

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Avigail Oren:** Today is Wednesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019. My name is Avigail Oren and I'm here with Darla- is it [pronounced] Cravotta?

**Darla Cravotta:** Cravotta.

**Avigail Oren:** Cravotta. And, in this interview today, we are going to focus on how Darla became involved with the GAP Trail project – particularly how the project intersected with your job- eventually at the county, but we'll start when you were in the office of Mayor Tom Murphy. And, we're also going to talk about the influence that Pittsburgh's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary had on the buildout of the trail's final gaps within the city. That's sort of where we'll end. So, let me begin, Darla, by asking you for the quick story of your life. Take me through a brief history of what happens between your birth and your first job in the office of the Mayor- former Mayor.

**Darla Cravotta:** Well, I'll skip right to that.

[Laughter]

So, I moved back to Pittsburgh in 1988 and I decided I wanted to be a social worker and ended up in a very quick fashion becoming a community organizer in the North Side. And, when you're an organizer in the North Side, you interface and intersect with Tom Murphy and a few other folks that he had working for him because he was a state legislator. And then, I was really lucky in graduate school to be placed in his office when he was a state rep, as an intern. So, I did my graduate school internship there and did research for him. At the same time that I was doing my graduate school internship, he decided he was going to run for office for a second time. And, I left the internship and I went to work for his campaign doing scheduling, which was a really great experience because I learned a lot about who he was as a person, what his values were and, more importantly, what he was going- where he was going to take the city to. So, I was very committed to him. You know, I was 28-30 years old and I, you know, had stars in my eyes. It was such a fabulous opportunity. I would do it again in a minute if somebody offered it to me because it was so much

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

---

fun and it was such hard work. So, when he won... And, I will say this, Tom ran for office, he also ran all over the city. So, he used to run everywhere and that's, I think, where he shaped a lot of his ideas.

**Avigail Oren:** You mean literally run as in jogging?

[Crosstalk]

**Darla Cravotta:** Literally run as in jogging.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes, not running the campaign. Right.

**Darla Cravotta:** Well, he was everywhere on the campaign but he had literally run in the jogging.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Darla Cravotta:** So, that was a trip. So, when he won and he was the Mayor-Elect, he was having all these meetings and this is kind of crucial to the story. So, he was having all these meetings and one of the meetings was with Harry Henninger who owned, at that time, Kennywood and Sandcastle. And so, Harry Henninger came in to meet with then-Mayor-Elect Tom Murphy and we were sitting in the office and I was in the meeting with him and Harry Henninger and Tom somehow got in this discussion about a trail through Sandcastle. So, my best recollection was that at some point, Henninger had offered property to Mayor Masloff at that time. And, Mayor Masloff said, you know, "No," she didn't want it anyway. So, Harry Henninger then proceeds to tell Tom, at that point, you know, hey...

Tom said something about this trail because he was very much aware of The Great Allegheny [Passage]- he was very much aware of the trail that was being built, still unnamed. And, Harry Henninger basically said, you know, "Go fish," right? Yeah, "That's not going to happen. You're not going to get through that." And so, that was in 1993. So, that was late November, sometime in December of '93. So, after Tom took office, he offered us after- he offered me a job. I worked in a neighborhood policy group for him. There was, like, six of us to start. Our focus was to first advance neighborhood meetings.

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

---

He wanted to meet with people all over the City of Pittsburgh. There's some things I will never forget. He had- we had 67 meetings from January 1994 until October of 1994. We had 67 night meetings. And, we collected data and information by recording them and by writing down all the questions and we would follow up with all the answers to people. So, we'd have hundreds of people come to these meetings. Hundreds. And, we learned a lot. I learned a lot working for Tom. We learned a lot about what people cared about when they talked about the city. They weren't thinking about redevelopment and they weren't thinking about tax bases and they weren't thinking about growth – they were thinking about garbage collection and a variety of things like that wasn't important. So, that was my first job.

Commented [AO1]: The emphasis here might be off. Can you clarify?

What happened then, is then I got married and had a baby. And, when I had this baby – my son, Emilio, who is 21 years old now – my son... I was off and he [Mayor Murphy] called me and asked me to come in. So, I thought maybe he was going to lay me off. The city- you know, we were always in financial trouble, so I thought, "Okay, here it goes." So, I came in and he was sitting there with Eloise Hirsh who was the Director of City Planning at the time and Tom said, "Are you coming back to work?" And, I was like, "Yeah. Well, yeah, sure. Yeah, absolutely, if you want me to." And so, he said, "Well, I'm excited because I just got this conference who's coming to Pittsburgh. I just got word this conference is coming to Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is going to host the 1999 International Trails and Greenway Symposium." And, I was, like, thinking in my head, "Oh, all right." So, and I remember- and he said, "So, what we're going to do is we're going to reassign you and you have to build trail. So, you have..." So, this is January of '98. "So, you have, like, a year and a half." And, I was like, "Huh." So, I learned from Murphy, Avigail, how to not say no to anything and just try to figure it out, right? So, I was like, "Well, I don't really understand trail building." He was like, "Oh, you'll figure it out." And, that was basically what happened, right? Like, "You'll figure it out." I had no clue. I didn't know what to do. But, there were a lot of people in the city that worked on these things. Like, we had folks in City Planning, like Dan Sentez that worked on things. We had people like Pat Hassett

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

---

who was the engineer at the time in City Planning and then he moved to engineering construction. But, they assigned me a guy by the name of Al Kovacic who- I can see him sitting in front of me now – who's saying, like, "Well, I work for a guy," we used to call this director "Dr. No," and I would say- I said, "Well, we don't have to worry about that now because we're just going to do it."

