

2018-10-21 JIM LINABERGER

Eric Lidji: Today is October 21, 2018. I'm Eric Lidji. This is the Great Allegheny Passage Oral History Project. And, I'm speaking today to Jim Linaberger at his home in Franklin Park, Pennsylvania. And, it's a Steeler's bye week, which is why we're speaking on this day.

Jim Linaberger: Right.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: I thought it would be a good place to start with you telling me how you met Linda.

Jim Linaberger: Well, it's interesting. I think Linda – and I have this written down in here – I think Linda and I both joined the board of the Regional Trail Corporation about the same time. It might have even been the same meeting. And, as far as when that was, I'm going to guess it was either – I have it marked down here. You're going to do some editing there, I assume?

Eric Lidji: It's just raw tape, but it's – the people who use it will edit it.

Jim Linaberger: I joined in 1993.

Eric Lidji: So, were you involved in trails before then?

Jim Linaberger: No. No, my background – when I retired, I was assistant to the president, People's Natural Gas. And, my portfolio covered community relations, governmental affairs – I was a lobbyist and I had three people who worked for me as lobbyists. And, I also administered our company's contribution budget, giving away – oh, maybe a \$1 million or so every year. Back in then, that was a lot of money.

Eric Lidji: Then being the early 90s?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah. And, Linda joined – I think we joined the same day or thereabouts. And, it turned out that her principal location was administering the family's foundation. So, that's how we met. And, I think, maybe, we were even recruited because of our

connections with me – the corporate foundations – and maybe Linda – family foundations.

Eric Lidji: So, you had no interest in trails or bikes or anything like that?

Jim Linaberger: Oh, I biked. Oh, yeah.

Eric Lidji: So, you were a cyclist?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah. In fact, I've biked most of the trails in Western Pennsylvania. I don't do it so much anymore because, you know, 81. But, I've ridden from Washington to Pittsburgh four times.

Eric Lidji: On the Great Allegheny Passage?

Jim Linaberger: Well, and also the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Towpath.

Eric Lidji: Right.

Jim Linaberger: Now, when I say that, all four of them – there were gaps where the trail had not been built yet.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. What about before those trails, though? Going back to when you were younger, growing up.

Jim Linaberger: Well, interesting, growing up – and my father was a Methodist minister, so we moved around a lot. And, after World War II, we were in Smithfield for a couple of years and Dunbar – both in Fayette County – two very small rural towns. And, I can remember – was probably about in the fourth or fifth grade – with an older brother, older sister, and me, and with a preacher's salary, all we had was one bicycle. It was used and it was a girl's bicycle. And, there was something wrong in the gears that if I was peddling with my buddies and stopped peddling – then to have it reconnect I had to peddle at the same speed. And, it was the hardest thing, but I mastered it. In the meantime, my buddies would be about a half a mile ahead. So, that's how I started.

- Eric Lidji:** So, you grew up in the area?
- Jim Linaberger:** Yeah, Western Pennsylvania.
- Eric Lidji:** Did you have any memory of the train or the railroad that is now the bike trail?
- Jim Linaberger:** Not specifically. Although, when we were in Dunbar, Pennsylvania – that's not too far from Connellsville – just a few miles away. No, the experience I had with trains was that during World War II, my father was a chaplain in the Army. And, he was gone from about 1942 until early 1946. And, at the time, we were living in Kittanning, Pennsylvania, which is where both my mother and father were raised. And, I had bad eyesight even then. So, my mother and I would take the train – this is during World War II – we would take the train from Kittanning to the Pennsylvania Railway Station at the upper end of town to see a very prominent ophthalmologist about, maybe, once or twice a year. We'd get off the train and walk down, probably Grant Street, or maybe Penn Avenue. And so, I had experience riding the train – passenger train.
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.
- Jim Linaberger:** But, I also remember – I can remember how dark it was a mid-day walking down to the Jenkins Arcade – which doesn't exist anymore.
- Eric Lidji:** It's Fifth Avenue Place now.
- Jim Linaberger:** Yeah. So, my experience with trains was actually riding in passenger trains during World War II. And, that was pretty exciting for a first, or second, or third grader.
- Eric Lidji:** I'm sure. So, why were – maybe “why” isn't the right word – but how were you recruited for the RTC?
- Jim Linaberger:** Well, as I said earlier, I administered our company's contribution budget and it seemed to me... I got a lot of requests for my... And, I tried, where possible, to try to focus

on giving grants to organizations that were going to help develop the communities that we served, one way or the other, i.e., if a community prospered, they would use more natural gas.

Eric Lidji: Right.

