

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay – as I said – this is for Allegheny Trail Alliance. Linda Boxx asked me to do this and to get in touch with people that were involved in the various parts of various trails beginning with the train ride back in '75 and the abandonment of the Western Maryland Railroad. And then, of course, moving through the state park development of their section, Somerset County development of their section, the north section – which is the old Pittsburgh and Lake Erie railroad – and then the Maryland section. And, we'll culminate this whole thing with a grand opening whenever it happens.

Linc Van Sichel: Wow. Good project. I think it is a historical event. It's been a major effort – an operation.

Paul G. Wiegman: The more I've talked to people, the more that I've seen that, it has just been an amazing conglomeration of people, government, private organizations, foundations that have put this thing together. And, we're not talking of a \$20-\$25 million facility when you consider all the work in the trails, and the bridges, and everything.

Linc Van Sichel: Oh, more than that. So, I made \$25 million in just Somerset County.

Paul G. Wiegman: In just Somerset County?

Linc Van Sichel: Yeah, in Somerset County alone it's got to be close to \$25 million.

Paul G. Wiegman: Now, quite frankly, I'm not sure where you got involved in this, but I know you were part of the Somerset County Recreation Board, and you were – what Hank Parke told me – was the project manager for much of the trail in Somerset County. So, let's begin by – now you told me this once – you moved to Somerset County to retire?

Linc Van Sichel: Well, not really to retire. I actually was still working, but the company I had been working for had been sold. And, our major plant was in Johnstown.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: They wanted to close. We had a sales office in Pittsburgh. We had it for years, and which was an easy place to work out of. But, they asked me to move to Johnstown and close the sales office. There was only two men and one woman working out of there. So, it was easy to do and it probably was the best thing to do. I didn't want to particularly move to Johnstown, and I had a daughter living here in Somerset. So, I moved to Somerset, and they were paying me to move and I figured I was looking for a place to retire anyway. I decided to build a retirement home and have them help pay for some of this.

Paul G. Wiegman: Sure, why not?

[Chuckle]

Linc Van Sickel: And so, I had to move close enough to the plant in Johnstown. So, I came over in '92.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, from Pittsburgh?

Linc Van Sickel: From Pittsburgh in North Hills or excuse me – Forest Hills. I got a son that lives in North Hills. So, we got here and, of course, we were new to the community. We knew our daughter and her husband. And, there was a piece in the paper asking for volunteers for the new Parks and Recreation Board.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: And, I had served on the Parks and Recreation Board of Forest Hills, Pennsylvania for over 20 years.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, yes, you did mention that.

Linc Van Sickel: And, I had been chairman of the Parks Committee for probably 15 of those years. And, I've been quite actively involved. We'd built two parks. We put in a swimming pool, we put in tennis courts, and exercise trail. And then, we also

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

incorporated the center of Ardmore Boulevard when there were street cars left.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, yes, right.

Linc Van Sickel: We made that and the Linear Park for the city. I mean, and still, if you drive down Forest Hills it's about the only area along Route 30 that has any kind of attraction in that side of...

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, it's very attractive. It's a beautiful piece of road.

Linc Van Sickel: So, I had been involved in all of that, and I thought, "Well, this would be a way to get acquainted out here in the community and be of some service." So, I wrote a letter, and about, I'd say, six months later – I got a telephone call from Bob Will who was the chairman of the board of the county commissioner saying that they were forming this committee. And, they had my application and would I still be willing to serve. This had to be at least six months after I had sent the letter.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that was in 19...

Linc Van Sickel: That was right around Christmastime in '72.

Paul G. Wiegman: '72, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: Oh, I'm sorry. I mean, '92.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, this was in '92?

Linc Van Sickel: '92, '92.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, at that point, Somerset County was beginning to look at a Parks and Recreation Board? Why were they forming it?

