

# JACK PAULIK PART I

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**Avigail Oren:** ...It pays to be paranoid...

[Chuckle]

...when you're doing this kind of stuff. So, let's get started. So, it is Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019. We are at Beauty Shoppe, Liberty Bank Building at 6101 Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's 1:47 p.m. My name is Avigail Oren and I'm here interviewing Jack Paulik. This is the first part of what will be a two-part interview. Today in this interview, we're going to focus on how Jack became involved with the GAP Trail project, particularly with the Regional Trail Corporation. And, we'll talk about how the project intersected with Jack's day job at the Westmoreland County Parks Department. Jack, I'll ask you about the role you played in building the trail sections leading up to through and beyond Cedar Creek Park and we'll conclude with the formation of the Allegheny Trail Alliance. So, my first question is – why don't you sort of tell me how you ended up at the Westmoreland Parks Department?

**Jack Paulik:** Okay. I guess let me give you a little history of myself. I'm originally from West Newton. So, having grown up there, I would have never thought that the Great Allegheny Passage would have gone through West Newton where the P&LE railroad currently or previously had existed. That's kind of a neat experience to be able to experience that. So, that was something I never expected to see West Newton turn out to be a trail town from a railroad industrial little community along the Youghiogheny River. And, my involvement in trails- well, Westmoreland County Parks. I was employed by Westmoreland County Parks for 30 years and I started out right out of college, several years out of college. It was right around 1974. And, I pretty quickly got into the park development section where I was in charge or park development of a relatively new kind of park system was probably five years old. So, I was kind of on the ground for park development, all facets of county parks. And, what came to my mind which is of interest tying to trails – it was in 1976 that the National Park Service had several grants going out throughout the country. But, we applied for one for rail-to-trail in 1976. The first which is really kind of getting on the ground

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level between Twin Lakes Park and Hanna's Town which were two county parks. We submitted the grant and we were not one that- we weren't one receive the grant for it was kind of a rail trail grant, but it goes back that far. That's kind of my first involvement in trails which that kind of- nothing really happened there.

And, my involvement in the county parks was pretty much develop the county parks. So, I was involved in all the development going on – everything from pavilions, ballfields, parking lots, comfort facilities. I built a lake in one of the parks, all type of athletic facilities. But, the one thing that I probably think right now is kind of- I pride myself more than any – it was in 1976 that it was at the Bicentennial and there was money made available, federal money made available for accessible facilities. So, at that time, through Westmoreland County, we developed a “make our parks accessible.” And, in doing that, it almost took the entire time that I worked there to make all we had- lakes, which we built, I built one but lakes in three of the parks and Cedar Creek Park does not have a lake, there's a river with a nice bike trail – been around all those lakes. Over that period of time, we built handicap accessible trails around all those lakes and it was actually looked at nationally is like a pretty good accomplishment. And, we did that not only with those trails which were accessible to everyone, but we had really good direction in making all of our facilities that could be made accessible, accessible, but the uniqueness of that was it's accessible to everyone, but you really don't recognize that. And, that was kind of very innovative at that time. And, to this day, I still think the county park system is probably the most accessible county park system. I know it would be in Pennsylvania.

**Avigail Oren:**

So, I mean, what- that really is an accomplishment considering the extent to which so many places still are not accessible.

**Jack Paulik:**

And, those trails encompassing those lakes is probably- and people ride bikes on them, too – probably ten miles of trails, ten miles around the lakes. And, they're used by everyone. And, we did find the trails and bringing people in which will transcend further down the road. It brings in walkers and

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bikers also, but they're good people. And, by putting them in the parks and having them use it daily for exercise, the criminal element disappeared because they don't want to be someplace where they know there's somebody that might see them. And, that really shocked a lot of even people within our system that did maintenance thinking, well, you're building all this infrastructure and it's just going to get damaged. It did not get vandalized because we had a presence of quality people through trail system.

**Avigail Oren:**

That's so interesting. So, I want to ask you what you did on a day-to-day basis as a park planner. Was there any such thing as a regular day, for starters?

**Jack Paulik:**

No, there was no such thing as regular day. I don't know – this may come up another time I was kind of the Department of Jack Paulik.

[Chuckle]

And, here's what I did. I was responsible for soliciting grants. I would solicit grants for all of our park development. And, over half the time, I would not hire a consultant to do a design for me. I would actually, through a lot of skill levels practice and research, I would actually develop the contracts, I would do the engineering for the projects, put it together right to specifications, bid the projects and oversee the construction. So, I did every phase from thinking what the project is to the completion of the project. And then, if we did projects in-house meaning with our own crews, that design concept would still apply to things like the boathouse that we did at Cedar Creek Park- or we did that at Twin Lakes Park, and then all the pavilions and restrooms and ballfields – I would design those and have our in-house construction people build them. I think since I've left that system, that a lot of those elements are now contracted out to contractors to do. But, we were able to do things for ten cents on a dollar because our overhead was so low. And, I had an engineering department that could do surveying for me so they did that. And, we had engineers they could stamp drawings so that's would pretty much what I did for 25-30 years. And, that actually led me up to after 30 years retiring from the Westmoreland County Park System because I

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just was- I had done enough ballfields, pavilions, and infrastructure that I didn't get excited about anything anymore. I thought, "I've been here too long and long enough." I still wasn't that old; I was maybe 50- I think I was 56. And, I just, "This doesn't excite me anymore. I'm going to do something else." You know, the bureaucracy was overburdened so I just wanted to get out. But, I felt that the system really got built very well and Cedar Creek Park, within that system which has a story that we can talk about also, relating more to trails than the other entities within the parks. So, I think building a lake at Northmoreland Park was kind of fun. That was a neat experience and we redid another dam at another project. But, seeing people enjoy what you do is really fun. That was, I think, I had a job that was unique to me because I always saw people enjoyed what I got to work on. It's fun.

**Avigail Oren:** You know, it really is unique. So, tell me – what is the chronology of the development of Rock Creek Park versus the trail portion?

**Jack Paulik:** Cedar Creek Park?

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah, were they concurrent or were they...?