Jim Linaberger: And, I think many businesses try to support nonprofit organizations that have some connection with what the corporation does. So, I was starting to get some requests from trail organizations to build the trails and I couldn't fund them all. But, I tried to focus on trails that were being built in or near towns that Peoples Gas has served. So, making a few grants like that is probably what brought me to the attention of the people who were in leadership for the Regional Trail Corporation. And, of course, the Regional Trail Corporation was kind of unique in and of itself is that it was set up to cover three counties – Allegheny, Westmoreland, and Fayette County. We had communities that we served in all three of those counties. And, the board was made up of people from each of the three counties. So, that made a lot of sense. And, it could have been Larry Ridenour – have you interviewed him?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: He was on my list.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Jim Linaberger: Larry may well have written the proposals that came to me and I made some grants and so we would have met and talked, and so forth. And, I liked biking. And, this just made sense – an organization that covered three counties. Because one of the things I ran into early on in running a donations budget was that you had competing organizations wanting money to do basically the same thing. What made more sense to me as far as making our company's money worth the best, was to ferret out all those individual organizations and try to find organizations that were covering a larger area or were a

group of a couple organizations into one. So, instead of making one donation or maybe making 20 donations to build trails, try to find an organization that was involved in building a number of trails.

Eric Lidji: So, even before you were on the board, you were getting approached by small trail organizations for grant requests?

Jim Linaberger: Mm-hmm.

Eric Lidji: And, some of those trail organizations later become part of the Allegheny Trail Alliance...

[Crosstalk]

Jim Linaberger: And, before that, the Regional Trail Corporation. And then, of course, what made more sense – the Regional Trail Corporation was working so well but I it only covered three counties. But, we had a couple more counties to go through to get to Cumberland, Maryland.

Eric Lidji: Somerset?

Jim Linaberger: Somerset, and then...

Eric Lidji: Allegheny.

Jim Linaberger: The other Allegheny County in Maryland. Yeah.

Eric Lidji: So, that's where the ATA comes in then? But, that's a little bit down the road.

Jim Linaberger: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: So, that explains why you were interested in this Regional Trail Corporation because it was a way to serve a lot of different places in one fell swoop.

Jim Linaberger: Mm-hmm.

Eric Lidji: But, that's a big step between supporting an organization and sitting on its board. Were you sitting on the boards of other nonprofits that that company was supporting?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Jim Linaberger: Yes, I did. Because one of my other portfolios was community relations. And so, I was involved with helping establish something called the Dollar Energy Fund.

Eric Lidji: Yes, I've heard of it.

Jim Linaberger: Now, that made sense to somebody who worked for gas utility – to help set up an organization that would accumulate funds that could help delinquent customers – be they electric or gas to pay the utility bills. That's just one example.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: But then, I was involved with some other... At one point before I retired, I was on the board of about seven nonprofit organizations.

Eric Lidji: Wow. And, was the nature of that to see after the donation that people who are giving or was there a broader interest in doing that?

Jim Linaberger: Well, obviously, the involvement with the Dollar Energy Fund would have made so much sense to help create a fund that would help our customers who, for whatever reason, were unable to keep current with their bills. That was a rather self-serving – but it was also doing a good thing.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. But, if you were on eight, that's a lot – but it's not all of them. So, what was it about the Regional Trail Corporation that was worth your time?

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Jim Linaberger: Well, besides maybe helping develop some of these small towns, and creating tourism, and helping the local businesses – [Whispering] I liked biking. That was kind of a selfish thing to get involved.

Eric Lidji: You'd be surprised how many people who are involved in this project seem to have that in common.

Jim Linaberger: Yeah. And, most of the people who were on the board of the Regional Trail Corporation, and then, eventually, the Allegheny Trail Alliance, were cyclists, like me. Like the Roy Weils and the Mary Shaw, and the Bill Metzgers, and Linda Boxx. In fact, if we could talk a little bit about Linda?

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: And, I was trying to think of something that was – I thought it was funny. I'll let you decide whether it was funny or not. On one of our organized rides from Washington to Pittsburgh – Linda and I were both on that trip. And, it took us about a week. And, she and I – we're not the same age. I'm a bit older than her. But, we got to know each other better. And so, people kind of pair up in the ride. Because you might have 15 or 20 people, but you don't normally ride in a group. You can. Anyways, Linda and I were frequently riding together on this week along the trail and I had a t-shirt that said something about the trail on the front. But, on the back was a map. And, you've met Linda. Linda is enthusiastic. She's devoted a lot of her time and her family's resources to developing the trail system. And, every time we would stop – about every hour we'd stop to get a drink and just to rest our legs. And, if there were people there, she was like a politician. She was more like an evangelist. And, she would start to talk to these people. And, they might be from Keokuk, Iowa, or wherever, and she would – almost like a campaign speech. But, it wasn't canned. She would start to tell them about what we were doing and so forth. And then, she'd have me turn around physically, and she'd point her finger on my back to where we were, and then she could illustrate. I didn't do it in front of the group, but at one point – we were riding along and I said, "Next time we do

this, Linda, you're going to wear a t-shirt, but the map is going to be on the front.

