involvement in what is now the trail from this early – not the Progress Fund period, but from the commission period?

Karen Post: Well, the commission period – it started out as a grant/loan program. They had a grant/loan program in-house that they provided grants in a lot of the small towns. They helped with a lot of the signage. And, they did a lot of research. There was a Penn State study done that a lot of people were coming to this area and they were leaving with money in their pocket. They couldn't spend the money. So, the one thing that that study showed was that a lot of these towns needed to be developed and ready for people either riding on the trail or visiting the historical sites along the way. So, that's why they established a grant/loan program. It was \$1.5 million that was the initial seed money and they would provide someone a loan and a grant to help them with either signage, rehabbing a property, or starting a small business.

Eric Lidji: And, that went straight to the local communities?

Karen Post: Yep. It started in nine counties.

Eric Lidji: But, you were working directly with businesses and cities?

Karen Post: Yeah, the small businesses directly. And, historical societies maybe needed grant money for brochures. You know, how do they market themselves? So, a lot of people didn't have marketing money back then either.

Eric Lidji: Were you traveling a lot?

Karen Post: Not me, directly. We had a consultant who was Dave Kahley, who works for the Progress Fund. He worked for Preservation Pennsylvania. Preservation Pennsylvania originally ran the grant/loan program and David worked with them as a consultant.

Eric Lidji: That's just a nonprofit?

Karen Post: It was a nonprofit, yeah.

Eric Lidji: Okay. You're one of the founders of Progress Fund, right?

Karen Post: Correct.

Eric Lidji: Does it grow out of the work that you did on the commission?

Karen Post: Correct.

Eric Lidji: How did that happen?

Karen Post:** Well, the commission initially seeded (this probably should be “seeded” not “seized”) it for \$1.5 million. Whenever we started doing what we were doing it in the nine counties, people saw it as successful, like, no one loaning money to these tourism businesses. Ohiopyle, for example, Eric Martin – his father passed away and left him a rafting business – he's looking at, “Oh, all these bikes are going to be coming through. I need to do something else.” What he did – he built his building, built a restaurant because no one had a place to sit down and eat there. So, we gave them loans for rafts, bicycles and helped him get started along the way. So, it originally started in nine counties and then what happened is people came to us and said, “Can you lend outside the nine counties?” Well, with that \$1.5 million we couldn't because it was really tied to the nine counties. So, we went out and borrowed money, looked at other foundations, and got another pots of money so we could go out and start working in other areas and doing the same type of work.

Eric Lidji: So, that's why you were doing both at the same time?

Karen Post: Right.

Eric Lidji: So, where does Trail Towns come from?

Karen Post: Well, Trail Towns, because we were doing the lending in the towns, David has worked in Port Townsend and he talked to Linda. They wanted to set up a Trail Town Program because, “What else are we missing. What else do the towns need?” There was a lot of signage issues. There was a lot of visitors coming and the towns weren't ready for them. So, they set up a Trail Town Program.

Eric Lidji: And, what did it do?

Karen Post: They did surveys, they provided signage, they did bike racks, they did maps, and all that marketing that was needed for some of those towns. The other thing that we did – we did the real estate development, too. A lot of the towns didn't have an inviting entrance off the trail because there were dilapidated houses and things like that, and properties that just needed taken care of. So, we went out and got additional funds to do some real estate development in some of these towns and either cleaned up the entrance ways or cleaned up properties along the trail. We own a B&B now on one of the trails. Just really helped make the trail more inviting to the people that were coming through.

Brad Clemenson: The Trail Town Program actually had sort of a formal process where they would come in and get the town's mayor, or the community leaders and, again, try to make sure they understood the economic potential, but they'd also do a formal walk-through survey. “Okay, you're on the trail. How do you get to the town from here?” Well, there were no signs. And, they would show the community what some of the problems were and the opportunities were. So, you get the community folks interested in “Well, maybe I should have a bike rack in front of my restaurant so people can come over here and use it.” It was an educational thing to some extent to get the community to understand, there were all these people going through town. We ought to get them in town and get a few dollars out of their wallets while they're here. They were also looking at how specifically, “What are the things you can do to make it so that if I'm riding the trail, you want to have, every so

often, a place where I can get off the trail – and there ought to be ice cream.” So, they would encourage...

