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Avigail Oren:

This is Avigail Oren. I am here with Malcolm Sias at the Westmoreland County Parks and Recreation Office – 194 Donohoe Road in Greensburg. It is Wednesday, July 31st, 2019 at 2:40 p.m. In today's interview, Malcolm and I are going to focus on how Malcolm became involved with the GAP [Great Allegheny Passage] Trail project, particularly with the Regional Trail Corporation and how the project intersected with his day job at the Westmoreland County Parks Department. So, to begin, Malcolm, why don't you tell me the very abbreviated story of your life that brings you up to 1982 when you began working here.

Malcolm Sias:

Okay, where to start? First off, I was born and raised in Westmoreland County, so I'm from here. When I went to Penn State University, I was originally going to major in forestry and I was interested in outdoor things and that kind of stuff. I learned early on that there were really no jobs in forestry. So, before I even started at Penn State I transferred to a program for students who didn't know exactly what major they wished to be in. I started out like that and started studying all the different majors and looking at what I might like to do and I came upon recreation and parks and I decided that I'd like to be a recreation and parks major. So, I actually chose that and then graduated with a degree in parks and recreation management from Penn State in 1978. My first job was in a small town called Red Lion Borough in York County and I started there January 1, 1979. And, I was the Recreation Director there for four years. I did recreation and park programs for the borough, the school district, and the surrounding area. It was small community recreation. And then, I had an opportunity – some people from back here, some friends of mine contacted me and let me know there was an opening here at the Westmoreland County Bureau of Parks and Recreation, headquartered in my hometown. I was very interested in moving back at that point because my dad was still here and my sister and a lot of my family members. And, I had just gotten married in the spring of that year. It so happened I married my wife Patti, who was originally from Penn Hills. She had moved to York, too, to take a teaching position. So, it kind of worked for both of us to move back here closer to our families. So, we moved back and I started

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working for Westmoreland County on November 1, 1982 and I've been here ever since. When I first started, I was the Program Coordinator and I ran events and festivals and programs throughout the county. I did that for about 20 years and it was during that time period that I started working on trails. Later on, in 2004, I transferred to the position of Planning Coordinator, where I did park and trail development. And then, several years ago, I became the Director of Parks and Recreation. So, now I do that and oversee the department. So, I've had a good time.

Avigail Oren:

Yeah. So, yes, my next question was a segue into the trail. So, I think one thing I'm really wondering about is what came first – the realization that the old Pittsburgh and Lake Erie line was being abandoned and could be turned into a possible trail or did the idea for a trail come and then, you know, you sort of move from there?

Malcolm Sias:

Well, I found out about the idea while I was attending a meeting at the Westmoreland County Courthouse hosted by the Department of Planning. It was some type of a regional meeting with people from other counties throughout Southwestern [Pennsylvania]. And, there were six or eight of us there in some type of a focus group. We were talking about things that could be done to spur economic development in Southwestern PA. One of the guys there who I had never met before was Dave Tremba, who at that time, was the president of the Connellsville Chamber of Commerce. And, he started talking about the possibility of buying the P&LE [Pittsburgh and Lake Erie] railroad from McKeesport to Connellsville and connecting it to the little piece of trail that was built in Ohiopyle to create this great rail-trail. I mean, that was 43 miles of trail. So, if we connected, we'd have over 50. He told me that he was just contacted by Larry Ridenour who at that time was working in the Allegheny County Planning Department. He was contacted by Larry and Larry said he was trying to find interested people from each of the three counties: Allegheny, Westmoreland, and Fayette and wanted to put together a group, like a task force to begin pulling this thing together. So, I ended up calling Larry the next day after I returned from that meeting and he and I had a discussion and I told him we were

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very interested here at Westmoreland County Parks. It so happened that the P&LE Railroad ran right through our Cedar Creek Regional Park, along the Youghiogheny River. And, we at that point, were involved in trying to obtain a railroad crossing within the park so we could develop the riverfront and really utilize that section of the park. And, we were involved in discussions with P&LE railroad in an attempt to purchase a rail crossing. Those discussions were led by Jack Paulik, who at the time was our planning coordinator here at Westmoreland County Parks.

We were talking to P&LE Railroad about a crossing. We wanted to put in a road crossing so we can access that piece of the park and develop recreational facilities right on the river like a boat launch and picnic facilities and that kind of thing. And so, we were very interested in the idea that trail could be built to connect and run through one of our regional parks and that people would be traveling through there was just so exciting. None of us knew a whole lot about trails back then to be totally honest with you. It was a pretty new concept – this whole idea of biking and walking trails over a long distance using railroad corridors. I mean, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy had just recently been formed and starting to talk about this stuff. There was a piece of trail that was already built in Ohiopyle State Park that I hadn't even seen at that point. That was a pretty small piece of trail – but it gave everybody the idea. At that point, the river rafting at Ohiopyle was just starting to develop and the rafting became very popular and the usage of the bike trail grew with it. That's how I got involved. You know, it's just like one meeting that led to a whole lot of additional meetings.

Avigail Oren: Yeah, I mean, I'm curious if we can, like, peg this onto a timeline. So, do you remember when this first meeting was at the courthouse?

Malcolm Sias: I don't know exactly but it was definitely in 1989.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

Malcolm Sias: We started this process in '89. And, I remember after that meeting at the courthouse, and after I talked to Larry

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Ridenour, the next meeting was at the Redevelopment Authority of Connellsville and we all met there, representatives from each of the three counties. There was probably 20 people at that meeting, Pennsylvania State DCNR [Department of Conservation and Natural Resources] was represented and all the three counties and all different groups, people that were interested in redevelopment, community development, of course just plain volunteers – people who were just very, very much interested in the whole concept of biking and walking trails. So, we met and got together and we formed this task force and, I mean, we were going from community to community holding meetings and talking about acquiring the rail corridor and making it into a trail.

We also met and talked with Gordon Neuenschwander, the president of the P&LE Railroad. Larry and I had discussions with Gordon at his office, which was located in Station Square. We were trying to do a lot of things at one time because none of us had ever done this trail thing before. We were trying to figure it out. So, we had kind of divided our task force into a bunch of different groups, or committees. One was led by Jack Paulik and Hugi Koudela [Ethal “Hugi” Koudela, PA Department of Community Affairs]. Their committee’s goal was to walk the corridor and basically assess it for the development of a trail, you know, seeing what the major challenges were and what the strong points were and all that kind of stuff. So, they were doing that and I was working on more or less the overall organization of just trying to get the counties together, trying to get everybody to work together and agree. So, we would meet, like monthly or even more than monthly, periodically. And then, we had these individual committee meetings in the meantime. So, we were getting together quite a bit and talking about quite a few things. I remember...

