

VIDEO INTERVIEW – HANK PARKE

Paul G. Wiegman: Let me introduce you, Hank, as the president of the Somerset Rails-to-Trails Association. Is that what you want to be known as? I mean, this is going to be 50 years from now.

Hank Parke: Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association.

Paul G. Wiegman: Somerset County. I should know that since I'm on the board, shouldn't I? Let's go back into early history of The Great Allegheny Passage because I've talked to other people about this. We're looking at the beginning in 1975 with the abandonment of the Western Maryland Railway and the last ride on that railway. Were you aware of that ride at all?

Hank Parke: I heard about it somehow somewhere but was not involved at all.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, you were not involved?

Hank Parke: No.

Paul G. Wiegman: But, you are a Somerset County resident, lifelong, for at least so far?

Hank Parke: Yes.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, you were at least aware of the Western Maryland Railroad?

Hank Parke: You know, only slightly. It's kind of ironic because I knew there was a railroad that went through Rockwood, that went through Confluence because at times you would hear the train, you would see the train. I don't think at that period of time I really knew there were two. I really didn't spend that much time in Rockwood and really, I don't think for the last few years of that railroad it was very busy anyway.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right. It goes from there through a variety of changes and talks about a rail trail from Cumberland, Maryland to Connellsville, Pennsylvania. That gets scaled back in 1975 to Ohiopyle State Park. The land does get acquired in Ohiopyle

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State Park, and a trail gets built in Ohiopyle State Park. I'm assuming that you're aware of that trail being built.

Hank Parke: Yes. We rode the trail either the first or second year and this was- there was probably a group of 15 or 20 of us.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Hank Parke: Little kids. In fact, that particular time – a friend and I rented one of those pull-behind buggies and put our two kids in it. And, they're now 24 years old.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Was that your first ride on...

Hank Parke: Yeah, that was the first ride, and I think they were six.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that would've been around 1986 – somewhere around there?

Hank Parke: Yeah, roughly.

Paul G. Wiegman: About 20-some years – a little bit less that.

Hank Parke: Yeah, I wasn't as smart enough. It looks virtually flat. I wasn't really smart enough. He took it from Confluence to Ohiopyle and then we switched and put it on my bike. I brought it from Ohiopyle. I realized which was uphill and which was downhill.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: At that point, where did you start? At Ramcat?

Hank Parke: Yeah, we started at Ramcat.

Paul G. Wiegman: Was the Confluence part finished?

Hank Parke: No, no.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, that was a little...

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- Hank Parke:** No, actually, that was a few years later.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** In the '90s? There in the '90s?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, the Ramcat was it at least for three or four years based on my recollection.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Then we move ahead. And, if we move ahead to the point that Somerset County becomes involved. Up until that point, there was a trail in Fayette County. And, as you say, it went from Ramcat to Ohiopyle and then it got extended to Confluence. There was still a railroad bed, but what happened?
- Hank Parke:** Well, the year that I rode a lot of things happened that year. The stars were all in line. We rode the trail. I had been involved in the tourism committee – the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, and you were executive director?
- Hank Parke:** No, not at that point.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Not at that time, okay.
- Hank Parke:** I was a board member, and I was on that tourism committee, and I heard that there was some folks in Confluence that started to talk about, "Well, why can't we continue this trail into our town?" And then, I was speaking with Bob Hoffman who runs Laurel Ridge State Park at Laurel Hill. And Bob said, "Take a look at this." And, this was Joe Kuppack's several page essay on what he saw as he walked this whole right-of-way. And, all these things happened within a year period somehow. And so, we started talking to the folks in Confluence and I talked to Joe Kuppack. I said, "Why can't this happen?" And, Joe said, "Take it along the whole railroad right away and hook it up to the C&O Canal."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, he had walked it?

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- Hank Parke:** He had walked it, yeah. He had walked the whole thing. He's a great hiker. He's done the Appalachian Trail two and a half times.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, wow.
- Hank Parke:** The man likes to walk.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** He likes to walk, yeah.
- Hank Parke:** So, and it all made sense for people who knew nothing about building trails. Why not, you know? How difficult can it be? So, we started to look around at other trails and other parts of the country...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, the "we" you keep talking about is the...
- Hank Parke:** "We" is the tourism committee of the Chamber.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, okay.
- Hank Parke:** And, I spoke to a woman who was with the Elroy Sparta Chamber of Commerce – I think that was the organization. And, they helped with the Elroy Sparta Trail in Wisconsin.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Hank Parke:** And, she gave me some pointers. I mean, what I knew of trail building was I helped clear ski trails in Hidden Valley, and ski slopes, and that kind of thing.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's good enough.
- Hank Parke:** So, a little bit different deal. And, she said, "Roughly \$10,000 a mile."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Hank Parke:** And, that's without bridges and tunnels. They're obviously kind of separate issues in themselves. "Gee, that doesn't sound too

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bad.” So, I suggested to the Somerset County Chamber that we support this project however we could. And, I didn’t know how that would really be, but everybody agreed that, gee, this made a lot of sense because, for our organization, we were always accused of being this Somerset Chamber of Commerce -- that we didn’t really represent the whole county.

Paul G. Wiegman: The town of Somerset?

Hank Parke: Right, right, and we did. We were a county organization. We had members throughout the county.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Hank Parke: So, I thought, “Well, this is a great idea to be more involved with the southern part of the county anyway and to show our support for a project that would never really go through the town of Somerset.” And, gosh, it was a beautiful trail in Ohiopyle State Park. Why couldn’t this come through Somerset County? So, we were raising money through foundations. We started to get our rails-to-trails group organized, incorporated and got in touch with foundations.

Paul G. Wiegman: When did that incorporation take place?

Hank Parke: That would’ve been, I think, it was ‘87.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay, a year after the Ohiopyle opens.

Hank Parke: Yes. and the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy – if I remember all these things right – the national organization started in ‘86. And, we were really one of the first major trails that got in touch with them asking, “How do we do this?”

Paul G. Wiegman: How do we do this?