Karen Post: That was a big demand – ice cream.

[Chuckle]

Brad Clemenson: Yeah. Well, you ride a long way and you get off... But, the family – they want the ice cream – but the couple old geezers like me, they want a craft beer.

Karen Post: A beer. A craft beer.

[Laughter]

Brad Clemenson: But, my point is, a lot of these small communities didn't realize the opportunity. And so, you have a little community meeting and some guy's sitting there and he says, “Well, gee, I have this little dumpy pub, I ought to upscale this thing and make it inviting for the bikers to come through.” So, a couple little dumpy pubs that used to have smoking and motorcycle riders, now they did a big transition. I'm overstating the case a little bit.

Karen Post: But, a lot of them did.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah. There were places where people in the community said, “There's an opportunity here, and plant seeds for other entrepreneurs to start new businesses. There's no ice cream for 40 miles. You ought to put ice cream stand here.”

Karen Post: And, I think that's what the success of the Trail Town Program was. It wasn't just in a town. You were talking to the community, what they did. We were able to give them grants we were able to give them bike racks. We could provide them with signs for their building, we could do loans for their businesses. So, that really helped flourish and it made it more inviting. And then, people still come to us and say, “Yeah, I never thought... I never thought...”

- Eric Lidji:** The business owners never thought?
- Karen Post:** Yeah. They never thought that they would make what they did whenever the trail people came into town. And, they have visitors from all over the country. It's just amazing.
- Eric Lidji:** With the Progress Fund, you're doing this on the trails, but you're also doing other towns that aren't trail-related?
- Karen Post:** Right.
- Eric Lidji:** Do you notice a difference between the towns that are on the trail and off? Does the trail, itself, seem to boost these towns in a way that the other towns you're dealing with aren't getting that boost?
- Karen Post:** That's a good question. Well, Bedford, for example – Bedford doesn't have a trail run through it, but it had the only Bedford Springs, which the commission financed that plan originally. And, it was a dead downtown, but people saw what was going to happen there. That downtown is flourishing. There's unique restaurants, there's an Italian that came in and put his own market in. It just depends on the tie within that community. We see success both on the trail and off the trail, the lending that we're doing.
- Eric Lidji:**** So, it's not like with the trails, like the (I'm pretty sure this was "rising tide, not:) rides-and-tie lifts off towns still have to do...?
- Karen Post:** Yes.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay.
- Karen Post:** And, that's why, as Brad had said, the Trail Town Program helped bring the people along in these communities and realize what they had.
- Eric Lidji:** Were you involved in the Trail Town Program?

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- Karen Post:** With Pat. I not sure what this is or was me referring to Brad working PA Environmental Council.
- Brad Clemenson:** Yeah. When I left Congressman Murtha, I became the coordinator for the Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape. It didn't have the full footprint of AIHP, but it went through Fayette, Westmoreland, Somerset, and Cambria counties. So, I was doing outdoor recreation and some tourism development in that four-county area. The Trail Town Program was very active there so we partnered with them and supported the number of things they were doing. I got to be very familiar with the Trail Town Program.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay. So, there was something that Linda wanted me to ask, and she sent it to you in an email, as well, about a chance meeting that had to do with something in Maryland and an overpass. Is this ringing a bell for you at all?
- Brad Clemenson:** A chance meeting...
- Eric Lidji:** Maybe I'll just get the email.
- Brad Clemenson:** Yeah. I don't remember seeing that.
Karen Post: The overpass?
- Eric Lidji:** Jim Oberstar?
- Brad Clemenson:** Oh, okay. He was...
- Eric Lidji:** Running into Congressman Murtha?
- Brad Clemenson:** Oberstar was a congressman from Minnesota.
- Eric Lidji:** Something about an underpass in Garrett?
- Brad Clemenson:** Yeah. I don't remember exactly where they ran into each other or where this conversation came from. But, Oberstar was on – which committee? I'm not sure – I'd have to go back and look at some stuff. But, Oberstar was on a committee where he could earmark money for specific projects, and he had a

relationship with Mr. Murtha. And, somehow along the way they mentioned that he was trying to fund this overpass and Oberstar was able to help them out with it.