Avigail Oren: Was this still in 1989 or are we moving into 1990?

Malcolm Sias: This is 1989-1990.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

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Malcolm Sias:

It took us until 1991 until we actually incorporated the RTC [Regional Trail Corporation] and turned it into a 501(c)(3). But, you know, we went through the process of trying to decide what this group should be. We talked about if should it be a nonprofit corporation or if it should it be an authority? How should it be set up? We kind of investigated all these different pieces. We finally decided on a nonprofit corporation and got the counties all in agreement. One of the interesting meetings I can remember occurred when we had finally got to the point that we had the whole corridor appraised from McKeesport to Connellsville, and we had the appraisal broken down in cost per county, based upon the miles and the land value in each county. And, we kind of came to the agreement that, because we (our task force) didn't have any money that each county should provide the funding that was need to purchase their section. So, each of us was responsible for going back to our counties and getting them to agree to that.

I remember that Westmoreland actually got off really easy on that because our purchase price for our 9.9-10 mile section in Westmoreland was about \$28,000 for the whole thing. Meanwhile, that was a lot less than the P&LE railroad was asking us to pay for the rail crossing that we were trying to purchase in Cedar Creek Park. I think that was going to cost something like \$45,000. So, all of a sudden, our price became lower. So, it was rather easy for us, but you know, Allegheny had a big price and the whole purchase price was \$200-and-some thousand dollars for the entire 43 miles and all three counties sections put together. And, like I said, we got off easy. I think Fayette was somewhere in the \$40-some thousand-dollar range. And, most of the value is in Allegheny County because they had the real estate that ran through developed and commercial areas and all that kind of stuff. But, I started telling you one of the meetings I remember is, when we got all the solicitors together, one from each County and one representing the Regional Trail Corporation, which was the name we chose for the non-profit we were creating. Richard (Dick) Wilson was serving as the attorney for the Regional Trail Corporation. He was a railroad attorney by background and he had actually done work for P&LE railroad. He was representing us. Larry Ridenour knew him through

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Allegheny County and he was helping Larry with some other projects. So we all got together in Pittsburgh with a solicitor from each of the three counties. And, we had Dick Wilson representing the Regional Trail Corporation. Larry and I were there and I am not sure if there was someone from Fayette or not. But, we were talking about how to write bylaws for the Regional Trail Corporation and, of course, when you get four attorneys in one room and they're all talking about bylaws, they all had different opinions. They all went different ways. So, we sat there and talked about that for a couple of hours and really didn't get very far. We kind of laid some groundwork. But, we ended up leaving there and I said to Larry, "Let me take a shot at this." So, I pulled together six or eight different sets of bylaws from different organizations and I ended up writing a draft of bylaws that we passed around and edited and passed back and forth. And, by the time we gave them to the attorneys, everybody said, "Okay, fine." They did some minor changes. We were finally all in agreement and then we filed for incorporation and became a 501(c)(3). So, in 1991 we actually concluded the purchase and incorporated, and elected our first board of directors and officers. At that point we were ready to go.

Avigail Oren:

So, I want to ask you- let me start with this question. What motivated the founding of the RTC? Like, what need precipitated a separate organization?

Malcolm Sias:

We all talked about how to go about this. And, what we were really afraid of was that over 43 miles in three different counties – we didn't want each county to just do their own thing because we saw a huge difference in the three counties. You had a very strong and well-developed county in Allegheny with a lot of money. You had Westmoreland, who was somewhere in the middle, and you had Fayette who's, you know, a poorer county. They were less interested in what was going on. And, we were all very committed to the idea that if you got on the trail in McKeesport, and you rode 43 miles and you're going south, we didn't want you to know when you crossed the county line. We wanted the entire 43 miles to basically look the same, be developed the same, be constructed the same, we wanted the signage to be the same.

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We wanted it all to be totally, completely consistent. So, we were all in agreement that there should be one organization that planned, developed and managed the trail. So each County signed an MOU [memorandum of understanding] in which each county agreed that they would provide the funding to purchase their section of trail. After that, we divided up into working committees and we all worked on the whole thing. We had a construction committee working on construction, we had funding committee working on funding – we didn't concentrate on funding within our county or constructing within our county. We concentrated on what we thought was the most important. Then when we got our first grant to plan, design, and construct the trail from America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), we decided we were going to build a segment in each county because we wanted every county to have a piece of trail so that we could keep everybody in all three counties energized and excited and moving forward.

Some people thought that we should actually build the biggest segment we could build,” you know, use all the money to build one big section of trail. But, we all thought, “No, if we really want to push this thing forward, one, we've got to keep everybody eager and we can't make it look like we're only building in one place, and favoring one county, We wanted every County to get at least one piece of trail.” So, we ended up building about two and a half miles in Fayette County, four miles in Westmoreland County from Cedar Creek Park to West Newton, and another three and a half or four miles in Elizabeth Township in Allegheny County. We did all that with only about a half a million dollars, which just absolutely amazes me because I just finished 3.3 miles of trail and it cost me a million and a half just for the construction. I probably have over \$2 million in it if I include all the design and engineering and everything else. So, the prices have changed drastically over the years needless to say. The other thing that we did that I didn't talk about when we formed the corporation – we were very interested in keeping the counties all strongly represented within the Regional Trail Corporation. So, we actually set up a board of directors with equal representation from each County. There were 18 people on the board and from the very beginning each of the counties appointed three

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of those people. So, nine of the reps were county-appointed reps. Fayette appointed three, Allegheny appointed three, and Westmoreland appointed three. The other nine were elected at large. And, it wasn't actually written this way, but as it's developed over the years, those at-large members have been appointed the same way. So, we basically have a board that has six members from Fayette, six members from Allegheny, and six members from Westmoreland, pretty much at any given time. And, it's been a very strong group from the very beginning. I think that the key to the success of the Regional Trail Corporation is that everybody's been committed to the trail as a whole and the overall experience. The Board has always focused on providing a great trail, not only for our residents, but also for people that come to visit from all over the world.