Hank Parke: How do we do this thing? And, they were actually quite helpful. They had been given, I think, \$150,000 grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation for operational purposes and to really get that organization going. We contacted Mike Watson in the

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Mellon Foundation the next year and I don't think the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy was terribly happy with us. But, they decided to give us a challenge grant of \$150,000 and not give the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy money that year. They wanted to see projects on the ground. They wanted to see people working on trails. And actually, how we did this was the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy administered that grant.

Paul G. Wiegman: I see, okay.

Hank Parke: Because, they knew the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy was a real living, breathing organization that had some really good ideas. We were just a ragtag bunch of people that thought this was a good idea.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Sure, why not?

Hank Parke: Yeah, we had no experience. It's pretty amazing when I think back on these past years.

Paul G. Wiegman: Now, Joe – at one point – you had Joe give a presentation?

Hank Parke: We organized things, and I can't remember the exact year in some cases, or month, or whatever.

Paul G. Wiegman: I'll probably find it when I go through the files.

Hank Parke: Yeah. We had a great meeting in Somerset. It was at the Ramada Inn at Somerset. Joe gave a presentation. We had George Wyckoff – who was the mayor of Cumberland at the time – and I knew George from skiing at Hidden Valley. He and his family all skied up there. I said, "Hey, George. I've got this idea, what do you think?" And, of course, they said, "Gee, this is great."

Paul G. Wiegman: So, that starts to bring in the Maryland people?

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Hank Parke: Yeah, because really from the very beginning, our trail group, our Somerset County trail group looked at this as extending this trail from at a bare minimum of Ohiopyle all the way to Cumberland.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Hank Parke: And, really as we started to learn about things, we actually were calling it the Cumberland to Connellsville Trail at one point.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. And, this group was looking to oversee that whole...

Hank Parke: We didn't know.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Why not?

Hank Parke: Well, we knew that chances were pretty slim that we could really do anything out of Somerset County. I don't know the folks over in Connellsville real well. Although, we did sit down with them. It was a woman who was their president of their Chamber of Commerce. We talked to them about kind of what our idea was. Of course, everybody thought this was great. Especially, when you look at a town like Connellsville – in a way – it's very similar to Johnstown where it was an industrial town in their heyday. And, "Gosh, we can bring people into town for anything, let's do it." It's sort of fortunate that the towns in Somerset County never grew any bigger than they are. They didn't have a lot of industries. So, they don't appear as you go through them as kind of rustbelt towns that have seen their better days.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, as distressed as some of them in the northern part of the trail.

Hank Parke: Right, yeah.

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Paul G. Wiegman: So, the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association forms and I take it there was a report from the grant – from the Mellon Foundation – on the feasibility of this trail. So, we're now at a point we have an organization – we had feasibility?

Hank Parke: Yeah, well actually we were given a \$20,000 grant or actually it would've been probably through the American's Industrial Heritage Project, which is Randy Cooley's. It's gone through several name changes and organizational changes. But, that was something that Congressman Murtha set up, and it was a nine-county area. And, to look at the industrial heritage including rail and how can we preserve this and kind of put a tourism- make them tourism-friendly, visitor-friendly sites. And, I remember we met – I think it was at the Johnstown Airport – with Congressman Murtha, Betty Halp – who was the chairman of the tourism committee for the Chamber. Bill Lloyd who was our state rep in Harrisburg. I think Henry Cook was there who is now the president of Somerset Trust Company – and I think he may have been president back then. But, we were meeting with Congressman Murtha to basically say, "Hey, this nine-county area is, in fact, a nine-county area. We saw projects in Cambria County and Blair County where, quite honestly, there were more constituents."

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

Hank Parke: We were saying, "Wait a second, what about some projects in Somerset County?" And, you know this trail is rolling along. This trail has some momentum and it's a great story. And, what a beautiful section of this nine-county region.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, and it's the southern section.

Hank Parke: That's right. And so, that kind of got us really connected with that AIHP movement.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Hank Parke: And, that got us kind of our first money to do this feasibility study.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, the feasibility study probably said it's feasible.
- Hank Parke:** Absolutely.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Go for it.
- Hank Parke:** Go for it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Which brings you to the railroad?
- Hank Parke:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The corridor was still there. It was still in one piece, relatively.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You're now starting to get to a place where you really have to do something. You really have to put some things together.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, how do we move forward?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Hank Parke:** Of course, we got in touch with the railroad and said, "Hey, we got this great idea to turn this into a trail. Why don't you give us the property?"
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Hank Parke:** And, they pretty much said, "We happen to be a business and as a business, we really don't make a habit out of giving away assets." Now, if I remember right though – at the time of that last train ride, the railroad offered this to the Conservancy free and clear.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It wasn't free and clear. It was offered to the Conservancy and the Conservancy offered to do a bargain sale. In other words, to say we'll pay X amount of dollars. The rest of the money you take is a tax write-off and it really realizes this cash. But, I don't think we were talking with the same railroad at that point

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because I believe with the Conservancy, they were directly talking with what still existed of the Western Maryland Railway.

Hank Parke: Oh, okay.

Paul G. Wiegman: Whereas you were talking with...

Hank Parke: CSX.

Paul G. Wiegman: The CSX, right. It had gone through- actually, the changes and the abandonment was some of the final steps in dissolving the Western Maryland Railway. So, the Conservancy was dealing with Western Maryland.

Hank Parke: Well, once we realized that they were pretty adamant that this was not going to be our Christmas present, we said, "Okay, what's your price?" Well, I'm not sure if they really knew we were serious because they really took forever to come up with anything. As they were working on what they might sell this to this naïve group of do-gooders. We realized that we really didn't have a good vehicle to own property and who should this be? And, one thought was well, gee, its state park over in Ohio. Why shouldn't this be a state park? And, in my dealings with state parks, I talked to Bob Hoffman, especially, many, many times. And, I know how tight the budgets were. I know how undermaintained most of the facilities are in state parks. That, to me, didn't really seem feasible at all. And, the idea of being a little bit more independent and not being a governmental part of the bureaucratic system – to me made more sense.

Paul G. Wiegman: For the trail ultimately?

Hank Parke: Yeah. So, we met with Tony Suppa from the Conservancy. And, when I say "we," we had a representative in the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. A representative of the Somerset County Conservation District and I think possibly somebody from the Somerset County Planning Commission...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

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Hank Parke: ...and myself. And, we went down to Pittsburgh and we met with Tony and basically, in a nutshell, said, "Sure, we'll take ownership most likely temporarily." "Great." So, once we got an agreement with the railroad I said, "Well, send a copy of this down to John Oliver at the Conservancy."