**Jack Paulik:** Okay. Here's- when Cedar Creek Park was not very old, like, when I first started working there and Cedar Creek Park is unique in that it has riverfront about a mile of riverfront access. The P&LE railroad separated the river from the main part of the park. So, for probably ten years, we could not legally access our riverfront because of the P&LE railroad, that that was not- and we've talked to them. And again, you and I have had discussions that railroads are difficult to deal with and they wanted us to put a signal crossing at Cedar Creek Park and it was at that time back in the 70s, it was, like, \$150,000. And, we didn't have \$150,000 to put a signal crossing and for a railroad that gets used, like, once a day. So, we never made that contact. And then, when the railroad was near- was not being used anymore and looking for abandonment and eventually railbanked which was probably, I think, around '94-'95.

**Avigail Oren:** It was earlier, actually. It was early 80s.

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**Jack Paulik:** 80s?

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. So, they stopped running trains in 1988.

**Jack Paulik:** In 1988?

**Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.

**Jack Paulik:** Okay, and I'll just jump back on that for a second because the last train I remember on that railroad – I was on a long trip in Arizona and I was returning home. I mean, I honestly thought it was maybe in the mid-90s, but I remember stopping at the crossing in West Newton and having to wait for a train to cross that railroad. And, I keep thinking back to that experience. I had to stop for a train crossing at the P&LE railroad in West Newton. But anyway, it was up for abandonment and eventually, it became railbanked. And, by doing that, then we thought we had access to the riverfront.

And, the next big event that happened at Cedar Creek Park in regards to the riverfront was we got a state grant through, I think, it was Representative Manderino. It was a couple hundred thousand dollars to build a riverfront park. So, we used those funds to build that park at Cedar Creek Park. And, we put a road system, we put pavilions, and restrooms, and eventually a concession building down there. And, that was a lot of kind of dissension was looking at that in terms of you're going to have a ton of vandalism here because the only people that come down here are the vandals. And, when we built at riverfront park, it did not happen. But, we always thought, "Oh, now we- Cedar Creek Park, wow. There's a bike trail that runs through it at the time. What is the bike trail going to be if there is a bike trail?" But, that possibility of a bike trail, I think, really got us thinking within the county – "us" is the lower- I'm going to say at our level not the commissioner level but a bike trail will be a pretty neat thing here. I just think where this bike trail could go. It could go to D.C., it could go to Pittsburgh, but that's still a long way off. But, we could have a very neat bike trail here.

**Avigail Oren:** Through the park. So, just clarify.

**Jack Paulik:** Okay.

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- Avigail Oren:** So, there was the portion of the park built before you arrived in the mid-70s?
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah, it was acquired.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. But, it wasn't built out. It was just...
- Jack Paulik:** No, very- minimal build out.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay, okay. So, it really wasn't fully built out until the railroad was abandoned?
- Jack Paulik:** When the road is abandoned.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** We continually were building out. When I started working there and probably '76, I started working – '75 or- I think '75 I started working for the Westmoreland County Parks. It was probably only four or five years old with minimal development. So, we were developing the section of the park above the river which had 400 acres of the park which was underdeveloped at the time.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, if I understand correctly...
- Jack Paulik:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** ...there's the acquisition happened before you arrived.
- Jack Paulik:** Right.
- Avigail Oren:** There had been a little bit of development in certain sections on that land on that property.
- Jack Paulik:** That's correct.
- Avigail Oren:** And then, with the abandonment, plus this funding from- was it Representative Manderino?
- Jack Paulik:** Manderino, state funding.
- Avigail Oren:** Then you were able to really make this park into...
- Jack Paulik:** The Riverfront Park.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah. Which is not part of Cedar...

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**Jack Paulik:** It's part of Cedar Creek Park. It was not- the road stopped. We couldn't go across the railroad tracks.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Jack Paulik:** It was about a mile of riverfront – 40 acres of riverfront.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay, so if I were to go today – like, what was the railroad is now the trail?

**Jack Paulik:** It is the Great Allegheny Passage.

**Avigail Oren:** Right. And, if I wanted to walk, like, essentially, I could walk up to the trail, walk over the trail and then be on the riverfront side. There's no...

**Jack Paulik:** There's no obstruction. It's just the trail.

**Avigail Oren:** Got it, okay.

**Jack Paulik:** Yeah. The trail is where the railroad used to be. And, that- to clarify that, the entire railroad trail, P&LE railroad segment is on the old track location.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, I just wanted to be clear that it wasn't that there wasn't a larger separation than just the track, okay, which is now the trail. Okay. So, you are, I guess, this brings us up into the late 80s when the P&LE stops running trains. And, this sort of raises the prospect of extending the trail from Connellsville to Pittsburgh. And, my question is – at what point did Westmoreland County appoint you to the Regional Trail Council? At what point did the county effort to work on that part?

**Jack Paulik:** Okay, I'll try to back up to get to that point.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah, great.

**Jack Paulik:** And this, again, would be, I guess, early 90s right when the abandonment was possible or coming up. Me myself as a county representative along with Malcolm Sias. We attended a meeting in Connellsville. And, the name of the man was Dave Trumba. He was from Connellsville and he pursued acquiring funds from the National Park Service to do a feasibility study. That's really important because, at that point, there was, I

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think, the first meeting in Connellsville of all the potential partners, all three counties. And, the National Park Service was going to oversee this study. And, during the several meetings that we had, I volunteered to be on the committee to do the feasibility of the 43 miles of P&LE railroad segment. So, myself with someone that probably will not be interviewed and I had talked to – Hovey Cudella – was with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources back then and she was a big proponent of doing this. So, she really was, you know, she kind of spearheaded our walk and Larry Ridenour was on that walk. So, we walked the entire 43 miles and we assessed the corridor for developing it into a rail trail. Now, this probably won't show up very often, but there was another man on that hike and his name was a George and I can't remember his last name. But, he was the proponent of the rail with trail and we were looking at what we did the whole walk thinking rail with trail – he really wanted a rail with trail. But, after we completed that study, it looked almost impossible because all of the structures were, like, single track structures. The bridges were not compatible for two-way traffic we just did. And, the rail corridor was in really bad shape for railroad – I don't know how many millions of dollars it would have cost to keep that railroad intact. The railroad really did not materialize, but the original feasibility was to look at a rail with trail, but the rail side just fell apart.