Avigail Oren: So, I'm curious. You went with a 501(c) (3). Were there any other organizational options, formats, and corporations that were discussed or batted around? Or, was it very...?

Malcolm Sias: Well, the only other one we discussed seriously was an authority. And, the only advantage you get if you can actually form an authority was that authorities can collect tax dollars and do that kind of thing. But, we felt that was probably never going to happen with the three counties working together, so we gradually just went toward the 501(c)(3). It seemed to become the right way to do it.

Avigail Oren: Okay. And, I'm curious – you've described parts of the process of forming the 501(c) (3) and what the board structure was how the bylaws were crafted. I'm curious who was involved, like, who was really hands-on involved through this process on a day-to-day making this happen, you know...

Malcolm Sias: Oh, boy.

Avigail Oren: ...filing paperwork and, you know...

Malcolm Sias: Yeah.

Avigail Oren: ...taking calls.

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Malcolm Sias:

Well, fortunately, Allegheny County Planning with Larry Ridenour was really the driving force at the beginning. They were well ahead of Westmoreland and Fayette when it came to thinking about trails. They had money set up in their budget to develop and construct trails and do those kind of things. So, they actually pushed us and carried us for a good bit at the beginning. But, Westmoreland – Jack Paulik and I from Westmoreland County Parks became very involved. So, we became one of the forces there, too. I think we brought a lot to the table. One of the people we brought to the Board was our Commissioners' coordinator at the time, John Pallone because we knew that we needed that direct connection to the Commissioners so they would understand exactly what we were doing and why we were doing it because this was like a brand-new thing. He gave us that direct communication to the Board of Commissioners that we needed. I also remember Scott Wendel from Fayette County. He became the first Vice President of the RTC. He was a salesman with a strong interest in trails. He came to all the meetings and was very involved. When we set up the corporation, Larry Ridenour was the first chairman and Scott was the vice chairman. Jack Paulik was the treasurer and I was the secretary for the first year. I think Larry was president for two years. And then after that, I took over as president and I was president for the next two years, I think but, there were a lot of different people involved. There was Jack Cusick. Jack passed away recently, but Jack was really a key individual. He lived in West Newton. He had just retired from Bell Telephone, and, his expertise at Bell Telephone was real estate management. When we acquired the railroad, we inherited all these agreements for crossings such as underground pipelines and overhead wires and all these other kinds of things. We had no idea what to do with all that but we knew it would require an awful lot of work. It was a potential source of annual income that could actually pay the bills and it was the only reliable source of income that we had at that point. And, Jack Cusick said, "I'll take that over and I'll organize that because that's what I did." And, I mean, he sat down, he put a lot of time and effort into it and organized that at the beginning and did that for a number of years. We've since turned it all over to Omega Rail

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Management. They manage it for us out of Nashville, Tennessee. They are a firm that manages real estate nationwide for railroads and entities that own long corridors. But, Jack organized all that and we ended up making good income off of that. In fact, I remember one of the long and ongoing feuds we had over payments for right-of-way was with West Penn Power. West Penn Power had a number of easements and the annual fees amounted to about \$4,400. They wanted to settle that and negotiate a lesser fee. So we went back and forth with them for the longest time. I was the President of the RTC Board at that time

And, David Hawk was the real estate person from West Penn that was negotiating it for them. It's kind of funny because now David is on my Citizens Advisory Board for Parks and Recreation and he and I have become good friends. But back then, we were adversaries and we really went at it. The RTC needed the funds so we wanted to bring it to a conclusion and move on. So finally I went to the RTC board and I said, "Look, what I want to propose to West Penn is that they pay us a one-time fee of 10 times the \$4,400 – \$44,000. And that \$44,000 will cover all the currently existing crossings, but from this point forward, then they have to agree to pay based upon our new and updated fee schedule." So, we made that proposal to Dave Hawk, and after some discussion with his team they accepted and we ended up shaking hands on that day and \$44,000 came to the Regional Trail Corp. And, at that point, that was a huge amount of money.

Avigail Oren: Ton of money.

Malcolm Sias: And, in fact, the board decided that we would start an endowment with that money that we still have today and we set it aside for future trail maintenance. We've never actually had to take funds from the principal of that endowment. We have borrowed from the principal a couple of times when we were constructing and we were waiting on reimbursements from grants and stuff like that. So, we borrowed funds from the principal but we have always paid it back. We let it grow and now there's about \$350,000 into the endowment.

Avigail Oren: Wow.

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Malcolm Sias: So, it's slowly growing and we've added other payments to it over the course of time. We passed a resolution saying that all one-time payments would go to the endowment. But, that settlement with West Penn was a big deal. It actually got us started on the endowment and the trail crossings produce a good income for the RTC. Ever since Omega Rail Management took over the management of these crossings they have been adjusting the fees to get them up to a fair and current rate and as a result our annual income has continued to increase. We had users that were paying these ridiculously low fees that had been the same for years and years. They brought them all up to current standards. Westmoreland County just bought a new railroad corridor a few years ago and the fees there were antiquated. Some of them were paying \$3 a year for a simple crossing or say \$50 for big gas line. When Omega reorganized those fees and brought them up to current stands the \$3 fee became \$750, and a \$50 fee became \$1,500 or so. They manage it all for us and they take a percentage but it was the best thing we ever did because, one, we don't have to deal with it all, and two, we make more money.

Avigail Oren: Right. Yeah, that's really fortunate. I just want to clarify the story about the one-time payment. So, after 10 years, you either renegotiate, they have to do another 10-times payment that covers...?

Malcolm Sias: No. A one-time payment covers it forever.

Avigail Oren: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

Malcolm Sias: In other words, the choice would be to either pay an annual fee every year of, say, \$1,000 a line or pay an upfront fee of 10 times that amount or \$10,000 – and that covered them forever.

Avigail Oren: In perpetuity.

Malcolm Sias: Yeah, in perpetuity.

Avigail Oren: Looking back, do you feel like that was a good deal?

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Malcolm Sias: Yes, I think it was a good deal because it enabled us to settle move forward. They paid us the \$44,000, which we invested into an endowment for future maintenance and we have been earning income on that money ever since. And, after that, we never had a problem. Every time they did a new crossing they just paid according to the current fee structure and we have been on good terms ever since.

Avigail Oren: I see, okay.