[Laughter]

Eric Lidji: A little risqué.

Jim Linaberger: Right. Well, we never did that.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

[Chuckle]

Jim Linaberger: And, you might not want to use that for the... But, I had to share that.

Eric Lidji: So, what were your responsibilities on the board of the RTC?

Jim Linaberger: Well, that's something I cover in here. Because of my involvement with grantmaking in Western Pennsylvania for the gas company, I also belonged to an organization – it still exists – it's called the Grant Makers of Western Pennsylvania. Linda and I were both members of that. And, it was sort of like an affiliation organization. Yeah, we all had similar interests and so forth. And so, in the process of doing that, I got to know well a number of the people who had a similar position at Westinghouse or Mellon Bank or PNC – you name it, any of the corporations. And, Linda sort of had that connection more so with the foundations – be they family, or like Mellon, or the Pittsburgh Foundation – they were not corporate connected. And so, very quickly, I think Linda and I realized that the best thing we could do for the Regional Trail Corporation would be to use our entrees into these foundations in corporate – giving people – and bring them out to the trail for site visits instead of just sending a proposal at them. And, we helped write some of them. But, instead of depending on us on that... In fact, one of the examples that I given here was that Ron Wertz, who at one time was the head of the Hillman Foundation – Ron and I are the same age, graduated from college the same year – different colleges. I think he went to Juniata and I graduated

from Allegheny. And, we got to know each other. And so, at one of our Grant Makers meetings, I said, "Ron, do you think the Hillman Foundation would be interested in considering a grant request from the Regional Trail Corporation? And, we'd never done this before. And, he said, "Sure." So, anyways, I arranged for Ron to come out and do a site visit. And so, Ron and I met at the parking lot in West Newton which is across the river from West Newton. And, the people that were on this trip were Bob McKinley, who has since passed away, who was our manager; Jack Cusick, who was a board member from West Newton and he's since passed away; and me. There were the four of us – Ron Wertz, Bob, and Jack Cusick. Bob McKinley had a beat-up decrepit Geo Tracker. And, the top was down. So, there were four of us riding in this and we probably rode down the trail – the actual trail – because we could show him much quicker, instead of riding on bikes. And, you can't really talk a lot – four of us couldn't talk. But, riding in Bob's Geo with the roof down, we must have traveled for about a half an hour, 45 minutes on the trail. And, we came back to the parking lot. And, being a former salesman at Peoples Gas, I wanted to try to get a feel as if Ron was a customer – which he was – about rather he would be interested in us putting together a proposal and submitting it to him to develop a trail. And, Ron quickly said yes. My next question was – and this the shocker – I said, "How much should we ask for?" Now, I was thinking maybe \$10,000. And, Ron, without batting an eye said, "\$100,000." Now, I wasn't too surprised because I knew how big the Hillman Foundation was, but Jack Cusick and Bob McKinley almost fell over. We'd never gotten anything like that. So anyways, we submitted the proposal. Ron gave us \$100,000. That worked so well that I managed to contact a number of other people, like Renny Clark at Westinghouse and – I can't think of – you know, it's so long... But, Mellon Bank and some of the other that I knew well. We would replicate this kind of a thing. I would invite them. They would meet us. We'd ride in box... You know, it may have had some benefit. I mean, it was beat up. So, that was probably what the best... And then, they made me chairman of the fundraising committee, obviously. And, I'm guessing that, in my time with the Regional Trail Corporation,

we probably raised at least a half a million dollars – primarily from corporations and foundations – to help build the trail.

Eric Lidji: So, some of that is because you had those connections. Was some of it that you understood how to frame something like this to somebody who was in your position?

Jim Linaberger: Oh, yeah because I was on the other side of the table. I was getting proposals from nonprofits, so I knew what I looked for.

Eric Lidji: Which is what?

Jim Linaberger: Which would either convince me that we ought to give or things that I thought were weaknesses in the proposals because I always had more requests than I had money. So, I knew that the receiving end of the process and could then help in designing the proposal going in that would answer the questions I would normally be looking for.

Eric Lidji: Was the site visit part of that?

Jim Linaberger: Oh, yeah. Because as much as I could – I couldn't do this for every – because I had other responsibilities. I had to be in Harrisburg and Washington. But, if I was interested in it enough to consider a grant request to a nonprofit organization, I would try my best to go out and do a site visit. Because a lot of times – people get good. And, they know what to put in a proposal. But, you get out there, and in walking around, and looking, and talking, you'll find out either, one, what they said in the proposal was true, or they were gilding the lily.

Eric Lidji: What was the state of the trail when you were doing these site visits?

Jim Linaberger: A lot of incomplete sections.

Eric Lidji: So, there was actually a trail?