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Hank Parke: Because they're really going to be the owners. And, once John received that, he called me and said, "Why did I get this?"

[Chuckle]

To make a long story short, there was a little communication problem. And, as it turned out, we scratched our heads, we scratched our heads. We didn't know what we were going to do. We really didn't know.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, at that point, you had an agreement that you didn't have an owner?

Hank Parke: Yeah, we didn't have anybody that necessarily to step forward.

Paul G. Wiegman: Or, pay for it?

Hank Parke: Right, so we talked to- well, what we did is we said, "Okay, let's try and get more people on board. All of the township supervisors, the Byrd council people, along this right-of-way in Somerset County. Let's invite them to a fun event. Have them bring their spouses, their children, whatever." We made arrangements with Riversport to give them bike rentals at no charge. The fire department in Confluence was doing their chicken barbecue that day. We worked it around that schedule. So, we invited them all and included our county commissioners and state senator, state rep. "Please come down, enjoy the trail. Don't make this a day away from your family. Bring your family with you."

Paul G. Wiegman: Bring the family, yeah.

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- Hank Parke:** And, Brad Cober – who was still a county commissioner – was actually vacationing down at Deep Creek Lake, if I remember all this correctly. He brought his family up and we put them all on bikes and he really liked it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Good.
- Hank Parke:** Not too long after that, we sat down with him and said, “Mr. Cober, we’ve got a little problem here.”
- Paul G. Wiegman:** A small problem.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah. “We need a responsible entity to take ownership of this.”
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Hank Parke:** And, he talked it over with the other commissioners and said, “Sure, we’ll do it. You raise the money to make the purchase and the county will take ownership.” So, we raised the money. We – the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association – which was now an incorporated entity. We’d been around for a couple years at this point. And, with the springboard of the \$150,000 from the Mellon Foundation...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Hank Parke:** ...and \$119,000-something from the Heinz Endowments, we- and support from- we were recycling cans at that point. We were written up in *USA Today*. Our co-ed did a special supplement and what people were doing all over the United States. They had every state in the union and we were Pennsylvania. We were recycling cans to build a trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Build a trail.
- Hank Parke:** Wow, you name it. It was sort of the “no stones unturned.”
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Make sales, whatever you can do.

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- Hank Parke:** Oh, you bet, you bet. It worked. To make a long story short, it worked. I mean, some of the foundations that we got in touch with- and I never dealt with foundations before it all.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, really? Wow.
- Hank Parke:** You just start reading, “What’s a foundation? What do they like to hear? What do they want to know?” So, we sent to 60-something foundations. And, the ones that were really involved in family issues or whatever. As we explained this whole project, we would insert a paragraph about what a great family recreational opportunity this is and it’s at no cost whatsoever. If they were environmental, we would sort of insert that paragraph. And, we would tailor these things. I mean, from all I read about foundations. I mean, that’s sort of how you do it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Hank Parke:** And, the neat thing was – a couple turned us down – but sent us \$1,000 checks. It’s like, “We’re real sorry we can’t do more, but good luck with your project and here’s a thousand bucks.” It’s sort of a consolation prize.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, did that purchase from the whole right-of-way from Confluence the- I guess we’re calling Confluence the bridge crossing at Confluence, whatever road there...
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, to the Mason-Dixon line.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** To the Mason-Dixon Line.
- Hank Parke:** Well, we had estimated based on what the average width they told us the railway right-of-way was and the mileage it was. It was going to be, we figured, \$4,500 per mile.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay. Wow, that’s not...
- Hank Parke:** For the purchase. Yeah, and but whether they estimated it wrong or we estimated it wrong really doesn’t matter at this

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point. We figured we needed to raise a total of, I guess, it was \$300,000 because the \$150,000 was the match. And...

Paul G. Wiegman: Boy, in this day and age that's a bargain.

Hank Parke: That's a bargain.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Hank Parke: We purchased it in pieces and we purposely did that. Number one, we didn't have all the money we wanted at one point and we wanted to start developing as quickly as possible to keep this momentum going. And, they dillydallied around as far as, "Okay, you owe us this much more." They would never get back to us. So actually, Dave Mankameyer who had been on our rails-to-trails board, ran for county commission because there were several projects he wanted to see completed. This trail was one of those projects. So, Dave and the Somerset County solicitor and I flew down to Jacksonville to meet with these folks face-to-face and say, "Hey, we are for real. We want to see this project done. We've had this vision since we first saw this trail that this needs to go all the way to Cumberland, and you're obviously a key component in this."

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Hank Parke: And, that kind of got them off the mark. They also sold us a couple sections that had rails and ties on it which the county then put out for bid and sold which helped us to raise money to... Yeah, yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: There's money there.

Hank Parke: So, how much we ended up paying in the end – I really can't remember. It's more than \$300,000 though.

Paul G. Wiegman: I would imagine I'll find it when I go through the files and get a hard... But, do you remember when the first – what are we talking now – late 1980s?

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- Hank Parke:** When the first part was opened?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** No, when the first part was purchased.
- Hank Parke:** I would say probably '89, or '90...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** '89? Okay.
- Hank Parke:** Probably around '90, maybe even '91.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, now we're at a point that it's purchased. Now, we have to build a trail?
- Hank Parke:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What did you do then?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, yeah. Well, again, we were figuring \$10,000 a mile. Well, we picked the easiest piece from Rockwood to the Low Bridge past Markleton.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** At Pinkerton Tunnel Low Bridge?
- Hank Parke:** Right, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, why was that easiest?
- Hank Parke:** It didn't have any bridges or tunnels.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay.
- Hank Parke:** So, we wanted a piece that we could get on the ground quickly so people could see what this was. We could start getting a constituency, build up a membership, and use that money to keep moving this forward.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, not to take away from Rockwood, but that seems like from nowhere to nowhere. But, it was a bike trail?