Malcolm Sias: They thought they got a fair deal, we thought we got a fair deal. Everybody was happy and we moved forward.

Avigail Oren: Okay. I understand. So, I'm curious if there were any- you described the bylaws being- at the writing of the bylaws being a little more complicated than it had to be. But, were there other challenges or hang-ups that slowed this process? Or, did the formation of the RTC move very smoothly?

Malcolm Sias: Considering that we were doing something as big as we were doing and that none of us had ever done before, and three counties were involved I think it actually went well. The other thing that we were doing at the time was organizing volunteer groups that we named Trail Chapters or Councils, to assist with the maintenance and management of various trail sections. The only group that was formed when we started the RTC was the Yough River Trail Council. They're still in existence today. Ohiopyle State Park requested that the local community form a volunteer group to assist with the trail they were constructing in Ohiopyle State Park. So, they had formed this group called the Yough River Trail Council and they had set themselves up as their own 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. They were in existence when the Regional Trail Corporation formed and that group was very interested in extending that trail and getting it the rest of the way through Fayette County, so they joined up with the RTC.

They became a key group and they accepted responsibility for the Fayette County trail section. We then formed one group in every county that was like that. One of the reasons we formed the Regional Trail Corporation and one of the smartest things we did was to form one 501(c)(3) and every other group

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became a chapter in that 501(c)(3). So, we had a group in West Newton, which is now called Westmoreland Yough Trail Chapter and we had a group in Allegheny called the Mon-Yough Trail Chapter. And, those were able to operate under the same 501(c)(3). So, it kept every group from having to go through that whole process of becoming a corporation, filing tax returns, and doing all that. So, now the RTC has 10 chapters throughout the three counties. As more trail was built along the Great Allegheny Passage both the Steel Valley and the McKeesport groups opted to join the Regional Trail Corporation. And, as we've developed trails in Westmoreland County, we've formed chapters of the Regional Trail Corporation that are not part of the GAP. So, now there are 10 chapters and it has worked out great because it has been easy for the RTC to accept a new group and form a new trail chapter. If they can fit into the RTC, they have a ready-made organization to associate with. Leslie Pierce is the business manager for RTC and she manages an annual audit of the RTC and all its chapters. Each chapter submits all their materials needed for the audit such as the monthly treasurer's reports, meeting minutes, invoices and receipt documents to the RTC office. The RTC then has it all audited by a CPA and they also prepare all the tax returns Bureau of Charitable Organizations documents as required.

So, it's made it a lot easier to form these additional trail chapters. A lot of the work that we did at the beginning, we did in such a way that it didn't have to be redone, and that was really important.

Avigail Oren:

Okay. So, this is one of the most confusing things about the RTC is the relationship between it and, on the one hand, the ATA [Allegheny Trail Alliance], SCRTA [Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association] and then the trail councils on the other. Because part of my job is to sit and think about what a historian in 200 years will want to know. I venture a guess that they, too, will be very confused about the relationship. So, you just explained that these trail chapters are like subsidiaries essentially of the RTC...

Malcolm Sias:

They are, yes.

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- Avigail Oren:** ...and the advantage is that they then don't have to incorporate.
- Malcolm Sias:** That's right. They all work together. Separate organizations cost money on an annual basis to maintain as separate accounting, tax forms, auditing and all those things are required of each. By partnering all those things are covered one time by the RTC and all the Chapters are included.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Malcolm Sias:** We also share work so it does not have to be duplicated. We don't have to keep reinventing the wheel. All of our trails operate under the same set of rules.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Malcolm Sias:** Everybody uses the same maintenance and operations manual. There is a sign policy and everyone operates using that policy.
- Avigail Oren:** It's a coordinating body.
- Malcolm Sias:** It's a coordinating body that keeps it all working. But, it also just makes it so much easier. We've had groups come to us and say, "You know, you guys are really good at this. There's this great opportunity. You've got to build this trail for us." Well, it doesn't work like that. It's like, "You can associate with us. You build your trail; you bring your expertise, your membership, your energy and you can take advantage of the tools in the box."
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Malcolm Sias:** Let me tell you about the formation of the ATA because the ATA started as a chapter of the RTC.
- Avigail Oren:** Right and that's confusing. So, yes, please do explain that.
- Malcolm Sias:** Well, first, let me tell you Linda Boxx was a key part of the story. So, let me tell you a couple of things about Linda. The first story I want to tell you about Linda is about when she came on to the Regional Trail Corporation Board.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.

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Malcolm Sias: We were maybe a year or two into the Regional Trail Corp. We were heavily into trying to figure out how to develop this 43-mile trail. I think we had our first trail under construction with this grant from America's Industrial Heritage Project. But, we reached a point as a board, we knew that we really needed to bring some people into the board that had strong ties within all the communities, within the counties, to the businesses, foundations, corporations, that kind of thing – people who could really help us to open some of these doors, make these contacts, and do those things. And, we were sitting at that meeting and George Takatch was there. George was on the Board of the RTC and George worked for Allegheny County. I think he was in their Department of Economic Development or something like that. But, he had a direct tie to the Allegheny County Commissioners at that point. And, we were sitting there just brainstorming, well, who should we get into this group? And, and George says, "Well, I know this guy by the name of Jim Linaberger." He said he was a grant maker and community relations director for People's Gas for years. And, I think at that point, Jim was on loan to the Allegheny Conference to help them do some strategic planning. So, he was near retirement, but he was on loan to the Allegheny Conference and he was helping them organize it. And, George says, "Jim Linaberger would be a really good person for this Board." And I said, "I think Linda Boxx from Latrobe in Westmoreland County would be a really good person for this Board." Well, it so happened. – I called Linda and he called Jim. Both of them said yes and I think they both started on the Board at almost at the same time. And, that was so important because they became the key to the Regional Trail Corporation fundraising committee.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: Our fundraising committee was just getting started and we were interviewing fundraising firms to help us out. We were looking at Teeter Associates. Linda and Jim got involved. That was really the key because Jim had all these corporate connections. He knew everybody in Pittsburgh and some of the foundation connections. And, who he didn't know, Linda knew all the rest, you know. So we began to work on how to

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tell our story. We started to develop the materials like the first trail map, the first marketing pieces, and the first brochure. But, those two, Jim and Linda, knew how to get to the people out there that we needed to reach. Jim's love was the bike trail. Jim ended up retiring shortly after that and he became very involved. He loved showing the trail to people. So, he and Linda would invite people out and they would take them for a little trail visit on a section that was built and maybe a section that wasn't built. And, they would show them the possibilities, show them the maps. Give them the vision of how this trail could develop and what it could become. So, we had these original three pieces that were constructed, and we started extending them until we eventually began to connect pieces. And, we were starting to have longer trail. But, they were the key to that because they brought all these people on board, got them excited about the trail, and the funds began to roll in so we were able to continue building trail.