- Avigail Oren:** Was it supposed to be passenger rail, scenic rail? What...
- Jack Paulik:** Scenic rail, scenic rail. Strictly scenic rail.
- Avigail Oren:** Tourists would come...
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah, scenic rail, right. We can run this as a railroad Historical Society.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** I'm not sure where his interest was. I mean, I just can't remember from 25 years ago. But, he was very- that's what he was looking at in our height to see if we can do that. But, we cataloged everything. We cataloged all the issues with it. And, what we recognized was it had not been abandoned that long,



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but there were a lot of people claiming parts. And, I was involved in kind of stopping that once we acquired this and then created the Regional Trail Corporation. But, it had been dump sites – people putting fences out, you know, using the access to get through their favorite fishing spot. Now it created some situations that were tense at the time. We had one individual in Fayette County put a fence up across the trail “no trespassing” after it was abandoned. We had to deal with that person to take the fence down. And then, I know I told the story one other time, but we had a contractor who was putting up our gates to secure right-of-way once it was acquired by the Regional Trail Corporation which represented the three counties and nonprofit. And, he threatened the people putting the fence in. He said, “If you do this, we're going to harm you a lot,” you know? And then, they said, “This person just showed up and told us that we're going to shoot us if we put these fences up, these gates up.” There was a lot of that going on. And, if this hadn't been railbanked and any of these parcels had been taken out of a contiguous route, it probably would have never happened. It would just be a linear, quite frankly, linear garbage dump because we spent a lot of time organizing cleanups along the railroad prior to building the railroad, the trail.

**Avigail Oren:** I want to go back to the walk.

**Jack Paulik:** Okay.

**Avigail Oren:** How many days was it?

**Jack Paulik:** Okay. We did about five or six miles a day so it's probably eight or ten walks.

**Avigail Oren:** Wow.

**Jack Paulik:** And, that report- Hovey Cudella housed that report and she may have turned that over to someone. But, she had the final report that we did on that walk. And, I think it should be archived someplace where it should be. I think she turned it over.

**Avigail Oren:** So, describe what you were doing.

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- Jack Paulik:** Okay.
- Avigail Oren:** So, you go out...
- Jack Paulik:** We would meet, we would put cars, say, six miles apart to trail locations. And then, we did this pre-vegetation. We did it, like, in March and April. And so, you can see everything. So, as we walked the corridor, we were looking at what the drainage system, if it was satisfactory. How, why the trail, the corridor was, if the ties were still there. We knew that rails were all going to go and incidentally, P&LE did remove the ties and the rail. I mean, the rail obviously was worth a lot of money but to remove the ties it was usually expensive and they took the ties. So, we measured the width, we wanted to see if we had enough ballast for base to build a trail and what kind of issues there were with property owners. And, damage to the trail from just laying idle for a long time, a lot of washouts. We cataloged all that information and took it back and submitted that report to Park Service.
- Avigail Oren:** I'm just trying to imagine you must have been out there with measuring tape...
- Jack Paulik:** We were. We looked through pipes. We measured widths, we measured pipes. And, there's called valuations set of maps that the railroad has. It's their track maps.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** And, we were able to obtain those through the P&LE and they were really a very good resource for us to identify where pipes should be and if they were clogged or missing. And, anywhere there were bridges, we evaluated those, you know. So, the mapping really helped. And, that mapping was done so well that we were able to use it for a lot of our designs for trail improvements, the existing mapping.
- Avigail Oren:** There must have been a relationship with P&LE in order to get these maps. How did that happen?
- [Crosstalk]
- Jack Paulik:** They weren't really that hard to get.

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- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** The maps we could get, we could easily obtain those through the P&LE, but the actual acquisition by the Regional Trail Corporation represented by the three counties – I would credit Larry Ridenour for a lot of that because he knew the vice president of the P&LE railroad. He had done a landscape project for him and the timing was perfect on his ability to present our case to P&LE railroad on abandonment and wanting to acquire this section. And, the three counties – they stepped up – I want to say in wording and they would like to do this and eventually they each paid for their segment of the property acquisition and the railbank to P&LE except for Fayette County which kind of both Allegheny and Westmoreland County pulled them along on the section of- on all of their development. We helped them out a lot on their acquisition and development of the Fayette County section of the trail.
- Avigail Oren:** So, I just want to check something about chronology.
- Jack Paulik:** Okay.
- Avigail Oren:** So, this MPS technical assistance – that was in 1988. They funded it in December of '88.
- Jack Paulik:** Okay.
- Avigail Oren:** So, this walk in the spring of '89 then?
- Jack Paulik:** It was probably '89 or '90. It's so far back, that's probably when it was.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, that I'm just trying to determine if this is different from the Greater Connellsville Chamber of Commerce sponsored study.
- Jack Paulik:** Oh, yes. It would not be the same study.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** At some point, we'll talk about the communities and their involvements because I do have things about Connellsville that when we did our original walkthrough, okay, I'll relate it to

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that. We got to Connellsville and Connellsville – the P&LE railroad in Connellsville it was like a high rail. It was over top of the city kind of like in New York City – they have this...

**Avigail Oren:** The High Line.

**Jack Paulik:** The High Line. It could have been that but the city, I mean, and I'm going to kind of roll this out – Connellsville- most of the largest cities and particularly you got down in the Steel Valley but Connellsville – we'll just talk about that. They gave away a lot of this right-of-way before we had a chance to it. There was a big section that I think West Penn acquired before it was abandoned. They got a piece of the trail, could never be a straight line. And, there was a high, an elevated train station that was a beautiful train station. They got it ripped down. It could have been a spectacular high rail through the city, but the city bureaucrats never embraced the trail as a high priority. It was more business-related commerce. I can't say all of them, but most of the situations it's like if you had had the foresight that you needed, this could have been a really special thing. So, we had to fight to get an alignment through Connellsville and that alignment in Connellsville – I was thinking there's a ramp in Connellsville that goes down the river. And, the city was with the Historical Society – they were always at ends with each other.