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Hank Parke: You may think that, but the thing of it is with the Pennsylvania Turnpike having access in Somerset. Rockwood is ten minutes from Somerset. Rockwood is the closest trailhead to Hidden Valley, Seven Springs, Pioneer Park campground, Kooser Campground, Kooser State Park, Laurel Hill State Park. That's the closest town, closest trailhead to all those summer vacationers.

Paul G. Wiegman: That's an interesting perspective.

Hank Parke: So, we really figured that that made the most sense. Plus, looking at some of those bridges, it scared us. We had no idea what we were going to do. We really didn't know.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: And, of course, the bridges were the things that scared people back in 1975, too.

Hank Parke: Yeah, and I don't blame them.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: But, you guys were naïve enough to just go ahead.

Hank Parke: We were. We really were.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, you begin building the trail with yourself and people with wheelbarrows, or what did you... Did you let out for bids or...?

Hank Parke: Yeah. We really have not done much in the way of volunteer construction. Some of the other trail groups have done a phenomenal job at that. That's one of the areas where we have really fallen short, I think. We put everything out to bid. We took advantage of enhancement funds.

Paul G. Wiegman: Which are ISTEAs?

Hank Parke: ISTEAs from the federal highway, coming down to the state. That was real beneficial. We had really interested Randy

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Cooley in America's Industrial Heritage Project. And, they helped get some funding that direction. Congressman Murtha helped get funding.

Paul G. Wiegman: It sounds like there was a good bit of interest in people taking part.

Hank Parke: There was. Once the governmental entities and the individuals who represented us realized that we were moving forward with this – virtually with them or without them while, again, we're still going on a premise early on that this was not going to cost too much money. Then you get the first bids back and you're like, "Whoa." And fortunately, we had enough interest then and we were able to get these funds to put the first couple pieces together. And, boy it was exciting.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, Rockwood was first. Rockwood from to Pinkerton tunnel?

Hank Parke: To Pinkerton. And then, it was either the next year, or I think there was maybe a year in between where we weren't really constructing anything. We were planning and trying to raise money. But, we did the Rockwood to the Garrett section.

Paul G. Wiegman: The other direction?

Hank Parke: Yeah, so that Rockwood was kind of the main trailhead.

Paul G. Wiegman: Was the hub?

Hank Parke: You could go both directions from there. And, again, we didn't have any bridges and tunnels.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, the...

Hank Parke: So, we're still doing the easy stuff but knowing in the back of our minds that the reality of doing these bridges and the Pinkerton tunnel was upon us.

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Paul G. Wiegman: So, now you're Rockwood to Pinkerton, and Rockwood to Garrett, and you have the Pinkerton bridges ahead of you and you have the Salisbury Viaduct ahead of you.

Hank Parke: And, the Pinkerton tunnel.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, the Pinkerton tunnel, yeah.

Hank Parke: So, we contracted an engineering outfit to look into the Pinkerton tunnel and to see what it would take to redo that. And, we found out it wasn't going to be terribly expensive. I mean, I think with the engineering work which was more expensive than we thought it would be.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, this is a relatively short tunnel?

Hank Parke: Yeah, 800 feet – somewhere around there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Something like that? Right.

Hank Parke: We were going to be spending about \$200,000 to \$250,000 to do all the engineering and to do the tunnel work. We went out to bid on that, once we started that project, the contractor found out that there were tons of rock that was sitting on the tunnel liner that wasn't there when the engineer went through. And, this would cost X amount to get that off of there. We didn't have any more money, and we ended up actually paying the contractor what we were obligated to pay him and they left.

Paul G. Wiegman: Did they do the work on the bridges also?

Hank Parke: No.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, okay.

Hank Parke: No, the bridge work...

Paul G. Wiegman: So, they leave and now you have to get the bridges done?

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- Hank Parke:** Yeah, we ended up getting the bridge work done locally. We bid that out not using government funds. So, we could do that much less expensively.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, where was this money coming from? Again, foundations in the county?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, that money would've been foundation money that basically was geared for construction. Because it was private funding, we didn't have to jump through the governmental hoops and build it to their specs.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** At this point, you're no longer going through the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, but you're going through your own 501(c)(3) charitable organization?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, and the county. The county was very involved in the contracting efforts.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Hank Parke:** I mean, they really... We were pushing it and we were helping raise money. They were doing the contracting end of things.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Somewhere along here Lincoln Van Sickel comes in?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, yeah. What years those were...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, I'll check with him.
- Hank Parke:** You'll have to dig through the boxes. Yeah, that's right. We needed somebody to really spearhead this. It was more than just a volunteer effort. It needed somebody to keep it organized.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** A project manager?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah. And, that's where Linc came in. Linc had been on our Rails-to-Trails Board. He was very interested in seeing this project go through.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, he's a transplanted Somerset County person?
- Hank Parke:** Right, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** He came into Somerset County as a retirement place.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, I think so.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So now, was he involved in the Rockwood to Pinkerton or did he get involved a little bit later?
- Hank Parke:** I think he got involved after that first piece and it might've even been after the second piece. But, we had a lot of trail to build, and as I said, the rest of it was much more difficult. There were bridges every direction you looked, there were two tunnels, and this was just more than we really felt could be done without having somebody to really manage the projects.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And now, we're getting to the place that some changes have taken place also within the state. John Oliver is no longer with the Conservancy, but he's secretary of DCNR at this point.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, gets re-involved with The Great Allegheny Passage.
- Hank Parke:** That's right. Yeah, and having a governor like Tom Ridge who enjoys cycling, talking about stars being aligned. This is the second time that happened that everything just seemed like it all fit. Rick Geist was chairing the House Transportation Committee. Rick's been a cyclist for years, and years, and years. This isn't his district, but he could see what this meant.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** To the state of Pennsylvania.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah This isn't just what it means to Somerset County. This isn't just what it means to the neighboring counties. This is a monumental project and he could see that very quickly.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Good, okay.