Avigail Oren:

Right.

Malcolm Sias:

Now let's talk about the formation of the ATA. There were seven trail organizations working independently to fund and build various sections of trail in Southwestern PA. The seven groups were as follows: the Regional Trail Corporation, the Somerset County Rails-Trails Association, the Friends of the Riverfront, the Steel Valley Trail Council, Mountain Maryland Trails, Ohio State Park, and the Montour Trail Council. All of these organizations were seeking funding to acquire, plan, or construct trail all around the same time so all or most of them were talking to the foundations located in area and asking them if they could submit grant applications for trail development.

Everybody was trying to raise money at the same time. Everybody had trails to be built. At that point the RTC had hired Teeter Associates to assist with fundraising and Bob Teeter was talking to the foundations on behalf of the RTC. Bob Teeter came back to us and said that the foundation leaders wanted to meet with us to discuss trail funding because there were so many groups asking for their support at the same time. They told Bob Teeter something like "this whole thing is very confusing to the

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foundations. There are too many things happening at one time. Somebody needs to organize these groups, get them together, and get them to agree on what the priorities are.” And, they actually called us to a meeting. They hosted a meeting, I think it was at the Duquesne Club, and a few of us from the RTC went with Bob Teeter to meet with them over lunch. There were representatives there from several of the large foundations such as the Mellon Foundation, the Heinz Foundation and the Pittsburgh Foundation. There were possibly two or three of the other key foundations there, I am not sure. But, that was the story that they gave us. We left there knowing that we needed to get all the trail groups organized, we needed to prioritize our needs, and we needed to show them that we were all working together and speaking with one voice. They wanted us to help them figure out what should get funded first, and where should they consider allocating funds to get the most impact. And, I remember going to that meeting because it was Bob Teeter, Linda Boxx, Jack Paulik that drove down together. Others at the meeting from the RTC were Larry Ridenour and George Takatch. We got the message that we need to get the trail groups organized and working together if we expected their strong support;

Avigail Oren: Were SCRTA people there?

Malcolm Sias: No, it was just RTC people. But on the way home we were all talking about the fact that we needed to get these other groups together. At that point, RTC was one group, SCRTA was one group Steel Valley, Friends of the Riverfront, McKeesport, Montour Trail and the Maryland group, seven in all. So, we decided we had to get everyone together. We were laying out this strategy on the way home in the car and Linda was all about this. She was very excited about it, and we were all excited about it. We thought it was the right thing to do and the right time to do it. Bob Teeter also thought this was what had to be done.

Avigail Oren: I interviewed Bob, yeah, and Sandra, too.

Malcolm Sias: Yeah. He's a very laid-back kind of individual.

Avigail Oren: Very.

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Malcolm Sias: We obviously thought we had made a big breakthrough here, and we really needed to do this correctly. And, I was very young then and I was not nearly as experienced that I am now so I was just listening to them talk. The next day, or maybe two days later, Linda Boxx called me on the phone. Linda said, "Malcolm, I've really been thinking about this thing. I would be willing to take the initiative to organize these groups and try to get this thing started." But, she said, "Malcolm, I just want to tell you one thing. I only have two years. I'm going to give you two years on this thing." And, I said, "Linda, you realize in two years you're not going to get very far." I said, "We've been working on the RTC since 1989. It's now 1995, and we're just now starting to make really serious progress and getting things moving." And, I think we had the same conversation two or three times over the course of two or three days. And, Linda kept saying, "No, I have two years. I'll give it two years. I'll get it started. Someone else is going to have to take it over from there, but if you're okay with it, I will take the lead in that." So, she jumped in and got all the groups together and got it underway. That was how the ATA got started. And I've reminded Linda a couple of times, like, when it reached 20 years I said, "Linda that two years – that's been going on for a long time now."

[Chuckle]

Avigail Oren: Like, what's the opposite of dog years?

[Laughter]

Malcolm Sias: But, it's like any big project, you look at it, you get excited about it and then you just get sucked in, you know what I mean? And, it's like once she got in and brought it to a successful completion, I think then she was trying to figure out how to get out, you know, after 20 years. But, it was really interesting. She took the lead and she's the one who basically made it happen. The reason I started telling you the story about Linda and Jim is that they ended up being the reps for Regional Trail Corp. who went to ATA and they worked together on fundraising there. And, the ATA used the RTC just like all the other chapters I mean, only in the past year did

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ATA actually become a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and become its own organization.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Malcolm Sias: All their money ran through Regional Trail Corp. And, it all worked fine. It let them hit the ground running because they didn't have to go through all the process of setting up an organization before they could get underway.

Avigail Oren: And so, the ATA effectively functioned as the fundraising, and marketing, and promotions group?

Malcolm Sias: Yes, the ATA became the group that led the completion of the GAP. The RTC was almost done funding and building trail by the time the ATA was up and running. So they didn't do a lot with the RTC because we were building our last sections of trail by the time the ATA got organized and operational.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: We had ours basically planned and funded. I think we finished sometime around 1997-1998. The RTC had a big advantage in some ways over, say, SCRTA because we built 43 miles but there were no major structures in our section.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: I mean, we have little bridges and stuff like that but we basically just built miles of trail, whereas they had miles of trail that in the middle were these multimillion-dollar structures that needed to be rehabbed and tunnels and things like that. So, their challenge was much greater than ours.

Avigail Oren: Right, right. That's very clarifying to me. I want to loop back and ask about how you originally knew Linda. How you came to call her.

Malcolm Sias: Well, I knew Linda originally in her role as the director of the McKenna Foundation. The foundation was funding the Westmoreland Arts and Heritage Festival, a program I was very involved in as the County Parks Program Coordinator.

Avigail Oren: Right.