[Chuckle]

And, I don't know what I'm doing, right? So, as that was happening, Tom had negotiated the agreement to purchase the alignment that we call the Eliza Furnace Trail. And so, I was not involved in the negotiation to purchase that – that was with- and it's in here, it's with a guy named Steve Leeper who helped negotiate this. This was the- this was the line that went to McKeesport. This was the commuter train and, boy, you know, while the trail is a great thing, it's too darn bad that we got rid of that. Like, in retrospect, right? In retrospect.

**Avigail Oren:** Right. The commuter rail.

**Darla Cravotta:** The commuter rail, yeah. It's just really too darn bad. But anyway, we did and that's that. And, when we built the Eliza Furnace Trail, we actually got funding from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. So, DCNR funded the project. The city put in money, but the city crews also helped build it. But, we hired a guy by the name of Larry Ridenour. And, you know, Larry had worked for Allegheny County Planning Department for a long time. He was kind of the Godfather of the idea of the Regional Trail Corporation. He was incredibly progressive. I haven't seen him in years, I wish I could see him. And so, we hired Larry to help design and manage the project. And, that project was- now, we had to have an eight-foot-wide trail with two-foot-wide, like, red clay on the side because Tom was a runner and he wanted to run on the red clay and then we had this hard surface for people who biked and walked. And so, you know, people kept calling it- you know, people wanted to call it the "Jail Trail," but we had so many problems, too, by the way. The county didn't want us in front of the jail. They thought that people were going to jump out of the, you know, windows and escape on

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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the trail. They were concerned people would want to, you know, entice prisoners, right? Like, stand there with their hands waving. I work for the county now, like, I can't even imagine my boss saying that, thinking it was possible. That we were going to orchestrate a jailbreak.

- Avigail Oren:** So, can I just ask about the timing? Was the jail already built by the time the trail was built?
- Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, the jail was already built. Yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** And so, there was not a negotiation as the jail was built about leaving space for the alignment? That just...
- Darla Cravotta:** If there was, I wasn't part of that.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, if there was... But, the park, the way it's built... So, here's the trail and here's the jail. And, here's a parking lot and this wasn't finished yet but these were all parking lots owned by the Pittsburgh Parking Authority which was controlled by the City of Pittsburgh. So, that space was there. It was kind of a right-of-way space.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Darla Cravotta:** As part of the alignment. So, when they bought the commuter trail- when he bought the commuter trail, that alignment was all the way down here. So, it was in front of the jail, right? And, it was in front of where PNC- now, he asked PNC to push it [their new building] back, but this was where the old B&O [rail grade] was.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Darla Cravotta:** All right? So, that alignment was all part of the commuter rail.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. And so, it was PNC that had to be...
- Darla Cravotta:** Pushed back a little bit.
- Avigail Oren:** Pushed back.

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Darla Cravotta:** But, push back a little bit – but the commuter rail line was what- the alignment was what was purchased. And, that went all the way to basically PNC because that's where the B&O building was. So, there was great fanfare when that was opened because, of course, that connected to Hazelwood. And, I will say that one of the really cool things about the Eliza Furnace Trail was that it was the first time that I actually saw a diversity of recreation. Not necessarily people who walk, run, or bike but people of color. And, more people because it was an open space, right? And, I thought it was really, really cool. And, we had to do things, like, we had to make accommodations because it was like a cattle chute, right? So, you start on one end, you get off the other end. We had to make an accommodation so if people needed to get off the trail, they could get off the trail. People wanted to call it the Jail Trail. I do not call it the Jail Trail because I think that it sends... You know, it's a great little, like, thing but I think that it just sends a message that I'm not willing to give up. We called it the Eliza Furnace Trail because it was directly across the street from the Eliza Furnaces. Murphy named it. He calls it the Jail Trail in these interviews. And, I just- you know, I see this as something that was built that really started the- it was like the zeitgeist. There were trails, little trails, here and there. Like, there was a little trail on the North Side that was built by Mayor Masloff. There was a bridge that connected Herr's Island down to the North Side that was built. There was some stuff in the South Side. But, it wasn't a complete system yet and I think the Eliza really made it- the Eliza created the impetus to create a system. So...

**Avigail Oren:** So, you say that you're brought in in January 1998 and told that you got to get this going.

[Chuckle]

Had Steve Leeper and Mayor Murphy already purchased the alignment or were they in the process of that purchase?

**Darla Cravotta:** I don't remember, but it was done by the time we had the conference.

**Avigail Oren:** So, okay...

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Darla Cravotta:** So, they must have already purchased it. Yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, let's... Yeah, let's talk through- you said you had to sort of, like, learn on the go including, "all right, we need the trail to be eight feet wide. We need- four more feet, there has to be clay." I mean, what was an average day like at this point? Like, how were you managing this process, like, from an office, [or] are you out on the trail all the time – what did that look like?