And, we had a board member, her name was Chris Wagner. And, I was, again, I was the construction chairman for the Regional Trail Corporation for the entire- from day one till- for the whole thing. So, in Connellsville, she told me, she said, "Jack, what do we need to do this ramp?" And I said, "We need the real estate from the city. We needed it to do this." And, she made it happen. So, that ramp would not have been put in if it wasn't for her effort to straighten out the political agendas of Connellsville.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, we're talking about two sort of separate spheres of that. And, there's the Parks Service, the National Park Service...

**Jack Paulik:** Yes.

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- Avigail Oren:** ...feasibility and later, sort of more of the community-based, you know, Chamber of Commerce-style involvement.
- Jack Paulik:** Right.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, in June of 1989, there's this first formal meeting to discuss the trail. Was this when you guys shared the feasibility study? Or, were you at this meeting? Do you recall having this at first conversation where it seems, like, really possible that the railbed is going to be acquired for the trail?
- Jack Paulik:** I'm sure I was at that meeting. I know whenever we had the final presentation, it was very positive. It was very positive. And, I think from that meeting, that's where we were looking at how do we formulate an organization to achieve these objectives?
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Jack Paulik:** And, the Regional Trail Corporation, again, with a cooperation the counties and strategic individuals from those counties put together an agreement for the nonprofit to be created to represent the three counties to build this trail section, to build this trail.
- Avigail Oren:** So, is that the Memorandums of Understanding that were signed to 1990?
- Jack Paulik:** I would say yes, but I'm not recalling that.
- [Crosstalk]
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah, I know, it's too hard to remember.
- Jack Paulik:** That's right. I'm recalling that, too. The answer would be yes.
- Avigail Oren:** Right, okay. Great. So, take me up to the point where you where the RTC is founded and you find yourself a part of it.
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah. Well, RTC is pretty much formulated from that initial study group from the AIHP and...
- Avigail Oren:** What does that acronym stand for?
- Jack Paulik:** American Industrial Heritage Preservation.

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- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** I'm pretty sure that's it.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay, got it.
- Jack Paulik:** Oh, AIHP – let me back up. I may be incorrect on that the AIHP was federal funds and commerce and Murtha was able to lobby for those and we use the AIHP funding to do our early development for the Regional Trail Corporation.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** It was money that came through his office that we really- the first two or three years of our trail development we did our development with those funds.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** That's AIHP program. One of the unique features of that was that those funds did not have a lot of strings attached to them which was very unusual. In other words, if we wanted to do three miles a trail, we could put together plans and specifications and validate it and get the money. If you have a good project, we'll fund it. It didn't have the strings attached that so many other grants do. So, we were able to use that money very effectively. And, trail construction – the first, I think, was '93-'94 – we did a segment- I think I'm going to back up. Once the Regional Trail- I don't know- I'm going to separate this. Once the Regional Trail Corporation was formed, I was part of the original formulation. I can't remember where- 18 people or how many were involved, but we would meet once a month. But, when I became part of the construction chair, I shared that chair with Larry Ridenour for maybe five years. And then, he moved on to other things and I stayed until we completed everything. But, we hired a consultant GWS&M and they designed the entire section of- they designed the entire 43 miles of the trail for us. They did rough designs for the...
- [Crosstalk]
- Avigail Oren:** Is it an architectural firm or- just trying to...

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- Jack Paulik:** It's a landscape architectural firm out of Pittsburgh.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** Bruce Wallace, Wayne Mullen- those are three of the- probably not alive now.
- [Chuckle]
- They probably aren't, but we hired them so to do a design for construction for the entire 43 miles. And, I will say that they did a good job. And, some of those design standards still stand up today...
- Avigail Oren:** Oh, that's amazing.
- Jack Paulik:** ...on typical detail sections that we used to do trails that were initially done. We worked with them on what we wanted and the trail with standardized ten-foot width with our ash to number ten limestone dust trail surface. That is used by- in southwestern Pennsylvania on almost all trail systems for the trail surface.
- Avigail Oren:** I am a historian and not an engineer.
- Jack Paulik:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** This is always sort of mind-blowing.
- Jack Paulik:** Okay.
- Avigail Oren:** I'm not a process person.
- Jack Paulik:** Okay
- Avigail Oren:** So, the thought that someone had to think that there has to be width...
- Jack Paulik:** Oh, yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** ...that someone had to think there had to be material. Where is this coming from? Are you pulling from references, inspirations, codes?
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah. There were design standards for bike trails...
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.

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- Jack Paulik:** ...national, state standards. And, there were many trails that were built. We looked at all these standards to pick out what we thought was the best standards for our trail development. That research was really available. And then, we designed what we found is best for our trail system like a ten-foot-wide trail would be considered a Class 1 bikeway free of motorized vehicles. So, our objective was we want a Class 1 bikeway. This is going to be a Class- we want non-motorized, safe. That was our objective is to provide that for the entire Pittsburgh to D.C. at the time – we weren't thinking that. We were, but kind of like, “Oh, we had a dream last night,” yeah.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. Well, I mean, I think that's important to put down. This was always very intentional, that it was going to be top of, you know, top of the field, top of the class, only the best.
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah, we wanted it to be great. And, **Argon Usses [? 0:37:51.9]** the management team – we decided that we wanted to do initially a section in each county that would show people that's a good thing. So, we did a section that connected West Newton and Cedar Creek Park – this I think was in '94 – first piece done. We did one in Allegheny County. I think it was, like, from Buena Vista...
- Avigail Oren:** To Greenock.
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah, to Greenock. And then, we did one in Allegheny County that went from, I think Dawson to Adelaide.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah.
- Jack Paulik:** And, we do those, like, we're going to do these and we want to see what kind of positive... Then if people use them, they're going to want us to do more. That was our objective. We want buy-in.
- Avigail Oren:** Proof of concept.
- Jack Paulik:** Right. And, we weren't surprised by that. And, I think I don't think I mentioned that, but by being appointed by Westmoreland County to the Regional Corporation board, I did have the flexibility to move about the other counties because I was on the that board representing the Regional Trail



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Corporation. So, I did a lot of project management in both those other counties and building the trail.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. So, I wanted to ask you about that because to me, you know, if I were managing staff, I, you know, this is Westmoreland County, Westmoreland County funding and effort. I wouldn't necessarily want my staff doing work in other counties. And, maybe I'm asking you to speculate, but what, you know, why did someone sign off on this?