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- Malcolm Sias:** It was our big event at Twin Lakes Park.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Malcolm Sias:** And, Olga Gera was the executive director of the festival and she was friends with Linda. Linda suggested that the festival sponsor this heritage banner contest. She wanted every community in Westmoreland County to do a banner and we would display them at the Arts and Heritage Festival and she was involved with Olga Gera and helping to make that happen. And, I was involved with Olga in making the festival happen, so, I met Linda that way. But, we didn't really know each other very well. But, then Linda called us because she was developing the Creekside Trail – it's a little trail in Latrobe in her home community. They had bought this little piece of trail and they had a couple other pieces that they were trying to either get under some type of agreement, or purchase, or do something with. They were trying to expand it. They were trying to figure it out. So, one day she called and said, "Would you be willing to meet with me and talk to me about trail development?" So, Linda came to visit us at County Parks and Jack Paulik and I met with her to discuss the Creekside Trail. That's why, a couple of years later, I thought we needed her on the Board of the Regional Trail Corporation, because she was not only a person who had all the connections and all the know-how, but she also had a really strong interest in trails.
- Avigail Oren:** Right.
- Malcolm Sias:** So, her first little trail project was the Creekside Trail in Latrobe and I think today it's a couple of miles long and it's still active.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay, so you said something earlier that I want to come back to, which is that new trails are now associating with the RTC. So, the RTC remains active in developing trails in these counties that are not connected to the GAP?
- Malcolm Sias:** Yes.
- Avigail Oren:** Yes and...? Okay. I thought you were about to say "yes, but" or "yes and no." Okay.

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- Malcolm Sias:** Yes, we set up the RTC so that other trails could join by forming organizations and becoming Chapters. When Jack Paulik and I were working on this from Westmoreland, we realized that for trails, this was just the beginning. There would be more to come.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Malcolm Sias:** And, we're going through all this work to develop the organization and we said, "My God, we can't do this every time we begin a new trail." So, we wanted to set up the RTC so that it could be an organization that would continue to help with other trails.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Malcolm Sias:** But we're the only county who's really taken advantage of that. As we were finishing our section of RTC, we built the Five Star Trail from Greensburg to Youngwood and we set it up as a chapter. Then we built the Coal & Coke Trail and then we built the Westmoreland...
- Avigail Oren:** The Heritage Trail?
- Malcolm Sias:** We're still building Westmoreland Heritage right now. So, we set them all up as chapters of the Regional Trail Corp.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay. And, the Montour is another example of one of these...?
- Malcolm Sias:** Montour is not one of ours.
- Avigail Oren:** It's not one of the RTC chapters?
- Malcolm Sias:** No, it's not part of the RTC. Montour was one of the original ATA groups, I forgot Montour. They were one of the original seven. They were organizing and getting underway at the same time as the RTC. Larry Ridenour was also involved in getting that trail started. And then, it just so happens they're not part of the GAP.
- Avigail Oren:** Okay.
- Malcolm Sias:** In other words, like they're a connector to the GAP, but they're not directly in the GAP.

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Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: Yeah. But, they were strongly involved with RTC and with everybody else at the beginning and they were strongly involved with the ATA. They had representatives on the ATA board up until the ATA reorganized just a year or so ago. But, they don't now.

Avigail Oren: Okay. I'm curious about the relationship between municipalities and the trail chapters. Has there ever been, like, formalized relationships or is it more of a project-based or...?

Malcolm Sias: One of the things we did wrong at the beginning was that we did not involve the municipalities. I think we were so involved with trying to do everything else, like getting the three counties to agree and work together, forming these volunteer groups and pulling everybody together. But at the very beginning when we were building trail, we did have some assistance from municipalities. I remember that in Elizabeth Township, I think Elizabeth Township Public Works and Allegheny County Public Works actually ended up working together to build one of the pieces of trail up by Boston. But we never formally worked them into the organization. Later on, we were approached by two people who wanted to build the Five Star Trail. One was a Hempfield Township Supervisor and the other was the fire chief in the City of Greensburg, Ed Hutchinson was one of those bigger than life characters that could get things done. He came up with these ideas.

They contacted us because they realized we were building trail and getting it done. They said, "Hey, we have this great idea. We need help." So, we started talking about building this trail from Greensburg to Youngwood and they'd already chosen the name – Five Star Trail, named for the five municipalities through which it would pass. There was a lot of interest from all five municipalities, and, fortunately, the Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corporation had just bought that rail corridor. It's a rail with trail. So, the county had just bought it through the Industrial Development Corporation – and they were willing to work with us to develop the trail. So all the municipalities were saying that they were willing to assist with building and maintaining this trail so,

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we're like, "Okay, well, how do we nail them to that?" How do we get some commitment from them that's ongoing? How do we know for sure because we're sitting there with the fire chief of the City of Greensburg. How do we know he's speaking for the City Council and the mayor? And, we have the Hempfield Township supervisor – how do we know he's actually speaking for the Board? And, on that original group that came together, we had two mayors of the small boroughs and we had a Councilman from Youngwood. So, we sat down with our solicitor at that point and we outlined the problem. We said, "Look, here's where we are. We want to start this new project. And, we really want to make sure these communities are involved and that it really is the community itself and not just some interested individuals within the community." So, we actually wrote a detailed resolution that committed the municipalities to the project. It was very loosely-worded, but it outlined what we had to do to develop, from Greensburg to Youngwood and the responsibilities that each municipality would have to accept to make it happen. There was funding that was already granted through the state and all of that was in there and at the end it committed the municipality to assist with the construction and maintenance of the trail to the extent of their abilities, and, as their time permitted. It was very loose because we wanted to make sure we didn't scare people away. Well, all five municipalities passed that very quickly for the Five Star Trail, and, at that point, Jack Paulik and I knew we had made a mistake when we did the Yough River Trail and we never officially tied in the municipal governments. And then, after we had the resolution in place and found out it worked, we kind of followed that procedure from that point forward as we formed other chapters for other trails. I actually taught that concept at some state trail conferences because no one else was doing that and there were many other groups trying to figure out how to form a trail organization that could get the job done. Now we've taken the next step, beyond the resolution, where we now we have intergovernmental agreements with municipalities through which trail passes. These are much more detailed. We still begin with the resolution but then move on to an Intergovernmental Agreement.

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Avigail Oren: Interesting.

Malcolm Sias: You can't do Intergovernmental Agreements with all of them, you can only deal with the municipalities that are developed enough to be able to do it and really committed. So, you kind of pick and choose how that gets done. But, that's really where we need to go, you know, in the future, but that's a big step forward from where we were back when we first organized the RTC.