**Darla Cravotta:** I wish I could remember my average day. I mean, I wish I would have written a lot of it down. I learned from all the guys that ran equipment. Like, I learned about grading from our Public Works. We used a lot of our own staff to build trail. So, I learned about grading because of the Gradall. I ran a Gradall, for, like, seven minutes, right, because, you know, I'm technically not supposed to be up there but I wanted to. And, when you spend enough time around the guys, you just develop those relationships with them. I learned about using reclaimed asphalt and asphalt to pave because, at that time, the city owned an asphalt plant, right? I learned that I couldn't get in the way of anything. As much as I wanted to stop certain things, I couldn't get in the way of it.

I learned that, like, Al helped a lot because he helped guide more of the design. Like, I learned about the standards because I went and read about them and I asked people for information and we kind of developed that, right? And, we'd set out kind of a path and Al would draw up, like, these... I don't want to call them rudimentary because they weren't, but kind of construction drawings for our guys to follow and then they would build it. At one point, we built a trail from the end of the South Side Riverfront Park – I can't believe I can remember this – kind of underneath the Birmingham Bridge and we continued to go to where South Side Works was but there was no South Side Works there, really. There was nothing there and we built this trail all the way into this land. Now, the Hot Metal Bridge wasn't done, nothing was finished then, but we wanted this to be part of an alignment because we had parts of the South Side Trail and wanted to continue to build the South Side Trail. And, we did this with our Public

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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Works guys. And then, behind us we had Angelo Ciotti – I can't even believe that I can remember him – he is an artist that worked- he is a sculptor who works with found pieces and he did some work for us on the trail. Like, he made these pieces that we didn't have to take care of and we didn't have to think about them. They were going to go away. They were going to slowly go back into the world. But, he took what we found as we were grading and paving and he created, like, a bench, he created a mount, you know, so it was really actually very beautiful. So, my average day- I don't remember a lot of my average day, but I remember the snippets of being there and going, "Holy shit." Oops. Like, "Holy cow. Like, wow, we, you know, we just built a mile of trail, wow." The other thing that we did for the Mayor, because he wanted this, was, we did mileage markers and signage so that when people were on the trail, they would know where they were. And, at the time, the city had this project called- it was a way-finding project and you can still see the signs – they're color coded. And so, we did that along the trail. We did mile markers and we did signage.

**Avigail Oren:** Was this the belt system thing? No, that's different.

**Darla Cravotta:** Not the belt system. The belt system is a car driving system for the county. This was just a way-finding system and so there's, like, a couple of really old signs still left and written on it. So, if you were on the North Side, you would see a sign that says Andy Warhol Museum.

**Avigail Oren:** I know what you're talking about now.

**Darla Cravotta:** Right?

**Avigail Oren:** Yes.

**Darla Cravotta:** And then, now there's big fancy ones. These were signs that we made in the city sign shop where there were these little mile marker things about this round, stuck in the ground so that you would know what mile you were on. But, we wanted to have, for that conference, Tom wanted to have for that conference kind of a really robust system so when people



## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

---

came to Pittsburgh, which they did, they would go, “Wow. We can’t believe this is the city.”

**Avigail Oren:** So, tell me a little bit about this conference. How involved were you in the planning or was that handled, like, by the sort of international group? Or, were you involved in it and then I’d love to hear, did you attend, what was it like? You know, just a...

**Darla Cravotta:** So, we- I was very involved in the planning of it because it was the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy that were doing it. Tom was one of their first board members and he was still on the board of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, the national group. And so, there were two women, Kate Bickert and Carla Marlow – I still stay in touch with them. And, they were the two conference planners – Kate worked for Rails-to-Trails and Carla was a consultant – and, you know, we put together the sessions and the mobile classrooms and I did a party. So, we did a party, too. So, we did a bridge party. But, a lot of the mobile workshops that we did were on the trail talking about how the city’s changed. And, it was, you know, a couple of days, it was a lot of fun. We had about 1,200 people come to Pittsburgh and nobody could believe, nobody could believe how green the city was. You know, they expected this, like, dirty steel town, gross, failing community – no. You know, it was a vibrant and beautiful and the water and the rivers and a trail system. You know, there was connections, right? A lot happened during this time period, Avigail. I mean, we worked with the state, DCNR to build a cantilever from Point State Park to the North Side and that walkway, that cantilever walkway [along the Fort Duquesne Bridge], was done while Tom was Mayor. I mean, I’m just talking about this and remembering things. That was a huge success that connected – even though you could use the bridges on, the three sister bridges – that cantilever connected the North Side to Point State Park. And, that changed, also, how people had the opportunity to move, so...

**Avigail Oren:** Well, it sounds like it was an incredibly successful event. So, let’s turn to the right-of-way on the South Side. Were you involved when Mayor Murphy negotiated the right-of-way

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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through what would become the Steelers' practice facility and, I believe, UPMC is down there, as well?

**Darla Cravotta:** There's only one piece that I was involved in which is that when they were building, I had to interface for a really short period of time to pull the permits for construction. So then, that allowed Tom to negotiate with UPMC. And, that is basically my memory of it. I left shortly thereafter – the conference – because I was going to do a Ph.D. at CMU. And so, that's where Hannah would pick up.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. All right, so, you go spend, was it a year, year and a half at CMU?

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, a couple of years at CMU, yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** And, you eventually end up at the National Park Service Rails-to-Trails and Conservation Assistance [(RTCA)] Program.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** And, tell me about your portfolio there. Was the GAP Trail in your portfolio of what you were working on with the Parks Service?