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- Hank Parke:** So, boy, you have all those things happening in Harrisburg, and this was getting to be the time that the ATA was getting formed also. I mean, that was getting off to a slow start because I remember we had at least one year that we felt that if we were on our own, we could've gotten some foundation money and been building. But, we all kind of agreed let's get this organization formed, and this has really got to be what moves us forward – catapult us forward.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, that's the ATA?
- Hank Parke:** The ATA.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Formed the ATA?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, and I remember Dave Mankameyer and I were a couple of the folks on the founding board. And, we would go to meetings together and we talked on the way over and the way back, "Are we really doing something that makes sense here?"
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Hank Parke:** Are we going to be able to bring all these trails groups together and have them agree on what the biggest priorities are along this long corridor?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Because that makes the state as one of the, quote, "quaint trail groups."
- Hank Parke:** Right. And, the main reason for the ATA is we go into a private foundation, and we'd say, "We're part of this vision of a long-distance trail tying Pittsburgh to Cumberland. They said, "Well, funny thing. Somebody was in our office last week saying, 'We're part of this vision from a long-distance trail from Pittsburg to Cumberland.' So, why don't you guys just work together?" And, that really wherein lies the ATA got, of course.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** One of the stories that I've heard is John said that same thing. I keep hearing "For money for DCNR. I don't understand what all these groups are, why don't you call it one thing?" And

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apparently, that motivation of John's created The Great Allegheny Passage.

Hank Parke: If that's going to get us more money, this could be the "John Oliver Trail" is what that leads to.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, so we've got some bridges done over the Pinkertons, but we still got Salisbury Viaduct and the Big Savage Tunnel.

Hank Parke: Yeah, well again, every direction we've looked we had something major – we had a major obstacle. It's fortunate that our organization had purchased this and the county owned this whole corridor because the Route 219 effort to do a four-lane highway was coming in. And, this property was treated as a park even though because the four-lane highway – Route 219 – goes underneath.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, and that was after county owns the Salisbury Viaduct.

Hank Parke: That's right. Had the ownership of this been in limbo, I think the state could've really torn out a section of the Salisbury Viaduct because that's what they would've preferred to do, I'm sure, to put in a four-lane highway.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, which is what happened to the bridge over at 381 in Ohiopyle and 281 in Confluence.

Hank Parke: That's right. They could not do that.

Paul G. Wiegman: They couldn't do it?

Hank Parke: And, really the trail would've stopped there because you've got a two-lane highway, a four-lane highway, an active railroad line, and a river.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, a river.

Hank Parke: How would you possibly ...

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** Get across all this?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah. So, it's a good thing we got going when we did because we saved that viaduct. That went out to bid just as a single project. No real trail surfacing and we got that piece done. But...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Just the viaduct?
- Hank Parke:** Just the viaduct. Getting into Meyersdale, we had to figure out what to do with the street crossings. There was a bridge over top that also carried gas lines...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, that's right, yes.
- Hank Parke:** ...on and on and on. And, each year we thought we were going to get that done. And, there was... Well, what actually happened was when the railroad abandoned that, things weren't done exactly how they needed to be done. Therefore, all these entities had to agree. The borough had to agree.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, in the water company...
- Hank Parke:** How everything was- I mean, coordinating...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I imagine it could get a bit more complicated.
- Hank Parke:** ...coordinating all those different entities was really difficult – really, really difficult. And, yeah, everybody wanted to see it done. Well, you would work on the plans, and then there was something that would come up. So, I mean, that was just finished really, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Just this year?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Really? Yeah.
- Hank Parke:** I mean, and that's something...

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, that was being thought about in the '90s?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And then, here we are in 2005 and it's just being finished now.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, we would hope that would've been done by- in fact, we hoped the whole trail was going to be done by the year 2000. When we first got going on this, that seemed like a logical goal. Plus, gee, 2000? That seems like it's a century away.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, right.
- [Chuckle]
- Hank Parke:** One of the things that happened, which I sort of left out – when we purchased the rail line through the county, we also for an extra – I think it was \$10,000 – got the station in Meyersdale.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, I was going to ask about that. That's...
- Hank Parke:** And, several organizations had been interested in that station. The folks in Meyersdale really wanted to see that preserved. And, the railroad was good enough to say, "We aren't going to sell that separately. Whoever buys this whole right-of-way, you see them if you want it."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, that explains why that was there.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, the commissioners said, "We think it needs preserved also, but we look at that as a money pit." And, the folks at Meyersdale said, "Wait a second. You have to do something with this." And, that was sort of put in their court. You form a 501(c)(3). You form an entity." That's where the Meyersdale Area Historical Society came from.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Comes in? Yeah.
- Hank Parke:** That wasn't in existence

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** That wasn't in existence before?
- Hank Parke:** No, that wasn't in existence before that. That was formed to basically transform that station and turn that into a museum to really – number one – to be a support facility for the trail. But also, to tell the story of the history of the Casselman Valley.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay. Of that region?
- Hank Parke:** Right.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Hank Parke:** And, they were very, very successful in getting funds to redo that. It had holes through the roof.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, really?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, there were holes in the roof. It had no maintenance. It had been broken into a few times. I mean, it's beautiful now.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I'm trying to think, is that the only Western Maryland station other than the station in Cumberland?
- Hank Parke:** That's intact?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's intact.?
- Hank Parke:** There's one in Connellsville that I think is either Western Maryland or whatever the other railroad is there. It's not right on the trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, it isn't?
- Hank Parke:** The P&LE.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's right, that's the old P&LE line down there?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, yeah.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** That's right, and in West Newton, there is a station, but that would be P&LE. That would be Western...
- Hank Parke:** Western Maryland didn't go any farther than Connellsville if I remember right. And, somehow in Connellsville – and I remember going over there – because we would visit these other trails and see what they were doing or these other sections of the trail. They had to bring- and they were on different levels. They had to bring the P&LE and the Western Maryland somehow...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Together?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, to meet.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, I think it ended at the Bowest Yard. So, the station in Confluence was gone by then.
- Hank Parke:** Mm-hmm. There was one in Rockwood also where the parking area is in Rockwood there was a station there.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, that's right, that's right. Oh, okay at the parking area?
- Hank Parke:** And, unfortunately- yeah. None of these were saved over the years. Once they weren't using the railroad it was like...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Things went...
- Hank Parke:** ...well it just became a vandal magnet kind of.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, and a lot of...
- Hank Parke:** And, the whole trail – it was obvious there were beer parties. The remnants of those. It was a place to dump garbage. As we were getting ready to build the Rockwood to Garrett section, we had a couple work days. I had a fellow come into the Chamber of Commerce office. This is a kind of funny story, but this is how thing get put together. And, he had a New Enterprise Stone & Lime hat on and a New Enterprise belt

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buckle. And I said, “You must work for New Enterprise.” And, he said, “Yes I do.”