Linc Van Sickel: Well, the reason being when I went to the first meeting Dave Mankameyer was in charge of the meeting – the first meeting.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, and Dave was a commissioner?
- Linc Van Sichel:** He was the county commissioner with Bob Will and Brad Cober who was still there.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, Brad Cober was a part of it?
- Linc Van Sichel:** He's still on the board. So, anyway, and Dave was the one responsible for the trail and the trail – at that point – had just been opened – or is being opened. I guess it was going to be opened that spring from...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Rockwood to Garrett, or Rockwood...
- Linc Van Sichel:** To Markleton. Rockwood to Markleton and that was where they were going to – they actually went all the way down to the...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Pinkerton Bridge.
- Linc Van Sichel:** It went to the Pinkerton Bridge. Pinkerton Bridge was not done but to the Pinkerton Bridge.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that was the first section of trail to be built?
- Linc Van Sichel:** The first section, yeah. And, that was going to open, and the Rails-to-Trails Committee was responsible for building it, raising the money, and so forth. And, was going to be owned by the county. So, they thought they ought to have a county agency to maintain it and operate it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Now, when you say the Rails-to-Trails Committee that was the Somerset County...
- Linc Van Sichel:** Rails-to-Trails Association, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** ...Rails-to-Trails Association, which you were on the board also?

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: No, I wasn't on that – at that time I wasn't – I didn't know anything about it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: The only thing I knew was that they were going to form a Parks and Recreation Board, which I thought would be similar to what I had been doing in Forest Hills. But, turned out they really didn't want to do anything except to maintain and operate this trail.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, the Parks and Recreation Board were formed for this trail?

Linc Van Sickel: For the trail.

Paul G. Wiegman: Or, the trail sparked the formation of the Parks and Recreation.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, they didn't have one. And, they've never really done anything further. I mean, more than just take care of the trail since then. They haven't expanded their mandate at all. But, in any case, I did volunteer. I went to the first two meetings and Dave Mankameyer organized and manned them, and they were nine or ten members/people there. And, I had to go out of town on business in the third meeting, and when I get back, I get the minutes of the meeting and I found out I had been elected chairman while I was gone.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Serves you right. You don't miss meetings.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, it was ironic. I was more or less overwhelmed. I mean, here I am as the newest member. I mean, obviously, the person who didn't know anybody in the whole county and I'm chairman of the Parks and Recreation Board. Anyway, I agreed to do this. And so, we get involved. I remember that Christmas season the family was out here for Christmas Day for a couple days. We had grandchildren and so forth. I told

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

them I was getting involved with this trail, and I said, “We better get down and look at this trail.” I had never been on it.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, you had never been down it before?

Linc Van Sickel: Never been down. Now, we had ridden bicycles on the Confluence trail – on the Ohiopyle to Confluence.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, in the Ohiopyle. So, you were familiar with that?

Linc Van Sickel: I was familiar. Our family had done quite a bit of recreation on Ohiopyle. I mean, we had gone out there for canoe rides, whitewater rafting. So, we knew Ohiopyle, and Ramcat, and all that.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, and that’s when you were still in Forest Hills?

Linc Van Sickel: I was still in Forest Hills, but we moved out here, and here I am involved with this trail, and I’ve never even been on this section. So, I got about – I don’t know – six or eight of us, and we went down to Markelton, and got on the trail there and walked it. This was in the winter time, and it wasn’t open yet. When we walked, I don’t think it was open. I think it was open of next spring. Next spring it was formally opened. We walked it all the way to Rockwood.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow, that’s quite a walk. That’s a good walk.

Linc Van Sickel: And, we had a car. We shuttled our cars back and forth so we didn’t have to walk back. Anyway, we did that over Christmas. So, the next year, we started working and I was busy there for three years organizing in the committee and trying to do some things, and taking care of the place. And, it wasn’t a really difficult job, but it was sort of fun. I got to know people. And so, then I retired in the end of ‘95. And, I remember I had a back operation. I decided to have a back operation before I retired thinking that I would save money. I would have a better plan

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

where I was working than I would with Medicare. It turned out I would've been better off if I had Medicare.