**Darla Cravotta:** The GAP Trail was partially in my portfolio. A lot of the work I did was watershed planning in more of Northwestern Pennsylvania. And, working on trail projects with the smaller municipalities- smaller counties that didn't have a lot of bandwidth. But, the GAP was part of it and it was more... You know, everybody, when they did the GAP, they made decisions about how they were going to prioritize and focus trail development, right? People would have to agree to sit that round out, right, wait their turn, however, you want to put it. And, everybody did it which was a, I think, a true collaborative regardless of- you know, it was a collaborative, right? People understood that they'd get their turn, but we had to build while we could or we had to take advantage of whatever. So, my role in the Parks Service was very limited with the GAP, it was more focused on engaging from, you know, I engaged in more rural communities with RTCA. So, I left CMU and I went to work for RTCA. I just had an opportunity; I tripped into it and took it.

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Avigail Oren:** And so, from there you moved on to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and were there for four-ish years.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah. I took- where did you find that all out?

**Avigail Oren:** LinkedIn.

**Darla Cravotta:** Oh.

[Laughter]

**Avigail Oren:** I am a professional researcher.

**Darla Cravotta:** That's right. Yes, I did. I spent four years at the Carnegie Library at that time in which I took a big break from trail development.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes. And so, then it was 2006 that you...

**Darla Cravotta:** I never thought that damned thing would work for anything.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah! I mean...

**Darla Cravotta:** I've tried to figure out how to use it but it's, you know, I get into this technology thing and I go, "I don't really know. Should I upload a picture?"

**Avigail Oren:** Yes, you should, and it is useful for the occasional interviewer.

[Laughter]

**Darla Cravotta:** I'm like, "How did you find that out?"

**Avigail Oren:** Okay, so, you end up at...

**Darla Cravotta:** It was a great job, too, by the way. There's nothing like working in a library. Nothing.

**Avigail Oren:** I have so much to say on that.

[Chuckle]

**Darla Cravotta:** There's nothing like working in a library.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Darla Cravotta:** Having your office in the library, being able to be in the library before it's opened.

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Avigail Oren:** Oh, stop...

[Chuckle]

**Darla Cravotta:** Wait, wait – after it's closed. Wandering the stacks at 7:00 at night when there's nobody there.

**Avigail Oren:** Oh, you're going to make me cry. It sounds so magical.

**Darla Cravotta:** It was such- I mean, my work was community-based but oh, my God.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay, let's loop back to that. All right, so, you're there for four-ish years, you come back to...

**Darla Cravotta:** County government.

**Avigail Oren:** To county government in 2006 as the Special Projects Coordinator for then-County Executive Dan... It's [pronounced] Onorato, right?

**Darla Cravotta:** Onorato, yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, what trail-related projects did you begin working on and was it immediately after taking that job or did you sort of segue into it later?

**Darla Cravotta:** Well, I was hired, originally, to work on municipal issues. I love municipal government but immediately, immediately, like, day two, I was no longer working on municipal government issues. I was working part-time for a number of years. And so, it was a big welcome back with Linda Boxx. And, it was a big welcome back to Sandcastle. And so, let's go back to '93.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes.

**Darla Cravotta:** So, it was a big welcome back. And so, you know, I sat with Linda – I probably still have this, I know she's probably given it to whomever – and she had a book of gaps. The gaps of the GAP. And, this was, like, 2006 and we sat and she was convincing us that what we needed to do was hire a circuit rider to wake up every single day and think about this. And, we did. We hired Jack Paulik. And, you know, there was kind of a match. I think she provided money, the state provided a match so that Jack could get up every single day and think about the

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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gaps in the GAP in Allegheny County. And, he did. And so, while we were all- and by “we” I mean there were several of us – Andy Beckley, Dave Wright, myself – while we were involved in looking at the gaps in the GAP – our economic development department – there were two things that I kind of more directly was involved in. One was, basically, saying yes to the Riverton Bridge when U.S. Steel was going to give it to us which was negotiated by Linda, more or less. And, the completion of Sandcastle. So, it was, like, full circle. And so, GAP-related, was those two pieces, more or less.