Jim Linaberger: Oh, yeah. We had portions of trail. Generally speaking, what the Regional Trail Corporation did – I can't speak for what was

the Montour Trail, or others – but on the Regional Trail Corporation, we typically paved the sections that were the easiest to pave or the most desirable to track people to come. And, that would be, starting with the trails at major highway intersections – West Newton's a good example, the road that comes down from 51, and we have the parking lot. So, we went both ways from West Newton. And, that probably was done down in Boston and coming north from Connellsville. So, sections that were done where there was – we wouldn't go out in the middle of nowhere and build trail, and there was no place to park. So, we did the easy parts first, and then slowly, but surely, we got to the tougher parts, and it completed as a trail.

Eric Lidji: Was the train station in West Newton when you were doing these site visits?

Jim Linaberger: There was nothing there at all. The train station had disappeared a long time ago.

Eric Lidji: But, I mean the new, the redone one that they have there now.

Jim Linaberger: That was built after our trail was done.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Jim Linaberger: And, primarily for a good reason. Our driving force was to build the trail and get all the connections together so that we would have a trail from Boston clear to Connellsville and then south of Connellsville to tie in with Ohiopyle State Park. It was only later that we began to work on building good parking lots with facilities for people to take care of themselves, water fountains. And then, build things like the train station because that was a major undertaking. And, my recollection, at least with the Regional Trail Corporation is, that probably is the only building we ever built. Most of our focus was on building the trail which involved, in some instances, building bridges or renovating bridges. And, lastly, renovating tunnels, which is one of the things I mentioned in here. When I went on the Allegheny Trail Alliance board because each of the trail

organizations that were a part of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, that had members on the ATA board... And, we had been working long and hard to determine what it was going to take to renovate the Big Savage Tunnel – that was critical. We had to go through the mountain, not over the mountain. If we'd have taken the trail over the mountain, it would not be nearly as successful because a lot of people are afraid of riding on highways. And, can you imagine some of those degrees? And, we estimated that it was going to take about \$2.5 million to renovate this Big Savage Tunnel. The lowest bid came in at \$12.5 million.

[Laughter]

Jim Linaberger: That blew us away. But, fortunately, we were able to tap into some significant transportation dollars from the federal, but the federal transportation budget gives money to state transportation departments. And, in there are funds for alternate sources of transportation. Rails-To-Trails qualified.

Eric Lidji: So, that's how the Big Savage Tunnel was funded? Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: That was a major challenge.

Eric Lidji: Just going back a second with – is it David Wertz?

Jim Linaberger: Oh, Ron Wertz. Yes.

Eric Lidji: Ron Wertz. So, you said that in your mind you thought, maybe, \$10,000 and then he says \$100,000. Why do you think that he was so enthusiastic?

Jim Linaberger: Well, I think he liked the fact that it was outdoors. Well, it's hard for me to try to figure out what made him – but he certainly had a lot more money available. The annual budget for the Hillman Foundation dwarfed whatever Peoples Gas was – so for me, \$10,000 was a lot of money. I guess for Ron, \$100,000 was maybe the minimum kind. But, that's purely conjectural on my mind. I can't get into his head.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Right. Was that the largest individual gift that you were able to secure?

Jim Linaberger: I can't tell you that. I don't remember.

Eric Lidji: Did you and Linda ever go on fundraising pitches together?

Jim Linaberger: Oh, yeah. In fact, one of the ones I list was that – this is a little bit of family history here. In 1998, my youngest daughter, Betsy, as I mentioned earlier, was on Governor Tom Ridge's staff as Deputy Director of Operations. And, she arranged for Linda and me to have a meeting with Tom Ridge's Chief of Staff, Mark Campbell. And, the issue was that there's this is huge capital budget that the legislature creates every two-year time. And, it's a wish list. Basically, every senator or every representative gets something in there, at least listed. And, it's in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The point is, most of those things never get funded, simply because there's not enough money. And, it's a – Well, I won't say anything more. I don't want to express my prejudices about the state capital budget. And, there was approximately a \$17 million line item that was for the Allegheny Trail Alliance. And, some of that might have been for the Big Savage Tunnel. Some of it might have been to renovate the Pinkerton – that very long...

Eric Lidji: The bridge?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah. But, it would have been a whole a whole host of... There was a line item for \$17 million. But, there had been no push to get money appropriated. It's one thing to get it in the budget, but then you've got to get the general assembly and the governor to sign off on so much state dollars being put in there to fund those things. And so, Linda and I decided that... What do you need?

Eric Lidji: I was going to plug in – if you had a plug that we could use.

Jim Linaberger: Yeah, I think back – right behind you is one of those power strips.

Eric Lidji: Can I pull it forward?

Jim Linaberger: Sure.

Eric Lidji: All right.