Paul G. Wiegman: How do you know?

[Chuckle]

Hank Parke: And, he came in to talk about the gates and the trail and he had some suggestions, and this, and that. And, I said, “What do you do for New Enterprise?” He said, “I run their crane.” I said, “Boy, we need one of them.” The banks below the trail were incredibly steep, but we had refrigerators, we had car engines, we had tires. We had two work days – and they weren’t even eight-hour days. But, we hauled up 500 tires that we had to pay to get rid of.

Paul G. Wiegman: They were taken off the runway?

Hank Parke: Yeah, and there’s still areas where a lot of them are still overgrown and you can’t really see them as you bike by. But, there’s a lot of stuff still out there. So, we actually had him reach over the bank...

Paul G. Wiegman: And, pick them.

Hank Parke: ...and drop, and what we would do is we just tied the cable around 20 tires together. He hit a button and...

Paul G. Wiegman: Up it went.

Hank Parke: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: It’s easier than carrying it up by yourself.

Hank Parke: Well, we had a lot of community support. We had Boy Scout groups, we had church groups, you name it, to help get things cleaned up. And, folks really took ownership of this trail. The folks in Rockwood, don’t you be driving- even before it was done as we’re starting to work on this, don’t you be driving a

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pickup load of junk up there. You replace the roof on your shed.

Paul G. Wiegman: They were beginning to protect it?

Hank Parke: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, which was great because a Linear Park like that how do you...

Paul G. Wiegman: How do you protect it?

Hank Parke: ...yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was one of the concerns of the state.

Hank Parke: And, you have got to really hope that these towns love this project. In the beginning, we had the National Park Service involved actually in the beginning through Congressman Murtha to really have some town meetings. "How do people feel about this, what do they like, what do they dislike, what are their concerns?" And, I can remember sitting in one of these meetings where somebody was referring to the Appalachian Trail going, "You know, they're going to buy up all the properties as far as you can see on both sides."

Paul G. Wiegman: And, keep everybody out.

Hank Parke: "Who are they?" "The government." And then, he said, "Ten miles. It's a ten-mile corridor on both sides."

Paul G. Wiegman: Ten miles on both sides?

Hank Parke: And, I said, "Well, now just picture this. Number one, we're still needing to get money." I'm sort of backing up here. "We're needing to get money to purchase this whole thing." Who was going to come up with this money? Now, ten miles means they're going to buy out the town of Confluence, the town of Rockwood, the town of Garrett, the town of Meyersdale, and actually part of the town of Somerset.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yes, yeah.

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- Hank Parke:** Who is going to do this? You really think? He was pretty quiet the rest of the...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The rest of the meeting?
- Hank Parke:** ...he actually didn't – he never really thought about what it was that he heard, but he heard it there before it was true.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, obviously, there was some opposition then.
- Hank Parke:** There was. I mean, some people thought this is really going to help the economy. We're going to have a bunch of yuppies on bikes come through our community and this is going to be good for us? Explain how.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Explain how.
- Hank Parke:** And, really...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What did you tell them?
- Hank Parke:** We had information from some other trails. This is where the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy was helpful. They had some information from other trails. So, I mean, we could tell them this is what other trails have experienced. They don't get the dumping anymore, they don't get the vandalism and the beer parties, and that kind of thing. They don't get the trespassing.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, so you were able to counter this?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, we were. Did everybody believe us? Absolutely not. John Tressler who was the president of Byrd Council in Confluence. John thought this was a stupid idea.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** He didn't want it?
- Hank Parke:** Absolutely stupid. We've actually used him to talk to other groups now in other areas who are not sure what this trail is going to mean to their community. I mean, he's talked about property...

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Paul G. Wiegman: And, he's in support of it now?

Hank Parke: He's very supportive of it now. He talked about property values that have gone up. He talked about new businesses that have started. This was beyond his wildest imagination.

Paul G. Wiegman: When it came about?

Hank Parke: Yeah. And, we're really still in our infancy. I mean, the way I look at it – yes, we've grown a lot – but we're barely in kindergarten. We have crawled.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: We have crawled.

Hank Parke: We are walking, but we're not mature adults yes, believe me. There's a lot that's going to happen between now and the next 20 years.

Paul G. Wiegman: The next 20 years and ...

Hank Parke: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: How about the Big Savage Tunnel? That had to be a...

Hank Parke: Yeah, when we first started to look at that, I heard it was going to cost more than a million bucks, then I heard \$2 million, and then maybe about \$5 million.

Paul G. Wiegman: It's going up exponentially.

Hank Parke: Yeah. Once they really started to get into that, they realized it was a major project. And, we needed a lot of financial help and that's- Linda Boxx, bless her heart, rallied the troops. She did everything that she could. She has really- we're out here in the hinterland. We don't have the advantage like Alleghany County folks getting that regional asset district money. I mean, that's not a possibility at all. She knew we needed more help. We're kind of her country cousins or something.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Country cousins, right.

Hank Parke: That's been kind of a painful project because really once the contractor came in – there was a contractor from Canada – they realized what the engineers were saying and the design just wasn't going to work based on the amount of water, based on the amount of damage, based on a lot of things. This was not going to be practical; it was not going to work. We've got to go back to drawing board and figure out how we're going to make this thing work.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, at this point, Linc is no longer somewhere along there, and Brett Hollern has come on board as a paid staff member of the county.

Hank Parke: Yes, right, right. And, that actually that was through the – I'm trying to think of... DCNR circuit rider program or if it was still the last years of DCA or the committee affairs. I can't remember how those...

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, which has been folded into the DCNR now.

Hank Parke: Right, but the idea of the circuit rider program is to get a couple of governmental entities paying for a staff person to do certain jobs.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, I see.

Hank Parke: And, this was the combination of Somerset County and I can't remember who else the other...

Paul G. Wiegman: One of the other municipalities or...?