- Avigail Oren:** So, I have a follow-up question to what you had said about Sandcastle when you’re talking about 1993. So, you said that Henninger had offered some property to Mayor Masloff?
- Darla Cravotta:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** And...
- Darla Cravotta:** My understanding, yes.
- Avigail Oren:** Who had declined.
- Darla Cravotta:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** Was Henninger offended- was this... I guess I’m trying to understand why, like, the about-face? You know, why would Henninger go from offering it to then being obstructionist?
- Darla Cravotta:** I don’t know. I mean, I don’t know why he... You know, I think he offered it before he built Sandcastle. I don’t remember when Sandcastle was built. There’s- Sandcastle was built straddling the City of Pittsburgh and West Homestead. So, he could have offered property to Sophie and Sophie didn’t think- Mayor Masloff, she didn’t think it was worthwhile. I don’t know. She didn’t know what she was going to be able to do with it.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. I understand. Okay. So, jumping forward again in time, let’s talk about...
- Darla Cravotta:** There were a lot of things that happened along that stretch.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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- Darla Cravotta:** There was a- there used to be an oil, like an oil depot. You know where the big oil things are? Where Caruso sits. Where Caruso Paving sits. I don't know if Caruso is still in business. I heard that they went out of business. And, I remember when those went up for sale. I was working for Murphy and they- because the city can only pay appraised value for property and it was a sealed bid, they had the property appraised... Oh, I wish I could remember how much it was. I can't even believe I'm remembering this. And, the URA made a bid for it but, of course, we were woefully under bid, right? That would have saved time building a trail but because governments are- our hands are tied in terms of how much we can pay for property.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Darla Cravotta:** And if we're using public dollars and there was not yet, at that point, locally, a lot of investment in the city system by foundations.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Darla Cravotta:** Okay, so I was thinking about that.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, okay. So, in 2006, the Sandcastle link is one of the few gaps that needs to really be taken care of and it is a tough one and requires a lot of negotiation. It seems like your boss, Dan Onorato, really took the lead in this work. Were you involved as well? Explain a bit about how this issue eventually gets settled and how the right-of-way...
- Darla Cravotta:** Sandcastle?
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Darla Cravotta:** So, it's .85 miles of the GAP and there were 28 parcels, I think, of land that Jack was working on. Henninger essentially told us that he was not going to be agreeable to us going through his property. I was in a lot of the meetings that were held. Dan may have had a couple of phone calls with him, but most of the discussions were with me or with me and maybe the Public Works guys, the- Linda, a lot with Linda. At one point, we were meeting about this and Henninger said- there's

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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a guy there named Pete... Pete... What's Pete's name? I don't remember Pete's last name. There was a guy there named-

**Avigail Oren:**

Peter McAneny?

**Commented [AO2]:** Have you since recalled or been able to confirm Pete's name?

**Darla Cravotta:**

Yeah, I don't remember Pete... I'll think about it. Pete was there and he wasn't there. We were meeting in a building across the RDC and Harry Henninger said he's having a root canal now and he'd rather- he would have rather been there than here. I mean, Mr. Henninger was not interested in accommodating the trail system through Sandcastle and we could not figure out why. It was really hard to figure out why or what was the motivation or what was the issue. We couldn't figure it out. West Homestead didn't want to accommodate the trail system. Homestead accommodated. Munhall did. But, West Homestead provided variances for the trail, pushed it out onto the sidewalks. Didn't allow it to go through- behind a hotel or behind Costco. I mean, there was a lot of resistance to that system in this little area. And, it was confusing. The Mayor of Homestead at that time did not see it happening, didn't see the reality of it. You know, I don't know why. Sandcastle didn't see the value in it. I mean, you know, this is a place that you could have biked to if you're a kid and by then when we were talking, you know, there were connections – the Hot Metal Bridge was being built. There were systems into Oakland. You could take a bus to the South Side and get off and ride your bike down the... You know, there were a lot of opportunities but he just didn't see the value. Sandcastle didn't really happen until the property was sold. And, once the property was sold to Parques Reunidos- once the property was sold is when there was more engagement by Dan.

**Commented [AO3]:** Can you insert [in brackets] what this abbreviation stands for?

**Avigail Oren:**

I see. Okay. And, do you remember what year that sale was in? I mean, I can look it up.

**Darla Cravotta:**

So, we had the grand opening in 2013.

**Avigail Oren:**

Right.

**Darla Cravotta:**

Linda received a RACP grant [Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program, State of Pennsylvania Office of the Budget] two years prior to that, two or three years prior to that. It was

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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sold... I don't remember when it was sold. It was sold... When it was sold, we started having discussions. As soon as it was sold, we started having discussions. They were not that willing. There was a guy there, Dondero...

**Avigail Oren:**

Yeah, Damien Dondero.

**Darla Cravotta:**

Damien Dondero, he was the [general] manager [of Sandcastle]. Scott... Oh, what was Scott's last name? He was the nephew of Harry Henninger. And, they were very helpful at working with the home office in getting it through. Again, but still, very small, very limited. No access points. We had multiple meetings in the county executive's office with the, you know, whoever it was. Kind of the guy that- and I have his name actually at my office, now that I'm thinking about it. We had multiple meetings with him to try to negotiate it. We hired, well, his name is Brian Kruell who worked for a company to actually do all the drawings for it. He worked for the county. He kept working for the county without money. He was so fabulous. To negotiate a right-of-way, we discovered that when we negotiated the right-of-way that some of the property that the road was built on was actually built on railroad property. So then, we had to acquire a small easement from CSX. And, when we acquired the small easement from CSX and we had to go through this whole exercise in demonstrating that we were not going to be changing existing conditions because the railroad didn't want to sell us this, essentially, this triangle of land. So, you know, I remember this feeling, at one point, thinking, "Oh, my God. It has been 20 years since we started talking about this." Like, and I keep, like, it's .85 miles. It's like, wow, like, you know, how can something so small... Avigail, we looked at so many alternatives – going down 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, going along 837, I think it is, building a ramp down to Carson Street, connecting to the Glenwood Bridge.