Jim Linaberger: Okay. So, I proposed to Linda that Betsy could arrange for us to get into see Mark Campbell. Now, if somebody is the Chief of Staff, it's not easy to get into see. It's just not only state government, but even for the White House. And, Betsy was able to get Linda and me a 15-minute appointment in Mark Campbell's appointment book on a Friday. So, Linda and I drove out there and that 15-minute ended up being about 45 minutes or an hour because Mark – once we got into his office... And, he and I had known each other from me being a lobbyist. He and Betsy – we'd all graduated from Allegheny College, so there were some connections there. I didn't know him well, but he knew me well enough. And, what was interesting is that Mark knowing me a little bit but not knowing who Linda was, the first couple questions were fired at me. And, I said, "Mark, I think Linda can answer that question better than I can." After about the third question, I just sat back in my chair and Linda did her thing. And, the result of that was – as Linda and I were driving back from Harrisburg that Friday afternoon, Mark Campbell was on the phone to John Oliver saying, "I want to see you Monday morning." And, of course, John was Secretary of DCNR. Now, we weren't asking for the entire \$17 million, but we got \$4.5 million – that was a big jump. With Linda's salesmanship and my connections, we had a lot of fun.

[Chuckle]

Eric Lidji: So, that's how the teamwork worked between the two of you?

Jim Linaberger: Plus, we got along famously together – good friends.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Before we get too much further, you had mentioned Bob McKinley, and in an ideal world we'd be able to interview him,

but obviously, we can't. I was just wondering if you could describe him as a person.

Jim Linaberger: Well, he was very devoted to Rails-To-Trails. I'm not sure I can remember what his previous background was. I'm assuming he probably had a day job like you and me. But, somehow or other, he became – and this preceded my going on the RTC board – my assumption is that he may have been initially on the board, and then was hired to be a full-time person to manage all the things. And, you needed somebody in some of these efforts – you needed somebody who could devote their full-time taking care of all the details and keep things flowing.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: Before I forget it, another fella that had did that after Bob McKinley was gone, but more so for ATA, not RTC, was Jack Paulik. Is he on your list?

Eric Lidji: He's on our committee...

Jim Linaberger: Oh, okay.

Eric Lidji: ...as well as on the list.

Jim Linaberger: Because Jack Paulik – and Jack got paid to do this – Jack Paulik managed to get the trail from McKeesport to the Point, which is probably the most difficult, engineering-wise, but even more so negotiating for rights-of-way and so forth. It's unbelievable what Jack was able to do. Back to Bob – I'm going to best guess that Bob was probably about my age and he did a very capable job of managing the day-to-day operations of building the trail from, basically, Boston to Connellsville.

Eric Lidji: Were you part of the founding of the ATA at all?

Jim Linaberger: I guess you could say that. I was on the initial board.

- Eric Lidji:** What was the idea of the ATA and how did it come into existence?
- Jim Linaberger:** Well, grantmakers like me were saying to the Montour Trail, and the Regional Trail Corporation, and others, that instead of all of you working independent and seeking funds from the same organizations, it made a lot of sense for us, especially since the whole – anybody could see that it made sense to tie all those trails together and get to Cumberland. So, instead of having them come in individually – and basically competing against each other – was to have one overall organization that would help facilitate completing the entire trail. And, I'd have to say that I was a pretty strong supporter of that from a grantor, and also as a grantee – that it made sense to work together instead of compete.
- Eric Lidji:** People have talked about a meeting at Seven Springs. Do you remember anything about that?
- Jim Linaberger:** Well, there was a meeting. I'm not sure whether it was in Seven Springs. But, early on, we might have had a workshop, or a retreat, or something – it would have been, like, two days. And, one of the subjects that we talked about was what are we going to call this trail? And, I give Bill Metzger the credit for coming up with the Great Allegheny Passage. And, of course, GAP for an acronym was the same as the clothing chain.
- Eric Lidji:** Right.
- Jim Linaberger:** Now, we never ran into any problems. They never came after us about... But, there were a number of suggestions made. It's sort of like you're in a meeting and you think you're getting nowhere at all because everybody's going in different directions. As I recall – and this is from memory – Bill came up with that suggestion and almost everybody said, “[Claps] That's it.” But, Bill was that kind of a guy. You have not interviewed him, have you?
- Eric Lidji:** I've not interviewed him, but I've met him.

Jim Linaberger: Okay. You know he's pretty unique.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

[Chuckle]

Jim Linaberger: In fact, he and I have more stories that we could tell. One of the first trips that we took from... I think our first night we stayed – this coming out from Washington. And, I can't think of the name of the town now. But anyways, it's a small town, it's in Maryland – anyways, we all stayed in what I called “The Bates Motel.” And, fortunately, it no longer exists. It's just over the Maryland State Line. I'll think of it because there's a...

Eric Lidji: Is it Frostburg?

Jim Linaberger: No. This would be – no, it wasn't Frostburg. It's just over the state line and there's a great bakery – Weaver's Bakery. But, anyways, I think Bill and I had one bed. So, Bill slept on the floor. The shower didn't work. The air conditioning didn't work. He's a character. A unique individual.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. So, what were your responsibilities with ATA?