Hank Parke: Yeah, I'm not sure if it was a municipality in Somerset County or- because he did some other work for ATA.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Hank Parke: It wasn't only Somerset stuff.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** I see.
- Hank Parke:** It was mostly Somerset stuff.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Mostly Somerset, okay.
- Hank Parke:** But, he's been a real asset. He actually did an internship with the Planning Commission that was somewhat involved in trail. Then, when he finished college and he had a degree in parks and recreation, it seemed to fit in real well.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It fit in, yeah. On the other end of the trail, you've gotten past the Pinkerton Tunnel and you've gotten to Fort Hill.
- Hank Parke:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, I understand that the trail was built north of Fort Hill for a specific reason just to kind of show you were indeed headed in that direction, but you hadn't made it to Confluence yet.
- Hank Parke:** When we purchased the right-of-way, it was done with a quit claim deed which basically means that the railroad was selling whatever interest they had in that. Now, railroads are purchased in different ways or set up in different ways. In the early 1900s when they were purchasing property, most of this particular railroad – Western Maryland – was purchased with a fee simple title.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Hank Parke:** Which was good for us.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Which was very good for us.
- Hank Parke:** Not all of it was. We had a couple of landowners who said, "Over my dead body."
- [Chuckle]
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay. Do I want to know what you did?

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- Hank Parke:** We did outlast a few of them. And really, a couple of them finally came around to say, "Well, here's some stipulations that we want to make, but we aren't going to stand in your way."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay.
- Hank Parke:** They realized that we were doing things as professionally as we could and looking into all the ups and downs, and whatever advantages and disadvantages there were for them as an owner of property on both sides. One gentleman was very honest. He said, "I throw my buddies in the back of the pickup truck in hunting season and we go out there and shoot deer." driving on the railroad.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Driving on the railroad.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah. Which is illegal as anything.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It sure is.
- Hank Parke:** I mean, really, a lot of people- the four-wheelers. The four-wheeler community was a little bit up and arms because they realize they were not going to be able to ride on this anymore. No really, they were all trespassing anyway.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It wasn't their land.
- Hank Parke:** No, it wasn't their land and they did not have permission and it was illegal. So, gee, we can't do this illegal thing anymore. And really, to ride four-wheelers that are made to climb and do all sorts of things on a perfect...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Flat surface, yeah. On a 1% grade.
- Hank Parke:** To me it seemed like it would be pretty boring, really.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Was there public opinion beginning to get involved here? Because now, you had a trail from Meyersdale...

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Hank Parke: And, we're getting more trail members, and we're getting a real constituency group. We had purposely – for our Rails-to-Trails board – chosen people that live in Confluence, people that live in Meyersdale, people that live all along the trail. So, they can go back to their communities and say, "This is what's happening." So, if there's a rumor here, they bring it back to the board, "Hey, so and so told me that they felt this was going..." No, no, no, that's not the case. We had farmers who were very concerned. They said, "We know what's going to happen." The Pennsylvania Farm Association came out statewide against rail trails because they felt that there were groups who when they saw cattle behind fences, were going to cut the fences and let them go.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, animal rights people?

Hank Parke: Yeah, yeah. And, that was a major concern. If I was a farmer, that may be a concern of mine. And, they said, "We want you to send us your meeting minutes." "Oh, okay. No problem." Well, you know we're an all-volunteer organization. And, there were times I'd remember and there were times I didn't. And, when I didn't remember, I heard from them. "What are you guys doing?"

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah. "Why did you miss that one?"

Hank Parke: Well, we had one of our monthly meetings. I said, "Listen, I think we need to create a board seat for somebody from the Somerset County chapter of the Pennsylvania Farmer Association." Unanimously that was done. They came to some meetings; they were very good about coming to the meetings initially. They realized we were not a threat to them at all.

Paul G. Wiegman: Now, there would've been people beginning to really use the trail in...

Hank Parke: Oh, absolutely.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, the numbers were beginning to go up?

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- Hank Parke:** Absolutely, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, we're really talking about the late '90s.
- Hank Parke:** We had that Big Ride Across America, GTE, which is now Verizon Big Ride Across America. I think there were something like 800 people that were going cross-country. I mean, this is a pretty hilly area. Even though it may be crushed limestone and not the best thing for a road bike, boy, it beats that...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Going up and down. Up and down, yeah.
- Hank Parke:** And, we started to see more and more long-distance cyclists who were using this as part of their coast to coast trip.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, that gives a little bit more impetus to finish from Fort Hill to Confluence?
- Hank Parke:** Mm-hmm.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And...
- Hank Parke:** And, we were able to have agreements with those couple of landowners who were...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** In that area?
- Hank Parke:** ...who were not welcoming us with open arms. And, boy, I tell you what, when we got that piece done...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Which was 2001?
- Hank Parke:** ...yeah. And, Confluence saw what this trail could be like. The increased traffic in Confluence was noticeable. We heard that from everybody.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** From the Confluence people?

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Hank Parke: Yeah, definitely. Because, now the folks that were used to starting in Rockwood could go all the way through to, at this point, to Connellsville because the state park had done pieces on the other end.

Paul G. Wiegman: The additions, right.

Hank Parke: Yeah, so as we are doing things on our end, they're doing things- the state park took it to Bruner Run.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, and then to Bowest.

Hank Parke: Right, and then...

Paul G. Wiegman: And then, gone from there.

Hank Parke: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: I think I have a whole series of things, but boy, you've pretty well covered everything I had on the questions. Anything that...

Cameraman: Well, we're out of time.

Paul G. Wiegman: Do I just hit... Did we...

[Break]

I think I know what we're going to pick up with... I've forgotten.

Hank Parke: ATA?

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, let's pick up with ATA.

Hank Parke: It needs to be said that the ATA and the forming of the ATA was really what pushed us forward. I mean, we really were to a point where looking at the Salisbury Viaduct that was over a million dollars, looking at the Keystone Viaduct was over a million dollars.

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Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, that's right.

Hank Parke: Looking at the Big Savage Tunnel that was multimillions. We really started to feel like we were playing in the big leagues here and...

Paul G. Wiegman: And, you were.

Hank Parke: Yeah. And, they needed to hear – the foundations, the state government, and the feds – needed to hear from a real unified voice that, "Okay, we have looked at this whole trail. Here are our priority pieces over the next couple of years." Through the ATA, we set up a system of prioritizing different projects along the trail. Will it connect at both ends? So, will it really- does it have the ability to lengthen the continued- the continuity?