**Jack Paulik:** Okay. The fact that I was a representative of the Regional Trail Corporation – I think I assumed that liberty.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

[Chuckle]

**Jack Paulik:** Okay, because I knew it was necessary. So, I just acted on what I thought was in the best interest of the trail and my representation on that board.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. So, no one pushed back on it?

**Jack Paulik:** I didn't get the pushback. But, I will say, as the years went by, and we had new directors, there was pushback from directors that really- I'm going to say we're more politically tied then committed to what they were committed to the park and recreation field, okay, I will say that and that that should stand pretty...

**Avigail Oren:** Mm-hmm.

**Jack Paulik:** A lot of times we did what we thought was the right thing to do.

**Avigail Oren:** Right, right.

**Jack Paulik:** And, I would just say this within my working relationship with Westmoreland County – I was given extreme latitude on park development. I mean, even within my immediate directors almost never said, "Work on this, do what you- do what's in the best interest of what you think you should do." I was given a tremendous amount of latitude on... But, there was plus- the negative side of that was because of politics – if I did

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something that wasn't looked at favorably, I didn't have support to back me up.

**Avigail Oren:** Right. Like, "Why did you do..." So, I was acting always on my own interest and politics. I mean, you do a lot of these quality projects throughout my county career and you don't expect accolades because the politicians come out and grab that and that's okay. I never had a problem with that anyway.

[Crosstalk]

**Avigail Oren:** You weren't a politician, right?

[Chuckle]

**Jack Paulik:** Never was, never will be.

[Chuckle]

**Avigail Oren:** Right, right. It's self-selection that happens. All right. So, let's talk about these three sections that are built between 1992 and 1994.

**Jack Paulik:** Okay.

**Avigail Oren:** One in each county. Why were these particular sections chosen?

**Jack Paulik:** We chose them because we wanted to get close to a population area. So, we wanted to see use, we wanted to see instant use an instant reaction. And, in Allegheny County, the only negative reaction we had when we first built that section of trail was, we have too many people coming down to use it, they're parking everywhere. That was a reaction we had. It was like it was instant success. It was instant popularity. In Westmoreland County, we had between Cedar Creek and West Newton we had good trail access so we just had- we love this, but we didn't have any negative kickback and in Allegheny County- in Fayette County, the section we built was a little bit more removed from the population, but here's the reason why. The section that connected from Adelaide to Connellsville, okay, this is unique, because this trail system got built using many different methodologies. Here's a unique story. You won't hear this one from too many people because

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[inaudible 0:43:26.4] We had a section of this trail had coal underneath it...

**Avigail Oren:** Oh!

**Jack Paulik:** ...because it was a railroad. So, the railroad disappeared. So, that coal now had value and it could be mined. So, we got bids from contractors and the contractor was Piccolini from Fayette County. They gave us a bid to mine the coal under the trail through a cut and in payback, they agreed we were going to get a royalty for the coal. We didn't get much money for the coal, but they agreed to build the trail section from there back to Connellsville, okay?

**Avigail Oren:** That's terrific.

**Jack Paulik:** So, we took the deal. And, that's how it got built. And, I'm going to manage that project. It wasn't easy, but they removed the coal under the railroad, they stripped it...

**Avigail Oren:** Just a seam?

**Jack Paulik:** A seam, right.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Jack Paulik:** It might have been ten feet down, they took that seam out because you could not do that when the railroad was there because structurally, it could be a problem.

**Avigail Oren:** Right. But, for the trail wasn't putting enough...

**Jack Paulik:** So, we mined the coal and the board was totally- because we didn't have- the board didn't have a lot of money – it's a nonprofit.

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Jack Paulik:** We need every dollar to stretch it out. So, we used the money we got from that to continue to build trail sections. And, that contractor built that rail section for us, yeah.

[Crosstalk]

**Avigail Oren:** And so, you handed the contract to the designs from your...

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- Jack Paulik:** We have the designs- we had the, right, TW design specs. And, he built this trail and we oversaw it and made sure it was done the way we want it done. And, he did a good job. He built it for us. We were happy and he was happy. We didn't get rich on the coal, but we got a trail.
- Avigail Oren:** Right. I mean, as you said, every little bit counts.
- Jack Paulik:** That's right.
- Avigail Oren:** That is very interesting.
- Jack Paulik:** Along with that...
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah...
- Jack Paulik:** I mean, we had other sections built. We had sections of this trail built uniquely. We had a section in Allegheny County that was done by the township. They built about five or six miles. Elizabeth Township built five or six miles of the trail. And we, the Regional Trail Corporation, bought them some equipment to do it. I think we bought them a grader or something and they built six miles of the trail. We bought the materials and they built it with their workforce. And, Rostraver Township in Westmoreland County – they did some grading for us also. They did some work. And, are you going to talk at all about the trail chapters?
- Avigail Oren:** I'm not sure.
- Jack Paulik:** The only thing I wanted to bring up about- here's why I was going to bring that up. The trail chapters – initially, there were three or four – one in each county. And, they were great because that's why the state looks at us as a Regional Trail Corporation is being this very successful organization because it had trail chapters that were doers. And, what I found in the trail building world – because I've done a lot – is that when the grassroot level engages, these trail chapters help build this trail, they helped raise money, they built bridges, they remove debris. Then their tie into maintaining this trail is like, "This is ours." And, that's why the section that the Regional Trail Corporation oversees in Connellsville down to Allegheny County, Allegheny County line about probably 45 or 46 miles –