Jim Linaberger: Well, there again, I focused more – there were people who had skill and knowledge of engineering. That was not mine. I was a liberal arts graduate. My portfolio, if I had one, both at the RTC and the ATA, was in helping to raise funds.

Eric Lidji: Were there any big moments in that ATA part that you remember?

Jim Linaberger: Well, I think the biggest one I mentioned was when the lowest bid we got for the tunnel was \$12.5 million. That blew us out. And, that was a tough meeting. We thought, “We'll never be able to raise \$12.5 million.” Well, we did. But, thinking 2.5 and it's 12.5. For a nonprofit organization, that's almost like a stone wall.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: One example I think I can give of fundraising that was kind of interesting – the first RTC board meeting that I went to, and it may have been the first one Linda had been. But, if it wasn't, then maybe Linda came on a month later. One of the items on the agenda was to buy a bridge that crosses the Yough River from the trail and goes over to the other side – very close to Connellsville.

Eric Lidji: Is it [inaudible 0:37:41.1]?

Jim Linaberger: No, this would be north of Connellsville. To the best of my knowledge, it might have been the West Overton Bridge. And, I can't remember what we paid for it. But, the funny part is I came home that evening, and at dinner, I'm talking to my late wife. And, I said, "So, you're not going to believe what I bought today. I bought a bridge." Sort of like, "Want to buy the Brooklyn Bridge?"

[Chuckle]

It was not a big deal. But, the first meeting you go to and you vote yes, we're going to buy this bridge. I'm not sure – I think we bought the bridge more to protect us from vandals or whatever misusing the bridge. I don't think – we had no plans to cross over that bridge and get into Connellsville. We had our way into Connellsville.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. Were you also involved in RAD funding? Not in the application part?

Jim Linaberger: Yes, I was. The RAD was a very important organization for trails. And, there again, each of the individual trail organizations were going into RAD to get funding. And, I was one of the ones that spearheaded us to do it as a group. And, I'm trying to think who was – David Donahoe, I think, was the original... No, not Dave. His grandfather was Mayor Donahoe. I'll come up with the name. It was the gentleman who was the original executive director for the RAD – David... It'll come. You might be able to do that online. I knew him because his father and I were fellow employees of Peoples Gas. In fact, maybe his – yeah, David Donahoe. And so, I kind of pushed each of the trail organizations for us to try to approach the

RAD, as a group, that would be more likely to get funding than if each of us went in and were competing against each other. And, we were pretty successful. And, even to the point where – I don't know that we... The various trail organizations would meet to make our plans for what we were going to ask the RAD for the coming year. And, I think I was one of the proponents that said, "If a specific trail organization – like, say, the Montour – didn't have anything significant like building a bridge or some significant construction project, that, maybe they ought to take a pass for a year. And, let's focus over here on the, say, something that the Mon-Yough Trail Council, which was part of the Regional Trail Corporation. So, we did. We did some horse trading among ourselves instead each of us all going in separately. And, I think we were successful in almost always getting the money that we asked for. But, it was money that could be used within a year, not something that's a couple years down... Because I knew David Donahoe and the RAD board didn't want to fund things in the future. They wanted spade-ready projects.

Eric Lidji: It seems like it would take a certain amount of trust among these different trail groups for one to back off for a year so that another could do something.

Jim Linaberger: It did. Well, we did some horse trading. And, the fact that we were starting to get to know each other and feel comfortable with each other because of the ATA...

Eric Lidji: That's really interesting. And, RAD funding increased year-by-year didn't it?

Jim Linaberger: It's so long ago, I can't tell you. We did well. We usually got what we requested. And, I think the reason we usually got what we requested is that amongst ourselves we worked hard to winnow out the things that could be better done next year, or whatever.

Eric Lidji: The other thing I wanted to ask you about was – the University of Pittsburgh did a study of the trail, I think in 2002. And, I was wondering if you were involved in that at all – were a liaison on that at all? Because I saw your name in some of the newsletters attached to that.

Jim Linaberger:

I don't know that I had much directly to do with that. One of the things I did do was – the last year and a half I was at Peoples Gas, I was a loaned executive to the Allegheny Conference of Community Development. And, it was to help organize an effort to get the eight counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania to approach both Harrisburg and Washington with a common agenda. And, it was a public-private thing. We had county commissioners and business leaders. And, at that time, George Davidson was the chairman of Consolidated. And, he was on the Allegheny Conference board. And, I was loaned by Consolidated, which owned Peoples Gas. And, having worked in the Gateway Center area for most of my downtown experience, I'm up in the U.S. Steel building which took me forever... In 18 months – it's too big. But anyways, for about 18 months I helped establish the... I should remember what this was. I even have a plaque here. It'll come to me. But, I was involved in a number of things like that – it's about getting the eight counties to work together. The other thing I did, but it was part of my job, was that I was involved with – it was sort of a grassroots effort to have something that the common person could have that was sort of like the Allegheny Conference. And, I'll be honest with you, I can't remember now what the name of the organization was. But, I led a group of people that did a study of the rivers and how they could be developed. In fact, I still have a copy, but I don't know where it is. But, obviously, in doing a study of the three rivers and how they could be developed from what they had been which would, basically – most of the rivers were taken up with the mills. So, what could be done in that case? So, it was a study of river development. I have your email. I can track these – the name of the – Southwestern Pennsylvania Growth Alliance was the thing that the Allegheny Conference created.

Eric Lidji:

So, this was the Allegheny Conference creates the Southwestern Pennsylvania Growth Alliance as a way to replicate its model for a different group of citizens, essentially?

Jim Linaberger:

Well, no. I think that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Growth Alliance was actually a project of the Allegheny Conference to get the eight counties to work together to lobby for brownfield development and highway construction, and things like that,

instead of each of the counties going in and competing in Harrisburg and Washington.

Eric Lidji: And, river development was one of the issues that were on their agenda?

Jim Linaberger: No, this was a separate thing.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Jim Linaberger: I was not yet working as a loaned executive of the Allegheny Conference. This was the Citizens League of... I'll have to work on the name of that. This was an entirely different thing.

Eric Lidji: So, this organization that was thinking about the rivers was which organization – the Citizens League?

Jim Linaberger: The Citizens League of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Eric Lidji: And, that's related to Allegheny Conference?

Jim Linaberger: No.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Jim Linaberger: In fact, they viewed themselves as of a little competitor. The Allegheny Conference were all the top CEOs of all the major corporations in Western Pennsylvania, whereas this was grassroots, up from the bosses and league kind of a thing.

Eric Lidji: When you said you were a loaned executive, that means that instead of the CEO going that you go as his proxy?

Jim Linaberger: I went there full-time.

Eric Lidji: Okay.

Jim Linaberger: Five days a week.

Eric Lidji: Oh, really?

Jim Linaberger: George Davidson was the chair of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Growth Alliance as the CEO of Consolidated. But, I think he wanted to make sure that this effort was going to be successful. And so, he looked in the C&G organization and chose me to be his person. And, I had an office, a

secretary, and arranged for our meetings, and all that kinds of stuff, yeah.

Eric Lidji: This other organization, the Citizens group – they were the ones looking at rivers?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah.

Eric Lidji: Were you involved with them at all?

Jim Linaberger: I was on their board, and when they wanted to do this study of the rivers, they chose me to chair. And, it was a group of, maybe, 15 or 20 people who worked on it.

Eric Lidji: And, does this eventually lead to trail development?

Jim Linaberger: It was certainly mentioned. But, that particular study was focused on what can be done to develop riverfronts from what they were to what some of them are now.

Eric Lidji: Yeah. And, trails are a part of that?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah. The Citizens League thing, I think was less related to trail development as it was more riverfront development.

Eric Lidji: Okay. What year did you retire?

Jim Linaberger: Let me think – 1995.

Eric Lidji: So, you were doing a lot of trail stuff after your retirement?

Jim Linaberger: I still continued after I retired. I retired early. I think it was probably about 57 1/2 years old. And, I had been involved in too many things to just vegetate. And so, I continued my membership on the board of about a half a dozen organizations after I retired, up until 1991 when my late wife was diagnosed with stage 3 small cell lung cancer. So, I had to drop everything – take care of her.

Eric Lidji: But, after '95, you were continuing to work on trail things?

Jim Linaberger: Yeah, as a retiree. No, I started to do some travel. So, I wasn't doing quite as much, but...

Eric Lidji: So, your main years on the trail were from the early 90s to about '95?

- Jim Linaberger:** Yeah. I'd say that was. And, part of the issue for me was my late wife and I had moved up here to the North Hills in 1989. We moved here three weeks before 279 opened. Now, think about that for timing. Think how many years it took to build 279 and we moved 3 weeks before that. Well, it was great for me. Traveling into town to work every day – it was like 15 minutes. And, going in from here, I didn't have a traffic light. Coming out there was one traffic light, and it was over here by the exit. But, that put me significantly further away from where the trails were. For me to go to an RTC board meeting, which usually was in West Newton, it'd be about an hour and a half. So, you can see.
- Eric Lidji:** Right. Are there are stories we haven't covered yet?
- Jim Linaberger:** Well, let's see. Well, I told you about the t-shirt...
- [Chuckle]
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah.
- Jim Linaberger:** ...and our trip to meet Mark... Did I – I said Mark Campbell, it was Mark Coleman.
- Eric Lidji:** As chief of staff?
- Jim Linaberger:** Yeah, it was Mark Coleman who was the chief of staff. I mentioned about – just in passing – I mentioned about this gentleman in Somerset County who was a volunteer at the Visitor's Center. And, his name was Maynard Sembower. And, when he died, he was 100 years old. He was the most delightful friendly person you would ever want to meet. Well, I mentioned some people, just in passing, that were significant people in the early – Larry Ridenour. Did you actually interview him?
- Eric Lidji:** Yeah. I was ...
- Jim Linaberger:** Because he doesn't live here anymore.
- Eric Lidji:** Right. He's in Kentucky. How would you describe his importance to the project?