[Laughter]

I would've saved money with Medicare. It was a better program than the one I was working with. But anyway, I had this back operation in the fall, and Dave Mankameyer was talking about trying to organize a group of trails to try to run this thing all the way through to Pittsburgh. I mean, it was in his mind there was no way we were going to be able to get enough money together to do all the work we needed to do in Somerset County with Somerset County's resources. We had to expand our vision and try to make this thing a trail to Pittsburgh.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, and doing Rockwood, or Markleton, or the Pinkerton Tunnel – you didn't do any bridges?

Linc Van Sickel: No, no. There were no bridges at all. It was an easy trail. We didn't have to do a lot. So anyway, and meanwhile at the same time we were working- we did open – about a year later – we opened the trail from Rockwood to Garrett.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, another easy six miles.

Linc Van Sickel: That was another six miles. Another easy six miles with no bridges or anything. So, we've done the easy 12 miles. And so, this organizational meeting- and Dave was very active to come to our meetings at times and he was very much involved. I don't know what that noise was.

Paul G. Wiegman: I think your wife just went in the...

Linc Van Sickel: Oh, my wife? She was taking a nap. She's up, huh? Anyway, I guess you can edit this when you...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, yeah, we can edit.

Linc Van Sickel: You can edit that stuff out.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Let me just check real quick to make sure it's running.

Linc Van Sickel: Okay.

Paul G. Wiegman: I have to put my glasses on to do that. Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: It's okay?

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, I thought about that at one point. I thought, "Geez, did I press the button?" But, we can edit things out. That's no problem. Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: So, at that particular time, when I got this back operation – it was minor, I was in the hospital for one night – but I had to take it easy for two weeks. I couldn't go to work. I couldn't sit up. I had to lie down or stand up. I could only sit for ten minutes at a time.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, boy.

Linc Van Sickel: The doctor was very insistent that I follow these instructions. But, after that particular two-week period they were having this formative meeting of the Allegheny Trail Alliance, which at that time was called the Spine Line Committee – or something like that. It was a meeting over here at Hidden Valley ten minutes away from me.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Linc Van Sickel: So, I thought, "Oh, I'm going to go to this and just see what's going on." I mean, I didn't have anything else to do. The only thing I was doing was watching OJ Simpson's trial.

[Laughter]

It was always on the TV. And so, but I called Dave Mankameyer up and told him I'd like to go, but I had to have some kind of a lounge chair to sit on since I had to lie down. He said, "Oh, I'll take care of that." So, he got me some kind of chair to lie down. So, I went to the meeting and that's where

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

the organization started. And then, in December I retired, and the day after I retired, Dave called me up and he said, “Linc, we’d like you to go to work for the county.”

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, boy. That didn’t take long.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, and then I said, “Well…” he told me, “We’d like to talk to you about it. We have a \$1,250,000 that has been up. We got it from the federal government.” And, I forget what program, “And, we have to spend this by September of…” – I forget the exact year, but a year and a half later. “We have to spend this, and we don’t seem to be making any traction with this thing.” He said, “Dave Steel had been working on this on building the trail.” The trail had been built by the concept – pretty much engineered and construction handled through the conservation district.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, that’s who was actually overseeing the construction for that first few miles?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, doing the engineering, looking at the drawings, and spearheading the effort of doing it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Sure, sure. And now, were they using contractors – just local contractors – to spread ballast and vines and so forth?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, they got contractors to do the work, but they were doing the inspection and getting the contracts lined up and approved, and so forth. But, they still – it was taxing their organization – and it wasn’t their particular bailiwick. They probably shouldn’t be doing this anyway.