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it's 100%- it's a volunteer base. These volunteers- because I worked in the county. At the time, I would call in these volunteers before I would call on county people. "Hey, here's a problem." I enjoyed working with them because their attitudes were great. So, these volunteer trail chapters were really quality and who comes to mind in Allegheny County was Charlie Smith. And, you may come across him sometime, but he was like from day one, he was like, "I'm in 100%," you know, "...on maintaining and building the trail." And, what that trail chapter did in Allegheny County – we had a section of trail that I'm going to take you- I'm going to flip a coin here. The section from Smithon to Dawson. So, like 13 miles of trail. We called it the "Outback." And, we got a grant, a transportation enhancement grant called a "T grant," federal money to do that. And, everyone said in the trail community, "This money is money from hell, you cannot use it." It's so complicated, so many bureaucratic design challenges. So, we ended up- it's about \$700,000 which was a lot of money back then. And, I said, "We're going to give it a shot," you know. So, we hired a consultant, Nealon Engineers, to be our designer. And, I said, "Give me the scope of everything that needs to be done, like the bullets."

So, we went through the design process to use that money and we hired that engineering firm with local money. I'm pretty sure we had fundraising money they came from our fundraising committee within the Regional Trail Corporation and designed the 13 miles. But, what I'm getting at – here is I'm taking a story. There were, like, five bridges on this section and for me, I don't know. You know, we're going to put them into design and there was a guy in PennDOT who was our PennDOT coordinator. He was a bike and pedestrian coordinator. His name was Jerry Dendo. He said, "Jack, take the bridges out, they're going to kill the project." I go, "Why?" He said, "Because historically and from a standpoint of bridge work with PennDOT money, you're never going to get this through all the reviews and regulations which I know now is correct."

[Chuckle]

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So, I pull all the bridges out of the contract and took the design up to the bridge, skipped the bridge and did just- we're only going to build the trail and not going to touch the bridges. In that contract, we completed it very effectively within that timeframe. But, if we had used that federal money on those bridges, the reviews and design... See, the federal bridge design requires a design that's rock solid. So, we took those bridges and here's what I'm getting at with the trail chapters, the Fayette, the Allegheny County trail chapter. And, Charlie was the president of that.

**Avigail Oren:** The Steel Valley?

**Jack Paulik:** Pardon me?

**Avigail Oren:** The Steel Valley Trail Council?

[Crosstalk]

**Jack Paulik:** I don't think they were- they weren't- that was further.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Jack Paulik:** This was the Westmoreland Yough Trail...

**Avigail Oren:** Oh, the YRT chapter?

**Jack Paulik:** Right. That's YRTC.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

**Jack Paulik:** They came up and helped build all these bridges in Fayette County. Fayette County didn't build them. The chapter from Allegheny County came up and built these bridges, yep, helped build these bridges.

[Crosstalk]

**Avigail Oren:** Explain to me how a volunteer builds a bridge. Oh, I have time to donate, but...

[Crosstalk]

**Jack Paulik:** Oh, yeah, we had plans we had simple plans.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay.

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- Jack Paulik:** I mean, we had people do bridge design plans.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** And, there really wasn't rocket scientists, it was common sense. Good carpenters could figure out how to do this. So, we built- we did all the bridges. They weren't big bridges. There was one in Cedar Creek Park – it was the biggest bridge. And, we did that bridge with the Cedar Creek Park crew.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** We did that...
- Avigail Oren:** The county did that?
- Jack Paulik:** The county did that bridge, right.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Jack Paulik:** And, the Regional Trail Corporation bought the material. So, we took all these bridges out. And, that was kind of a watershed moment of that guy telling me knowing that PennDOT- "You got to do this. You can't do this. You're not going to get this done."
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Jack Paulik:** And, that was the first T-project completed in a region. Somerset County was completing them but not in Westmoreland County or even Allegheny County. It was considered money from hell and the story will get- we can roll this over later. But, in going into Allegheny County on completing the GAP, there were probably six transportation enhancement grants that we worked with Allegheny County, I think, in District 12 or district 11 – 11 and 12. One was Westmoreland, one was Allegheny. And, we completed all of those projects to complete the GAP. We used every penny we had. We shuffled the money around, used every penny we had and did it in Allegheny County as well as Westmoreland County. So, it was like, "Here's what we're going to do," and we did it, and we did it. But, that but that was strategic in other trail chapters were just they're there, you know.

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**Avigail Oren:** I mean, that's a lot of volunteer labor. I mean, what I'm hearing in just all of these stories you're telling – one of the themes is this couldn't have done without volunteers.

**Jack Paulik:** No.

**Avigail Oren:** But also, it couldn't have been done without, I mean, you were working on this not as a volunteer or partially as a volunteer.

[Crosstalk]

**Jack Paulik:** Yeah, partially.

**Avigail Oren:** But also, as a...

**Jack Paulik:** I was a county employee.

**Avigail Oren:** Right. Darla was a county employee, there were state, you know, Larry was a state employee. The boundary between the professional and I don't know if we want to call it personal – voluntary – is very blurry in a lot of these cases, Hannah Hardy was working for the mayor's office or PEC, you know?

**Jack Paulik:** That's right. Right.

**Avigail Oren:** And so, it does seem, you know, one of the big takeaways to me about how this got built is you, you know, really needed passionate people who were funded to do it.

**Jack Paulik:** That's right. They had a passion for the project. Very few of them were told, "Do this," and they did it because those people never came. They never surfaced because it took too much intensity to actually to get things done.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. And, the last thing I heard is...

**Jack Paulik:** Okay.

**Avigail Oren:** ...is a lot about relationships. So, Larry Ridenour knowing the VP of the railroad, having Representative Manderino and Murtha on, you know, having those relationships.