Avigail Oren: What's the incentive for municipalities to making this commitment?

Malcolm Sias: Well, back then, no one knew what the incentive was because no one knew if trails had any value. One thing I will tell you is that from the very beginning everybody talked about this plan to build 43 miles of trail from McKeesport to Connellsville. I was one of the first ones that rode that corridor in a high-rail vehicle and I looked at it, I said, "Oh, my God, we'll never get this built." I mean, truly, 43 miles of trail and there were all kinds of problems with it. You know what I mean? There were so many things that needed to be done. And then, everybody jumped from 43 miles to 150 miles from Pittsburgh to Cumberland and then from Pittsburgh to Washington D.C. We all began to realize the opportunity even though we had no idea of how to get it done.

Avigail Oren: Mm-hmm.

Malcolm Sias: And, none of us would say we weren't going there, but I'm not sure any of us truly believed that it was ever happening, you know what I mean? We had spent half a million dollars and built a couple of miles of trail here and there, but we had 43 miles of trail to build. At that point we had a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and energy but we did not have any idea of how that was all going to come together. But it all happened, and it all came together simply because a whole lot of people were committed and dedicated. But now, it is so much simpler these days because everybody realizes the value of the trail. Every community wants a trail.

Avigail Oren: Right.

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Malcolm Sias:

You know, back then, many people were scared to death of trails. I remember going to a meeting in Van Meter, which is this little community in Fayette County next to the Westmoreland County border, and, the residents of Van Meter were scared to death of the trail. One person said “If you build this trail to Washington, D.C., all those homeless people from Washington D.C. are going to walk right up that trail and end up here in Van Meter.” And, I looked at them and said, “They're homeless for a reason. They're not going anywhere.”

[Chuckle]

That's the kind of stuff we heard. Things like “People are going to use this trail to kidnap my kids out of my backyard. It runs past my house. People are going to come up the trail and break into my house at night.” We said “No, you won't be able to drive an automobile on the trail. How are they going to carry away your TV when they have to walk or ride a bike?” It was basic stuff like that. People were scared to death. People either loved it or they hated it. And, we heard a whole lot of that “not my backyard” thing. If the trail was near to their house, they were scared to death of it. If the trail was to be located across town and they could go there to ride their bikes then they loved the idea. Eventually, people's thinking changed. Now people literally want a trail right outside their door. They want to be able to hop on their bike and then hop on a trail. They don't want to have to haul their bike in their car. So, most people now realize that not only is a trail great for the local residents because they have a close-to-home place where they can go outdoors and exercise, but trails are also great for economic development. People come here to use the trail and they spend money. All the restaurants get filled up, people stay overnight, people buy gasoline. So, now most people have realized that there's a true value to these trails. In Westmoreland County the Laurel Highlands Tourist Promotion Bureau will come right out and tell you that what's filling rooms in Westmoreland County are these trails. They're bringing more people into the County than any other attraction. So now, our commissioners are willing to spend some of the hotel tax funds to help maintain trails, because they're realizing that's what drawing people into the area.

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Avigail Oren: Okay.

Malcolm Sias: But, there is just such a difference now from back when we started. We no longer have to fight the concept of, “This is a terrible idea.”

Avigail Oren: Yeah. So, in addition to, well, the lesson not learned on the GAP that you then subsequently learned with the Five Star Trail – what lessons did you feel like you learned on the GAP and then brought with you to subsequent trail builds? Were there some, like, key insights or takeaways?

Malcolm Sias: Well, one thing we learned on the GAP was we all helped each other. We had all these volunteer trail groups in different counties and we did almost all the bridges ourselves because you can't spend federal money on bridges or it becomes so complicated and so expensive just to engineer that your money just disappears. So, we decided we would renovate all the bridges ourselves. Well, just little things like that – every time there was a little bridge to do in Fayette County or no matter where it was – people converged from all over and got that bridge done. Everybody was working together and we were all committed to the overall concept. We carried that concept forward as we went on to build other trails. From there we went on to build the Five Star which is nine miles long to building the Westmoreland Heritage, which is 22 miles across Westmoreland County. Of that 22 miles we have now built nine miles east and nine miles west. We have a four-mile gap in the middle. We've worked hard to get all those municipalities to understand that it's not just about them and their section of trail. When Jack Paulik and I were working on the Five Star Trail, it was almost all built with municipal forces. We had state grant money that we used to pay for all the materials and supplies. The trail got underway when the City of Greensburg built a little 1.5 mile section. When we first started out no municipalities would allow their workers to cross a municipal border. Greensburg employees could only work in Greensburg, South Greensburg would only work in South Greensburg and Hempfield Township employees could only work in Hempfield. But, when we got to the end of the trail and we were constructing the final section through Buncher Park, I

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can show you a photo where we had a milling machine from a private company paid for by PennDOT [Pennsylvania Department of Transportation] and we had trucks lined up from every one of the municipalities – hauling millings out and hauling asphalt in. Westmoreland County also sent a truck. Everybody was working together to get that last piece done because everybody had come to the conclusion that the completed trail was good for everyone and every municipality.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: Two miles of trail in Greensburg is not very useful. What good is two miles a bike trail?

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: All of our municipal partners came to that conclusion over the course of time and that is when everyone started to work together.

Avigail Oren: Yeah, it's like a 20-meter swimming pool, right? You just flip the whole time.

Malcolm Sias: Once you have 20 miles then you want 50, right?

Avigail Oren: Right, right, yeah. So, I'm curious to hear you speak about what working on the GAP has meant to you personally and professionally.

Malcolm Sias: Oh. Well, to be honest, I learned so much. You know, Jack Paulik and I kid about this because we put so much time and effort into building this trail and forming the Regional Trail Corp. and getting it all done and it was such a great project and so very well received by the community. But we actually got in trouble for it, you know what I mean? Because we had bosses who did not see the value of trail and did not see the value of work and partnerships with others and could not understand why we would spend our time helping other counties get the trail completed. Jack was heading the construction committee and he literally oversaw that construction that occurred in Fayette County so there was a lot of controversy over that. Some people simply could not understand that by helping others, we were helping ourselves.