Eric Lidji: Just because they were friendly with each other?

Brad Clemenson: Yeah, yeah. They were colleagues and I'm sure Mr. Murtha helped him somewhere along the way, too, but that's the way it worked. A collegial kind of atmosphere.

Eric Lidji: Are there any other moments about the trail where you guys feel like either the project came together in your mind or something that seemed like a story that symbolizes the larger accomplishments – anything like that?

Brad Clemenson: I think one of the things in my mind that was really significant is going way back to the 1980s. Before there was an Allegheny Trail Alliance, there were some local people who really saw the opportunity here. Initially, there was a lot of resistance. In Somerset County, for instance, there was a guy who owned a big swath of the corridor and he was vehemently against it. So, there were some people who advocated to get the funds and then they were having some issues getting the projects implemented, and managed to work through it, and deserve a lot of accolades for what they did.

Eric Lidji: What about through Congressman Murtha – is there anything in his involvement that you feel like was crucial?

Brad Clemenson:** I know there were some times where they would put money into these projects. If we didn't have AIHP back in the day, I don't know how else the Somerset County part of this trail would have been funded. The locals would have had a very challenging time putting it all together. But, when you had AIHP – and they had quality staff like Karen who could do the stubby pencil bookwork – you have a volunteer group of people who are trying to build a trail. They've never built a trail. They've never dealt with a transportation department which is a big bureaucracy. They would have really had a challenging time in getting started if it hadn't been for AIHP and the Murtha

dollars that funded the study, the engineering, and ultimately the construction on some pieces of this. As that happened – as a significant part of the Allegheny Highlands Trail got built through Somerset County – people started to realize, “Wait a minute. That connects to the Youghiogheny Trail, which connects in... And, they start connecting the dots – literally – in their minds and started plotting the idea that we ought to make this one continuous trail. If they hadn’t had that initial seed money from AIHP, Somerset County, I don’t believe would have gotten to first base. Maybe they – had a couple little sections of this one, but five miles of trail done here and three miles down on the other side of the river. But, the whole thing would not have come together. And, that was a real catalyst for this whole thing.

Eric Lidji: Karen, what about you? Was there anything that you were a part of that you witnessed that you felt like was really crucial to the...?

Karen Post: I was part of a lot of the initial discussions and it's the old analogy, “Build it, they will come” – they came. And, some of the towns weren't ready. A lot of us saw that it could happen and we couldn't be the cheerleaders in town all the time saying, “You have to do something. .” But, we were ready whenever the people started coming in and saying, “Can we help you? We want to help you.” And, they were ready then. They did – they built that trail and people came from all over. The towns didn't believe it, some of the towns, in the early days. But, we were ready whenever they said, “We're here to help you.”

Eric Lidji: It's interesting that you started out on this on the federal side and then gradually moved over to the local side.

Karen Post: Mm-hmm. And, the other thing is watching state agencies because we work with state agencies, federal agencies, and local communities – leaders. And, they all wanted to work together. They really did.

Eric Lidji: Why?

Karen Post: Because I think they believed that it could happen. There were actually early planning docs done early on that showed it could really happen. And, Linda, she was the biggest part of it. She knew how to pull people into the same room and get them to talk, even if they didn't believe, just to listen.

Eric Lidji: What were those planning docs you were talking about?

Karen Post: There were originally planning docs that were put together for the trail – like what's it going to look like in our community? I think Richard talked about it earlier. Because a lot of those — nobody had money to do planning. The local communities didn't have any money to put into planning documents to see what it would look like. You know, “How much is this trail going to cost?” And, I'm sure there were cost overruns all along.

[Laughter]

Brad Clemenson: Yeah. And, back then the Rails-To-Trails movement was pretty new.

Karen Post: Yeah.

Brad Clemenson: And, this was some of the first rail trail development. It had become by happenstance, but this was the kind of projects that also fueled that whole national movement to the world rail trails.

Karen Post: Right.