**Jack Paulik:** Right.

**Avigail Oren:** You know, you talked about at times having good relationships with the politicians in Westmoreland County and other times,



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not so much. But, I mean, does that resonate with you? Like, do you see relationship-building as being a big contributor to this project getting done?

**Jack Paulik:**

Yes. The state, DCNR – they were an extreme fan of this. Again, I'm going to go back to Hovey Cudella. She was our state representative for park projects, crowdfunding. She loved this project. And, when we did the event in down in Sandcastle for completing it, she actually showed up for that and Mike was, like, very congratulatory on this. This is probably one of her visions that became a reality, you know, even though thinking it may never. But, outside of that, we've had very, very good cooperation with the state on grants through DCNR – extreme. And also, federal funding too, I think, Rick Geist was really good at getting transportation [inaudible 0:55:53.5] Linda Boxx would probably give you a lot of information on the bigger picture on the funding. But, from the state level, grants that we applied for, for trail projects – and I think this stands today, if any, ever probably a 20-year period, every trail grant state level that I/we applied for, we got it. We got every one. We never, never didn't get. They were like our biggest cheerleader.

**Avigail Oren:**

And, you think it's because they were just supportive of the project?

[Crosstalk]

**Jack Paulik:**

They were so supportive. Here's what drove that. They were supportive plus they were getting- we always delivered. And, you'll probably hear more about this with the fundraising at this level too for these projects, the funding that was involved in... I'm really not sure how much money we had from private foundations. For the sections we're talking about today, there was money and we always spent it effectively and delivered. And, that really rolled over in completing the GAP. I mean, we delivered all these- everything we said. Even though we didn't know we're going to do it, but we deliver here. We want the money to build a bridge. Well, here's, a million dollars. I mean, we built a bridge and we built the bridge.

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**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. Other people have talked about the importance of being able to have politicians and county representatives be able to show up and say like, “Look, we did this,” you know. We used taxpayer funds and I know what you got.

**Jack Paulik:** And, I'm going to only speak for Westmoreland- well, Allegheny County – they were on board. I mean, they were on board to build this. In Westmoreland County – there are a huge proponent of trails. Now, I mean, when I was working at Westmoreland County, we're not going off, but we built other trails, too. We built a trail system outside of the Regional Trail Corporation. We built the Five Star Trail, the West Penn- the Westmoreland Heritage Trail. We did those trails which we're... And, they've expanded on those since I've been gone there for over ten years. They're real good, a huge trail, trail expansion. But, the politicians – most of them, you know, supported me. A lot of people, a lot of support now for trails.

**Avigail Oren:** I mean, it seems like that was really vital. So, let's talk about some of... I'm curious about construction and challenges. I've heard a lot about- and you spoke to it earlier. There were some of the- I don't want to call them “legal” or “interpersonal challenges” about securing the right-of-way. But, where they're also engineering challenges or, you know, logistical, practical challenges?

**Jack Paulik:** On this 43-mile section, I felt at the time I was working on that and other people were working on Pittsburgh sections and I felt, “I have right-of-way and this isn't that hard. You give me the money; I'm going to build the trail.” It didn't have a lot of logistics. Most of it was related to encroachments on our trail. People were encroaching on our property. They want rights-of-way. And, when we did acquire this property, we also acquired the easements that came with it. So, the Regional Trail Corporation still gets revenue from all the easements and we've hired an organization that manages those for us now. And, I'm going to bring up the guy's name from the Westmoreland trail chapter – Jack Cusick. He initially did all the easement agreements for us. He was a very, very- he was retired, he was from West Newton – very, very critical person and the trail chapters, he developed all the easement

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agreements and researched them and got us moving in that direction. But, it was a lot of encroachments encroaching on our trail. We were right up against your property, we're on your property, we had to kind of fight those. And then, easements – people would want to build things or they would just do it and didn't think we would catch them, you know, easements that would encroach upon us. So, those were the issues. Having worked on other trails now, I didn't look at this as being, you know... Most of the challenges were getting the funds, getting the support that we want this trail, and then keeping away vandals for a while because until this got established, you had gate vandalism and people wanting to- I did this before just, I mean, we're talking 25 years ago now. People have accepted this as the Great Allegheny Passage, not my honey hole to go swimming. And, I have access there every weekend.

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Jack Paulik:** So, building that 43-mile section was not too problematic.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. It sounds like a very different story from filling in the gaps, now in the county.

**Jack Paulik:** Oh, yeah, it's a different story.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah. I want to ask you, you know, about stories, you know, you've told quite a few, but from the sections, you did two sections in 1984 that came into and out of West Newton where you're from. Was that meaningful? I mean, were there people you sort of grew up with and knew who you saw then using the trail or...?

**Jack Paulik:** Yeah, actually, as of today, when I go down to West Newton, I'll run into- because we went to school in a very small school with, like, 70 people. And, we had a class reunion. It was only a little over a year ago, you know, significant, like a 50-year reunion. And, 30 of these people still live there. And, I have seen them on the trail. And, I mean, when I tell them my association with it, they're like, "Oh, this is great. Here's the guy that built the trail for us in West Newton." That was kind of fun. But, they liked that. But, I think a good story is the train station in West Newton. I don't know how much you have on

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that. Well, there was a P&LE a railroad station in West Newton. And, it sits on the site where the RTC office is. Have you been there? You haven't been there. Okay. And, it's a duplicate train station of- very similar to the one that was on the footprint of where the original P&LE the train station sat. So, I'd say one of the better feeling events that I have was that my involvement in that – there was a grant that the local trail chapter along with Bob McKinley, he was our executive director for quite a while and did a really good job and was a great promoter of the trail and helped acquire a lot of the grants that I ended up closing out. But, they got a grant to reduplicate the train station. It was a federal grant a T grant. And, the money only took that project to where the station, the shell got built and it sat there. So, what happened, the maintenance group there – they moved their maintenance operation into this empty building. And, a couple years later, another phase of grant was acquired to finish it and I got involved in that.