Paul G. Wiegman: And, those that you just mentioned – Salisbury, Keystone, and Big Savage – although they're here in Somerset County means something very important to West Newton, and Confluence, and all those places.

Hank Parke: Absolutely. And, the things we really started to understand as we sat down on a regular basis with the other trail groups. We really started to understand what they were going through. And, the folks in Pittsburgh, we could get a mile done in about the same time they got a block done because of the encroachments, this, that, and the other thing. And, just because it was an urban area. And, if there was a key property purchase that they needed to make and that was going to cost \$2 million, and it meant that we weren't going to construct something that year. Through this system of prioritizing, we understood that, "Okay, this is all one trail."

Paul G. Wiegman: This is all one trail. So, what you're saying is ATA – since people are going to be seeing this in years to come – it's Allegheny Trail Alliance.

Hank Parke: Allegheny Trail Alliance.

Paul G. Wiegman: Allegheny Trail Alliance.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – HANK PARKE

- Hank Parke:** Really solidified...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, prioritized.
- Hank Parke:** ...yeah, they solidified the concept that this is one trail. Yes, there are geographically groups that are working on pieces of this one trail because that's the only way you can do it. I mean, I don't have the ability to work on anything in Westmoreland County or whether...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Or, that or Allegheny, right.
- Hank Parke:** I was lucky enough because at times it got a little testy because are you working for the trail project or are you working for the Chamber of Commerce?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** By this time, you're executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, right?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, and I held that for 16 years – was there. My board members started to really see that this is a good thing that, yes, this is bringing new money into the county. This is bringing construction jobs to folks in the county. This is a good thing. So, they let me spend an awful amount of time on this project. That was very, very helpful – very helpful.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, that's an understanding board.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, it really was. And again, they could see that there were real benefits. In working with the Americans Industrial Heritage Project folks – Randy Cooley and his staff – Randy told us from the very beginning, "Don't count on us for all your money. Do those things that you have been doing." And, ATA was able to kind of magnify our asks on this.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, some of that was through foundations?
- Hank Parke:** Absolutely.

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- Paul G. Wiegman:** You've mentioned Mellon, and Heinz Endowments, the McKenna Foundation...
- Hank Parke:** Yes, yes.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Any others that you can think of right off?
- Hank Parke:** Laurel Foundation.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The Pittsburgh foundation?
- Hank Parke:** McCune, I think we have...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The Pittsburgh Foundation.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, and they really have pretty much been a Pittsburgh Foundation community.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, how about here from Somerset and other towns in Somerset County?
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, we've gotten major support from Somerset Trust Company, for instance.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Hank Parke:** Unsolicited. I'm not sure how many years ago this was. One of their board members – the bank's board members – said, "This trail is a really good thing." Out of the blue, they pledged \$5,000 a year for three years.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Wow.
- Hank Parke:** Unsolicited. I mean, they truly understand this county and what makes it tick.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** What do you think they are seeing about the trail that gives them that understanding?

VIDEO INTERVIEW – HANK PARKE

Hank Parke: I think they're seeing changes in some of these communities. They're seeing changes in attitudes.

Paul G. Wiegman: It's more than just money, its attitudes.

Hank Parke: It is more than just money and its personalities. You're a good example. You live in Confluence now, you know?

Paul G. Wiegman: I live in Confluence.

Hank Parke: You are one.

Paul G. Wiegman: I am one.

[Chuckle]

Hank Parke: But, when you see a community that lost their railroad – Rockwood for instance. One railroad is no longer functioning. There was a hotel there. It's no longer operating as a hotel.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah.

Hank Parke: This is starting to bring new people into town, and they say things like, "What a nice town you have." It's like, "Oh, really?"

Paul G. Wiegman: "Oh, really." Yeah, I haven't heard that for a while.

Hank Parke: That's right. Folks have come from all over the United States using this trail. There are folks that have come from other countries. In think in Meyersdale – this summer – they had the folks that signed their guest log were from 20-some states and two foreign countries.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, two foreign countries?

Hank Parke: In Meyersdale. That part of the trail has only been done for a matter of months.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right. I would imagine in Rockwood it's even...

VIDEO INTERVIEW – HANK PARKE

- Hank Parke:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, in Confluence.
- Hank Parke:** And, I'd be remised if I didn't mention when you said Rockwood Maynard Sembower who will be – what did we say yesterday?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** 97.
- Hank Parke:** 97 his next birthday.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, I want to talk to Maynard and get his...
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, he has spent the last ten years selling T-shirts, giving trail information, assuring people that, "Yes, you're in the middle of nowhere, but you're safe."
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You're safe, yeah. The bears aren't too bad here.
- Hank Parke:** Yeah, this is a nice place to be, and if you want to get a bite to eat or an ice cream cone, here's where to go. A real welcoming great-grandfatherly kind of guy. And, a lot of people come back and start at Rockwood trailhead. They want to say hi to Maynard. It's really neat.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Hank Parke:** So...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, thank you.
- Hank Parke:** Thank you.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** This has really given me a better understanding and that's what this is all about. And, I'm sure as people see this, they're going to have a better understanding. I should put in here too that you've given a great deal of credit to a lot of people. You deserve a whole lot of it. This has just been...

VIDEO INTERVIEW – HANK PARKE

Hank Parke: It's been a team though. You can't do anything like this without...

Paul G. Wiegman: That's right.

Hank Parke: ...and part of it is insanity, too.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, well you were mentioning that yesterday. If you really knew what you were getting into would you have done it?

Hank Parke: There was a quote somewhere that said, "If I could have seen the top of the mountain, I wouldn't have begun the climb." And seriously, had we known that this was going to cost something like \$25 million, I think we would've said, "Wow, what a good idea but too bad we can't do it." So, it's really fortunate that we weren't very realistic in the beginning. What can you say? Because we're damn near there.

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: We're almost there.

Hank Parke: We are so close to having this whole thing done. It gives me shivers.

Paul G. Wiegman: Thank you, Hank.

Hank Parke: Sure. Thank you.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was a good one to close on.

[Chuckle]

[End 01:12:19]

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