- Jim Linaberger:** Well, I'll tell you what, of the three counties that were a part of the Regional Trail Corporation, Allegheny County was the hundred-thousand-pound elephant in the room.
- Eric Lidji:** Because it was difficult?
- Jim Linaberger:** No, no, because they were the biggest.
- Eric Lidji:** Okay.
- Jim Linaberger:** But, the most helpful. Westmoreland County had some very good people and some significant... Fayette County – it's like [Whispering] a third-world country – was, and still is. If you know anything about politics, they... So, Allegheny would have been at the top of the heap. Westmoreland County was really a good supporter. Fayette County – we had to fight for everything that we could get. Larry, coming from Allegheny County – and, I think he was either on the planning end of it or the engineering end of it. If we needed brochures printed, Larry, at a board meeting, he'd say, "I'll get it done." Almost anything of that kind of nature, Larry had the ability. If we needed signs – there's a place that makes signs over here near North Park. He said, "I'll get the signs made." And, it didn't make any difference whether it was going to be an Allegheny, or Westmoreland, or Fayette County. Larry had the ability to tap the assets of Allegheny County. Which, in all fairness, Allegheny County is probably multiple times bigger than Fayette County in terms of population and resources, and so forth. But, Westmoreland County was good, too.
- Eric Lidji:** And, that was Malcolm Sias?
- Jim Linaberger:** Malcolm, yeah.
- Eric Lidji:** And, how would you describe some of his involvement?
- Jim Linaberger:** Well, Malcolm was good at making sure that the county commissioners always put a certain amount of money in the county budget to support the Westmoreland portion of the trail. And, there again, he and Jack Paulik – I don't know if they were in the same department, but Malcolm and Jack Paulik were both from Westmoreland County. And, they were very,

very helpful as far as getting us what we needed from the county.

Eric Lidji:

Charlie Smith we haven't talked about yet.

Jim Linaberger:

Oh. Well, Charlie Smith owned – I think he's probably retired now, but I can't be sure of that. Charlie Smith is a few years older than me. And, he and I got to know each other. He was very, very active in the Mon-Yough Trail Council, but he was also on the Regional Trail Corporation board. And, he had a business – and I think it was a tool and die – right on the trail. So, it's where we could park stuff. And now, I think the Regional Trail Corporation – see, I haven't been involved that much recent – but I think that's where the Regional Trail Corporation now has a building on what used to be Charlie's property, where they can store their mowers and graders and all that kind of stuff. And, he and I just had a delightful time together. And, to me, he was the person that kind of got this over-the-hill gang together that volunteered on Saturdays to do the maintenance work, and so forth. And then, of course, Roy and Mary, what they've done with the publication – the multiple publications of that guide. And, that a significant portion of the profits from the sale of those books went to the trails. Roy and Mary – I think Mary is the more dominant of the two. I mean, they both contributed. What's interesting is that they rode a tandem bike. Roy always drove it, which meant Mary's behind, which means the scenery never changed for her. Mary was – I think she was the author of a lot of that stuff.

Eric Lidji:

Are there any other stories we should talk about? Any of those things you'd like to mention?

Jim Linaberger:

This morning, I added one last person – Rick Geist. He was the state representative from the Altoona area. I can't tell you the – well, you don't need to know the district. But, he was a state representative from '79 to 2013 – a pretty long span. And, for many of those years, he chaired the House Transportation Committee. The House Transportation Committee is one of the more important as far as money in the general assembly – because a lot of the money that they parceled out came from the federal. And, it just so happens that... There was a gentleman from the Altoona area who

chaired the Federal House Transportation Committee for many years. I can't think of his name now. But, Rick Geist was very helpful with us making sure that funding that came from Washington to Pennsylvania, that Rails-To-Trails could get – not just ours – but that Rails-To-Trails would be a focus of funding as alternate sources of transportation.

Eric Lidji: All right. Is there anything else?

Jim Linaberger: If I could just put my hands real quick on a copy of that study.

Eric Lidji: Well, we can find it afterwards.

Jim Linaberger: Okay.

Eric Lidji: Yeah.

Jim Linaberger: That... As far as...

Eric Lidji: Yeah. All right. Well, thank you very much.

Jim Linaberger: All right.

[End 0:58:41.9]

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