Brad Clemenson: People started to see that the potential here to really change the whole dynamic of various communities.

Eric Lidji: Who funded those planning docs that you were talking about?

Karen Post: The AIHP originally, yeah.

Eric Lidji: Okay. And, these are just little things that say from Rockwood to whatever this is what the trail would look like so that they were on the shelf when the money came.

Karen Post: Right, right.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Karen Post: And, sometimes you needed a planning doc to show someone, "This is why I need this money."

Eric Lidji: It's interesting how – it seems like the commission and AIHP was able to leverage relatively small amounts of money into something really big.

Karen Post: Mm-hmm. And, they leveraged state money to make some of this happen along the way.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah, you probably have in the material that Linda has pulled together, a pretty good rundown of where all the funding came from. And, it came from all over the place – the foundations, out of a lot of state money. So, early as big ISTEA or TEA-21 grants. I'm thinking there also was some random water conservation funds that went into the Big Tunnel.

Eric Lidji: The Big Savage Tunnel?

Karen Post: Yeah.

Brad Clemenson:** Yeah. And, that's another federal pot. I think that was (should be Land and Water Conservation Fund) Water Conservation money went into it.

Karen Post: Yeah, just because it's federal money – if it's coming from different pots, you have to have everybody talking and on the same page because if they're not, it's not going to happen. And, I think that's part of the thing, too, that AIHP did along the way. They could bring all the partners together.

Eric Lidji: Because they have those contacts?

Karen Post: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: That's interesting. Is there anything else we need to talk about? Any other pieces of trail that you guys were involved in or an important part that you think needs to be on the record?

Brad Clemenson: I was at that 1995 meeting, and that, also, was really critical. I was wearing my Jack Murtha aide hat there and...

Eric Lidji: What was the nature of that meeting?

Brad Clemenson: Linda Boxx did a great job pulling everybody together. And, I don't think there was anybody who thought it was a stupid idea. It was the meeting where people said, "Yeah, we need to do this," where they finally said, "We're going to form an organization, and we're going to develop this trail from Cumberland, Maryland all the way to Pittsburgh, and the spur on the Montour," and that was a huge moment for this whole region.

Eric Lidji: Just because they can coalesce everything?

Brad Clemenson: Yes, yeah. The people in Somerset County weren't talking to the people in Fayette County and weren't talking to the people in Pittsburgh. And, Maryland – people from Maryland, which is, "Why... (I think "should" is missing) We have them come too?"

[Chuckle]

Karen Post: That's another state.

Brad Clemenson: Yeah. There was no history of working cooperatively.

Karen Post: Yeah.

Brad Clemenson: But, that started the ball rolling where this thing all of a sudden became much bigger than a little Somerset County project, a little Westmoreland, Fayette County project. It became a bigger, greater, sum is more than the total of the parts kind of project.

Eric Lidji: So, that reminds of something, and I don't know if you knew anything about this, but when that \$6 million comes down through the TEA-21 and it goes to the ATA, a million of that goes to – from Pennsylvania to Maryland to help the Maryland people do their stuff. And, my understanding is that that's very unusual for one state to give money to another, and I'm wondering if either of you guys know anything about how that all went down?

Brad Clemenson: I know that the ATA tried to keep a good handle on what are the priorities, and really needs to get done. I was on the ATA board, I think, when that happened. And, my recollection is that there was some specific thing in Maryland that had a timeline where – it might have been a matching money, they might have had a TEA-21 – no, this is TEA-21 money. But, they had to pull some strings to get that done, and I don't recall all the details, but that was – it is uncommon.

Eric Lidji: Was Congressman Murtha involved in that string-pulling?

Brad Clemenson: He probably had at least something to do with it. If Pennsylvania has money, they're not normally going to give it to Maryland without some encouragement. And, the fact that the whole Great Allegheny Passage had so much momentum by that point and the timing – there's something critical about the timing – that they were able to get it done.

Eric Lidji: Is there anything else we should talk about?

Karen Post: I'm good.

Eric Lidji: All right. Thank you so much.

Karen Post: Thank you.

Brad Clemenson: Thank you.

[end 0:58:02.9]

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