I mean, we looked at so many things and when this company finally said yes, it was like, oh my gosh, that was it, right? It was wow. It was a huge deal. And, the joke we had with Linda and Michele Gornick and I – when Linda would have grand openings, you know, there was this big grand opening when the county did this one piece in RIDC [Regional Industrial

**Commented [AO4]:** Have you recalled or confirmed this name?

**Commented [AO5]:** Can you clarify—is this the Pittsburgh office of Parques Reunidos?

**Commented [AO6]:** Can you fill this in?



## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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Development Corporation] Duquesne and she loved balloon arches. So, we had this surprise balloon arch for her because she loved balloon arches and she had pulled so much political clout to get this stuff done that it was, like, such a giant celebration. And, that's when Rich was there.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, and I was there.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. I mean, who doesn't love a good balloon arch? That's terrific. So, that's the Sandcastle story. Let's talk bridges. So, you mentioned earlier you were involved in the Riverton Bridge negotiations. You accepted, like, you were the representative for the county who accepted responsibility for the bridge or the ownership of the bridge?

**Darla Cravotta:** Very limited. Tom Sterling, who worked for U.S. Steel, who also kind of over-managed Union Railroad which is owned by U.S. Steel, had talked with Linda about this. Linda talked to me about it and I was like, "Well, of course, we'll accept it for a buck, yes. Absolutely, why wouldn't we?" And, we had a meeting at, you know, we had a meeting about it. And, you know, Tom Sterling was there. John Surma was there. I don't remember if Linda was there, maybe she was, probably. Dan was there- Dan Onorato was there and I was there, too. And, I had already basically said yes. I can't say yes to anything and I don't have the authority to just accept a railroad bridge and so, but Dan knew about it and so he was all prepared. He just said yes. You know, he knew.

**Avigail Oren:** What does it mean for the county to acquire a bridge? Like, why was that necessary and what does it mean?

**Darla Cravotta:** So, it was necessary so we could connect the system in McKeesport to the system over in Duquesne safely. So, that's the first part. It was super necessary. There is a memo from 1986 that Larry Ridenour wrote to Union Railroad that says, "We would like to cantilever off this bridge so we can connect from one side to another," right? It's there. There was, again, Larry Ridenour, right? And so, to accept a bridge, to accept any property from the county is just a legal action. We take

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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legal action. We accept ownership of it, right? And, it's a legal process. It's done through a council. Our Public Works Department can accept it pretty quickly. And, what we did in the case of this is we accepted it and then we, in turn, entered into an agreement with the Regional Trail Corporation which allowed Jack Paulik to take over the project itself.

**Avigail Oren:** The build out.

**Darla Cravotta:** And, manage the build-out without having to go through a lot of the other, you know, not bypass any of the safety issues but allow the project to be done with project dollars.

**Avigail Oren:** Rather than waiting for the county to get around to doing it.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, or getting additional dollars. There's some money that was DCNR money, there's some money that was private money. And, I think Linda pulled down some donations around some work that was done on that, yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** And, does the county agree to maintain it? Is that part of the...?

**Darla Cravotta:** We inspect it, yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** Inspect it.

**Darla Cravotta:** We inspect it. I mean, maintenance is, you know, limited and we partner with a trail organization to do some of that, but maintaining a bridge is a little bit different. So, if there was a big problem with the bridge, we would have to take it on. So, if something got- if a barge got hit or struck the bridge or whatever because that's all navigable waterways, we would have to manage- we would manage it.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** All right, I just wanted it to be clear for the record, like, what exactly it means for the county to acquire a bridge.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, we own it. We own it.

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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**Avigail Oren:** Okay. And, what about the revamping of the Hot Metal Bridge? Were you involved in that at all?

**Darla Cravotta:** No. No, I wasn't.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Darla Cravotta:** I was there when they opened it.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Darla Cravotta:** But, I was not.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Darla Cravotta:** Walked across it before it was...

**Avigail Oren:** That must have been fun.

**Darla Cravotta:** Part of... Yeah. Yeah, it was really cool. And, that was back in the- when they had just acquired the LTV site but not when it was done.

**Avigail Oren:** And, were you involved in the Mon Wharf renovation?

**Darla Cravotta:** No, but I will tell you that the- in about 1998- '99, there was a drawing done for Tom to show a ramp that connected the end of the Eliza Furnace Trail or what was going to be a trail down to the Mon Wharf. Because Tom wanted mile zero to be at the Point. And so, that was done a long time ago. So, but no.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. And, do you know who did do that work? Was it the Riverlife Task Force and...?

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, it was Riverlife. I mean, it took a very long time for them to, I think, raise the dollars and then do it. But it was, I think, at the end of the day, it was between Riverlife Task Force but the City of Pittsburgh did all the project management and managed the construction because they own that ramp.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. And, who is the Riverlife Task Force? Like, is it a volunteer group? Is it...?

**Darla Cravotta:** So, in... I don't remember exactly what year it was, but Tom had a meeting with Paul O'Neal and John Craig and they were talking about ways and I actually was in this meeting for some

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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reason. They were talking about ways to manage development in the Golden Triangle area and they were concerned about- this was when they started to talk about casinos, riverboat gambling – there was this huge discussion about it and they determined what they were going to do is they were going to develop an organization and they would call it Riverlife Task Force. And, Riverlife Task Force would help set design guidelines and help set guidelines for development in this particular area. And, Davitt Woodwell was the first- he, like, took a leave of absence from Pennsylvania Environmental Council and was the first kind of director of Riverlife Task Force which is now called Riverlife, but it was Riverlife Task Force then, so...

**Avigail Oren:** Okay, that's really helpful. So, let's shift to the Pittsburgh 250<sup>th</sup> celebration. Were you involved in any of the lead-up and planning of events or was your participation limited to just helping finish the gaps on the trail?