So, being from West Newton, I just thought, "I'm going to do this." So, I met with that local trail chapter because this was their home now and convince them through a lot of negotiations and Jack Cusick was critical in realizing this to get them to move out of there into another location. So, there was an old greenery there just a couple hundred yards away. And, a grant was secured to acquire that property. And, we got county involved to rip the building down. And, they built a brand-new maintenance facility several hundred yards away from there and moved out. And, to this day, I'm sure they're happy there. But, that was a real challenge, too. I mean, grumpy old men, hard to get them to change during things, you know. So, we got them to move. And then, this grant that we had – we hired an engineer who was familiar with historic railroad building. His name is Richard Lance, I think. And, I oversaw that project on finishing that building which it is today with that federal money. So, we actually got completed and now it's the central office and a visitor center in West Newton.

**Avigail Oren:**

When was this all taking place, start to finish?

[Crosstalk]

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**Jack Paulik:** Okay, I'm going to say it's in the 2000s. I looked and it wasn't on there. It was probably ten years ago, you know? I'd have to call Leslie and say, "When did you move in there?"

[Chuckle]

**Avigail Oren:** Right.

**Jack Paulik:** Because I was doing that. I was kind of juggling a couple of balls. I was doing that – it was probably 12 years ago just when I started working on get the gaps in the GAP. I kind of had a couple balls in the air. I was doing that just because it was a real project that needed to get completed. I felt that was a really cool accomplishment. That and then having the trail through West Newton. And, just to see that being a trail town – it was a really cool thing to see it become a trail town. And, I was actually at a- we went to a meeting on trails at the Westmoreland County Courthouse. And, this is pre-trail town and at the conclusion of that meeting, I was sitting with Sandra Finley, Linda Boxx, and myself. And, there was another gentleman there – I can't remember his name. He's in one of the trail chapters. But, I brought up, I said, "You know, it would be nice if you came riding into the town and there was a sign that said, 'West Newton Trail Town'." Then people driving into that community would think, "Oh, I better watch out for bicycles," you know. And, that concept. I mean, Linda Boxx ran with that and really made a trail town program very successful. But, when my initial concept was identified this as a trail town so people recognize and take more caution in driving, but they turned it into a trail town program that ended up being, you know, economic generator. But, I was on that initial discussion on the trail town program. And, I brought it up for West Newton because I just thought- because you come over the hill, it would be nice to see "West Newton Trail Town". There's a sign there that says that now.

**Avigail Oren:** I mean, it's rare that we get to make such a mark on the places that nurtured us, you know? It's amazing.

[Crosstalk]

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**Jack Paulik:** Oh, yeah, no, you're right. I mean, that's like, I have my niece who is- her name is Lauren – it's my brother's daughter and she's real, I'm going to say green, like earthy-type, you know. And, I mean I do, I enjoy hunting and fishing. I do all sports, but I told her about all this bicycle stuff and within Westmoreland County... Actually, one thing I did there the year before I quit – we acquired the scenic byway between Ligonier and Latrobe, that greenway. It's the Loyalhanna Greenway. And, it took me about three or four years to acquire that for Westmont County as a greenway. And, I had told her about that and the bike trail and she said, "Uncle Jack, you really got to do some cool things, you know, that benefit people," you know, that was kind of neat, you know. But, the trails are, again, they're... And, that's why bike pavilions and ballfields – all that stuff is great when you build it. But, 10-20 years down the road, you need to fix it. But, these trails – I think people enjoy more and they're like, "Wow, I'm glad somebody thought of this, did this," 20, 30, 100 years from now.

**Avigail Oren:** Yeah, yeah. So, take me up to the formation of the ATA. What do you remember about that?

**Jack Paulik:** Okay. See the ATA – I was not really involved in the formulation of the ATA. When the ATA was being formed to complete the system in Somerset, even going into Maryland, and eventually to Pittsburgh, my feet were on the ground and building it. I'm going to build a trail and you go, the ATA is going to take care of other segments. I would attend the ATA meetings periodically and get updates on what they're doing in the other counties and then I would give them updates on what we were doing and what's going on in Fayette and Allegheny County through the Regional Trail Corporation. I kind of had boots on the ground there for all three of those counties and the ATA expanded to build, tying a lot of this infrastructure in Somerset County and rolling into Maryland. And actually, right now I do sit on the ATA board. I've been on there only for, like, a year and a half.

**Avigail Oren:** Okay. But your home, your, like, primary affiliation was with RTC?

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- Jack Paulik:** It was with the RTC, right. But then, whenever I took the position within ATA which was actually the Regional Trail Corporation, houses their financial responsibilities through the nonprofit – I resigned from the RTC because I didn't think I should be doing both at the time. So, when I started working for ATA to work on the GAP projects- but now, I'm the liaison for the RTC to the ATA. I am that right now.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah...
- Jack Paulik:** Those acronyms, you know what they mean. I don't like people- it's always tough speaking, you know?
- Avigail Oren:** There was a learning curve with this project for me trying to figure out the relationships between all of these organizations. So, I think we can probably wrap it up there. And, the next time we see...
- Jack Paulik:** Okay.
- Avigail Oren:** ...we'll pick up from when you transitioned from Westmoreland County to working as a project manager on the gaps that the GAP. But before, is there any other- any questions that I didn't ask or stories that you had really hoped to share? You know, I sort of cede the floor to you.
- Jack Paulik:** You know, I think I bounced around and maybe took you a little out of the agenda to try to hit on some of the things that I thought were unique in this process. And, I really felt positioned and blessed to be in a position to do this – like working with the National Park Service now. It's more fun than work for me, you know. And, I mean, I carry a lot of experience into that. And, I'm working with those people that kind of respect that and it's going really well. So, as long as I'm still enjoying it- and I have a value to share and can still do that in the trail world and I'll do that. I think you should always do that if you can.
- Avigail Oren:** Pay it forward?
- Jack Paulik:** Yeah, yeah. So, that's- hey, thanks. That was fun.
- Avigail Oren:** Yeah, thank you.

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**Jack Paulik:** You're welcome.

**Avigail Oren:** I'm going to stop the recording.

[End 1:14:04.8]

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