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We were working both inside and outside our county, but so were the reps from the other counties. When we were raising funds we did not concentrate on just our own County. The committee worked to fund whatever trail section was next in line and planned for development. It did not matter which County it was located in. But to be honest with you, that was the most valuable experience. I think a lot of what I bring to being the director of parks and recreation now are things I learned during this project. I learned all about fundraising by serving on the Regional Trail Corporation's funding committee and interacting with people like Linda Boxx, Jim Linaberger and Teeter Associates and learning how you put these things together. Since then I have raised millions of dollars for Westmoreland County Parks and I would have never known how to do that had I not learned from some of the best on the RTC fundraising committee.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: That all came from that, you know what I mean? And, the whole idea of putting together agreements so that organizations and people can work together and communities can become partners to make things happen. It's just that I learned so much from my RTC experiences. And, there were all the construction techniques we learned, everything we did wrong there...

Avigail Oren: We fixed.

Malcolm Sias: ...we've gradually improved as we went. So, you know, it was all very important. I learned many basic construction techniques from trail building, and it became the basis of knowledge that I needed for all the park development work I have done since.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: And, I have built all kinds of park facilities. So, it's like I learned, and I had the opportunity to develop that expertise. But, I think through the trails, probably the thing that benefited me the most were all the connections I made with people. Now, we get funded by the R. K. Mellon Foundation and

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others and they know me from my work on trails. That's how I got started with them. Now, since then, I have come to realize that foundations, like all funders, are all about "If we give you a grant we expect you to do the project just as you said you would do it and get it done in a timely manner."

Avigail Oren: Right?

Malcolm Sias: That's my reputation, that's what I do.. But, that all started through my work on trails. I think you bring all that with you, you know, a person is always growing and evolving.. But, there's always some things that you've got to deal with, you know, you can't make everybody happy.

Avigail Oren: Ain't that the truth? So, that's sort of the professional benefit. What about personally? Did you take personal joy in the trail being finished?

Malcolm Sias: Oh, sure. Yeah, I absolutely love the trail. And, I love all the trails I have been involved with over the years. I spend way more time working on trails than playing on them. I mean I've ridden my bike, like, twice this year and both of those were work related.

Avigail Oren: Yeah.

Malcolm Sias: I have built five bridges over the last two years, big bridges on the Westmoreland Heritage Trail. We have been renovating and building bridge decks with a combination of park workers and trail volunteer volunteers. I like to do that kind of stuff. We built one bridge that was over 120 feet long and others that were 85, 57, and 56 feet long. We took all of those out of the federally funded project and did them in-house. I'm always out doing some kind of trail work. Eight of us spent last Saturday, resurfacing sections of the Coal & Coke Trail. We had some washouts and stuff. So, there were seven or eight of us out there working, and I do a lot of that kind of stuff. Some of the best people I've met and the best friends I have are people that I've met through my trail associations and with the groups that I work with. One thing you'll find- I tell people this all the time, is that the people who use trails are, for the most part, very good people. The Five Star Trail in Greensburg is a rail-

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trail right through town and it runs right up against everybody's backyard. And, once again, at the beginning people were afraid of that. They're like, "Oh, these people are going to be right in my backyard." And then, I had this little old lady who lived there and she was afraid that the trail would ruin the neighborhood. But we completed the trail and the next thing you know, she was out there every day standing by her fence, talking to people and telling them about all the shrubbery and flowers she was growing in her yard. It became like her deal and her thing, you know what I mean? And, she told me later, "It's the greatest thing that ever happened, this trail."

Avigail Oren: Yeah. So, I've reached the end of my questions. So, this is when I open the floor to you to share any stories, anecdotes, last thoughts that I may not have known to ask you about.

Malcolm Sias: I wanted to mention two people that were very involved with the RTC. Shortly after we started, we decided to hire a trail manager and the person we chose was Robert "Bob" McKinley. Larry Ridenour and I, plus two or three others were involved in the interview process. We interviewed a bunch of different people. We were looking for a trail manager, which at that point, there was no such thing as a trail manager.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: No one knew exactly what that was. We all had our own ideas of what that person should be and how they should go about it. But, we ended up hiring Bob McKinley and I remember that he had this extremely strong community service background. He had been very involved in Jaycees [United States Junior Chamber]. He had led a lot of community-based projects through the Jaycees. And, you could tell that he was just one of these people that when he talked about stuff, he got you excited about it. And, that was his strength with the Regional Trail Corp. He was actually very good. He was going out and talking to those people who are afraid of the trail and with those communities that weren't sure that they wanted to trail to come through. He would go out and talk to them about all the good things that the trail could bring. And, he could do it in a way that they felt comfortable with it, you know what I mean? He really helped to win them over rather than pushing them

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further away. So, I wanted to mention Bob McKinley because he was a key person that was involved in our early success. Bob has since passed away. He was the leader of the RTC for quite a while. I also wanted to mention Leslie Pierce, who's the business manager now. She has been there for a long period of time. I'm not sure when we hired Leslie, but she started out as Bob McKinley's secretary and receptionist.

And, I can remember it was Jack Cusick and I – he was the person I mentioned who retired from Bell Telephone. We actually did the interviews for that position and we were interviewing Leslie. We had already interviewed seven or eight other people. We had a lot of applications for that position. Leslie was one of those people who you could tell she had a tremendous amount of skill and ability, but she would not tell us about any of it. So, we had to sit there and, like, yank it out of her, word by word, and ask her all these pointed questions. And, I have kidded Leslie about this periodically over time because now Leslie has become quite a strong leader and she has no hesitancy in talking to people. She has really developed into this position. She started out as a receptionist and became the business manager. We reached a point with RTC where we realized we couldn't afford two people and Leslie ended up being the one that stayed with us. She now manages all of the business of the RTC and we would be lost without her.

Avigail Oren: Right.

Malcolm Sias: She deals with those contracts. She deals with Omega Rail Management and with many of the municipalities. She has learned how to be a grant writer and to prepare successful grant applications to the PA DCNR. I think she loves her job. She works out of West Newton and she tells me she's good for another two or three years or five years before she retires. She's just one of those self-made people that found the right job and then grew into the position. I think, it's really been a good thing for her and, she's been a good thing for the RTC.

Avigail Oren: Yeah, that's definitely a person worth mentioning. Well, thank you so much for sharing these recollections.

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Malcolm Sias: Oh, you're welcome.

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

[End 1:07:51.2]

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