**Darla Cravotta:** The only thing that we did as part of Pittsburgh 250- I mean, Dan rode in from a place- he rode across the Riverton Bridge – was that much of the trail wasn't finished through- much of the trail wasn't finished in Allegheny County and we had to have- we had state police and the local police ride with the riders and I helped coordinate some of that in Allegheny County. Maybe state police and county police, I think state police were there. I want to tell you the Governor was there but I don't remember. And, we had them coordinate. They actually rode alongside them until they got to where the trail was finished.

**Avigail Oren:** So, what was the intention? Was this to show these police officers that- the trail or this was just for protection?

**Darla Cravotta:** No, it was just for protection. For security. Because people were riding on the road.

**Avigail Oren:** I understand.

**Darla Cravotta:** They were on the road, I'm sorry.

## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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- Avigail Oren:** Okay, I mean I was envisioning... There were so many times that people were brought onto the trail to help them see the vision, right?
- Darla Cravotta:** Right. Yeah, the cops were never brought on to the trail to see the vision but- or maybe they were but the- but we used, for 250, we used police for safety reasons.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. And so, the county wasn't really involved.
- Darla Cravotta:** No, this was a project of the conference – the Allegheny Conference.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. All right. So, did you attend the celebration in June 2013 that was the, like, official end of the GAP Trail's construction?
- Darla Cravotta:** Mm-hmm, I did.
- Avigail Oren:** And, what are your recollections from that day?
- Darla Cravotta:** I remember the balloon arch, of course, is very important. I remember... You know, when you kind of step back and you think about... So, let me just say it a different way – I've always worked for elected officials so for them, the end result is the work that they've accomplished, right? And, I've always taken great pride in that. It's a really good feeling to be able to see your boss and bosses, at that point, stand up on a stage and talk about the completion of a system that you understood. Like, I understood it. You know, I understood Meyersdale and I knew Confluence and I got West Newton, right? I mean, I understood it. I knew the work that Linda had done. And, there's something really special about being able to just sit there and listen to it, right? Watching, you know, Linda ride in. Watching them speak – Congressman Doyle was there. Rich spoke, Tom spoke and then we rode, right? And, we all got on our bikes and we rode. And, we rode to, you know, the Point. So, it was just a really good feeling of like, wow, it's not done but this part's over, right? And, that was the one thing that I've said is that we're not done, we're not finished. It's just that there's one part that's over now. There's still a lot to be done.
- Avigail Oren:** So, what, at that point, did you see still left to be done?

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Darla Cravotta:** Well, besides the ramp down to the Mon Wharf, right, which is just opened – that was part of but never really part of The Great Allegheny Passage work because most of the GAP work there was, you know, kind of led by Linda, right? And, Linda would coordinate all of that work and that wasn't part of the official GAP. There was nobody on our board that was working on that particular piece. It was a very distinct piece with Riverlife, right? And, I think that's totally fine, it was really great. But, what I mean is, you know, The Great Allegheny Passage is a tool that is not- I mean, yeah, sure, it's recreational tourism but it also has turned into a commuting route for people that live in certain communities which is really great. It is an economic development engine. It's, for those same communities, there continues [to be] a need to invest [in] the system. The maintenance, the overall maintenance. I mean, if you think, the trail's 40 years old. No matter how, you know, recent Sandcastle was finished, there are segments along the trail that are that old. There are landslides, there's drainage issues, there's the overall upkeep of it. There's the beauty, the scenic beauty and the view sheds that need to be constantly protected and need to be protected from potential development. And, you know, so it's not done, right? And, my involvement in the GAP didn't stop on the 13<sup>th</sup>, you know, in June of 2013. It actually intensified in a lot of ways because all [of] the sudden you're like, you know, you experience, you were a part of- a really small part of that experience and you- and then somehow you get thrust into another thing. I mean, Linda- when Linda rolled off the board- I mean, she rolled off the board because she had- I was, like, the President of the Allegheny Trail Alliance all of the sudden. I was like, "What is this about?" And, that's when you start to realize, like, the amount of work it took to build a trail was extraordinary, right? Kind of the focus and the push- like, my little sections, Avigail, when you ask about them, like, I remember having my two-year-old on the trail when Linda and a bunch of people rode in, right? And, it was so nice to see people ride on the Eliza Furnace. It was just so great, right? But, when all of the sudden you realize that the work that the people have done throughout all of that time and that it's just never really finished, you begin to realize the scope of a system like that.

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Avigail Oren:** Hmm. That's pretty powerful. I mean, I think you've really reconceptualized it as a living organism much more so than a piece of infrastructure.

**Darla Cravotta:** Because it's the people, actually.

**Avigail Oren:** Yes.

**Darla Cravotta:** I mean, it's the people. I mean, it's the people and, you know, I was talking to my Parks Director the other day and he's the President of the Regional Trail Corporation right now and he said to me, "I just got done [meeting] with Charlie." Well, I met Charlie in 1996 or '97 or whenever I met Charlie. And, Charlie was, you know, cleaning the trail off. Well, he's still doing it and he had this little thing called "Charlie's Chain Gang." And, there were five landslides in the area that he takes care of. And so, the fanfare and the importance of finishing the system is crucial.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Darla Cravotta:** But, it's not done.

**Avigail Oren:** But, it's not done. It seems like there was a lot of overlap between people serving in city, county government and on the ATA, RTC boards. Why do you think that was?

**Darla Cravotta:** Hannah and I are symbiotically connected somehow.

[Chuckle]

**Avigail Oren:** Well, and also you just mentioned... Oh, I'm sorry. I'm blanking on the name of the person you just mentioned who's serving on...

**Darla Cravotta:** Andy Beckley?

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Darla Cravotta:** So, Andy I met when I worked for the National Park Service and Andy was the Parks Director in Washington County.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Commented [A07]:** Correct? Is this the implication?

**Commented [A08]:** Can you add Charlie's last name and title [in brackets]?

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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**Darla Cravotta:** And so, he took a job in Allegheny County and he's been with the county, I don't know, let's just say 15 years or so, right? So, he took a job working for, I think, Jim Roddey. I can't remember what Andy- when Andy started. But, when Andy left Washington County, he came to work for Allegheny County. And so, he got involved with the Regional Trail Corporation. He always loved trails and that's how I met him, is we were working on a trail that went to West Virginia when I worked for the National Park Service.

**Avigail Oren:** So, you know, it does seem that, like, people who really have a passion for this work end up doing it not only in their professional lives but also in their volunteer hours and- or did you always see your role with ATA or RTC as being part of your professional work?

**Darla Cravotta:** I was really fortunate that it got to be part of what I did, right? And so, I was lucky, right?

**Avigail Oren:** Right, yeah.

**Darla Cravotta:** You know, Hannah was lucky. Hannah and I worked together in the Mayor's office and so Hannah came behind me and then we worked together when she was with PEC, blah, blah, blah. So, we have a lot of overlap in our work, and Andy, right, but I think what happens is- like, I never thought I would do trail development. I mean, I was in community development, right? I loved neighborhood development, but there's not a lot of difference in it. I mean, there is but it's not. It's infrastructure, sure. It is infrastructure and its alignment. It's a connection that's connecting these communities together and it holds people together. I mean, I, over the last four years, when I've been... leading is a hard term, but when I've been the President of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, I have never been so serious about a task that is not directly related to my work because there is such a legacy.

Like, I mean, I can see these guys sitting around the board meeting and they were all people that raised money with Linda and they cared about it so much that the... Like, I wouldn't say the responsibility was but understanding that it wasn't just a trail group. Like, that was part of it. Like, understanding that it's



## **DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW**

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not just a trail group. And, I ride, right? I love riding on the trails. I don't ride on the road. I think trails are the way to go. I think they're safer, they're flatter, they're nicer. But, it was probably- I mean, I'm on a few boards but this was one of the boards that I was on that I was like, "Well, I'm glad this is part of my job but, wow. Like, I'm really, like, invested in the success of it." And, what's really nice about this, too, Avigail, is that my boss, Rich Fitzgerald, he started a few years ago. He rode on a Healthy Ride back during the very first open streets which I was a part of. We thought, this is very cool, I'll be a part of open streets. So, we were a part of open streets, he rode on this bike and he kind of got addicted to it. And, I mean, "addicted" is strong, but he really was like, "Wow, this is really great." And so, it doubles the opportunity for me because then to be able to invest additional time in a project that's really, really important makes a lot of sense, too, because he likes the GAP. He talks about it, he understands it. He understands the economic benefits. And, seeing that kind of stuff, for me, is very cool.

**Avigail Oren:** So, this is sort of the opportunity at the end for you to talk about anything that didn't occur to me to ask about, things that you think are important to put down for posterity – stories, any stories you have that are, you know, fun and special, you know, even if they're not historically significant. But, this is just sort of me opening the floor for you to talk about anything that I missed.

**Darla Cravotta:** You know, I don't really have much more to say. I think one of the things that the GAP has given the region, you know, this large region, is this impetus to keep connecting to other places. And, that is really a gift because, you know, we've been working on this system of the Allegheny to connect to Erie, right? People are connecting to Ohio, connecting to West Virginia. So, the GAP itself creates this model of what it means to connect and why these towns are really important and that it's just not this trail, right? The one thing I've never figured out is how we can capitalize and monetize it so people understand that the investment that happened is super important but that it needs continued investment and that most of our governments

## DARLA CRAVOTTA INTERVIEW

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don't have the capacity. You know, smaller governments don't have the capacity to do that, so, I don't know.

**Avigail Oren:** So, that's the challenge for the future, is sustainability and trying to maintain momentum past the enthusiasm of building.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah, and that's... And, people are very enthusiastic when you're building and opening a trail. It's a- it is absolutely such a success. You know, when you get through one place and you get to the next and then you get to the next and you get to the next, those little baby pieces are, they're so important. And, but, sustaining the quality and so that ride of your life continues to happen is the challenge for all of us, right? And so, the history of the GAP is so fabulous. It's about a lift by, you know, a group of people that saw these connections. You can't beat that. The sustaining- sustaining that quality is what we have to do and what people behind us need to do and I think that that is a challenge. It's hard to communicate it.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah, yeah. There's no balloon arches anymore. So, yeah.

**Darla Cravotta:** No.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah.

**Darla Cravotta:** Yeah.

**Avigail Oren:** Well, thank you so much for sharing these memories and I'm going to turn off the recording.

**Darla Cravotta:** All right.

[End 1:05:58.7]

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