Paul G. Wiegman: They tend to deal with dams and agricultural kinds of things.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, so and the Planning Commission didn’t have enough resources to do it.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Linc Van Sickel:** So, what they wanted to do was to get me to come on board on a temporary part-time basis to ramrod spend this \$1,250,000 and what they really wanted to do was to do the Salisbury Viaduct. The one that goes from Meyersdale – the big one.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** That was your first really big project? That was your first really big project on that part of the trail.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And, he felt that if we got that done – if we could connect Meyersdale with Confluence – if we could get that much done, we could call it the success if nothing else. We could eventually hook up with Ohiopyle, and that would make a pretty decent trail.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And, we had already spent \$100,000 on the Pinkerton Tunnel trying to get the Pinkerton Tunnel – they were going to get the Pinkerton Tunnel done first before they did the Salisbury Viaduct. And, they actually had an engineering contract, but the scope of work was not – when the company went in there – they had the contract, discovered that the roof was in much worse shape than they had thought. And, they were talking about all kinds of big bucks to fix this thing. And, they finally backed out of the whole project. They didn't have enough money to do it. And, it cost the county like \$100,000.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Wow.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Not the county taxpayers but of their funds that they had been given to...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah, the commission money and federal money.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah, so they were real gun shy about going that way. So, they figured they would go the other way and do the Salisbury Viaduct. So, I looked the proposition over, thought about it, and I finally agreed to do it on a part-time basis – very minimal

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

it was supposed to be one day a week. And, I was paid a great sum of \$850 a month.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow.

[Laughter]

Linc Van Sickel: And, that was supposed to include my expenses. But, I didn't want to have to go through expense vouchers and all that stuff. I would take care of the expenses. I figured this would be kind of a fun thing to do.

Paul G. Wiegman: Sure, sure.

Linc Van Sickel: And so, anyway I got to work. And then, as soon as I got to work on that I thought this Spine Line Committee – at that point – was called and actually had two or three meetings. And, I thought, "I better go down and see what they're doing." So, I went down to the meeting that was held in Monroeville at a restaurant and met the current president at that point and time and some of the other people. I don't even remember meeting Linda Boxx at the first meeting, but she might have been there and came back. I was very positive about what they were doing and how they were approaching this whole thing. I thought we need to be active in this organization. And, we were having trouble to find anybody to even go to the meetings, you know?

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, yes.

Linc Van Sickel: And, I'm telling Dave Mankameyer we got to get somebody to go to these meetings because this organization is going to work. And, this is what you want to do. You want to try and form a stronger group. He said, "Okay, Linc, you'll go to the meeting. Just go." So, I ended up going to the meeting.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, you even miss a meeting and you still got volunteered.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: So, I had missed the first two or three meetings, but this is about the third meeting I went to. So anyway, then I became a member, and Hank Parke was going to most of the meetings. Hank and I went to the meetings together. Pretty much, we were the two delegates. So, that was going on, and I was trying to- meanwhile, trying to get the Salisbury Viaduct up and running. It was being constructed, and I worked out a – we had to have – I forget how you call it – but we had to find an engineering company. We had to go out and search for the engineering company, and you had to get their recommendations. And, we picked a company that had an office here, and I can't think of the name of the company. But, Sean Isken was the chief engineer in this area for this company. He's still in business here independently now.

Paul G. Wiegman: Is that Eades?

Linc Van Sickel: No, it wasn't Eades.

Paul G. Wiegman: Or, is it the one that's just south of Somerset on 281?

Linc Van Sickel: It's no longer in Somerset.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, no longer in Somerset?

Linc Van Sickel: I forget the name of it now. I've got it in my records.

Paul G. Wiegman: Well, I'm going through the records of the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association. So, I'll probably turn it up there.

Linc Van Sickel: Well, anyway Sean Isken was my chief contact. And so, we signed a contract – I forget – \$45,000 or something like that for them to evaluate the viaduct to come up with what needs to be done to make it useable and estimate how long it would last because we wanted to know if it was going to last 10 years, or 50 years, or how long.

Paul G. Wiegman: Exactly, yeah.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: So, they came up with this, and they set up a number of repairs for the upper part where some of the bracing had deteriorated by rust. We had to replace that plus put in a concrete deck which would protect the rest of that from getting too much rain down on it and so forth. So, that got estimated a 70-year life with that done.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: So, everybody in the county commission and the rest of us thought, “We’re not going to be here in 70 years so we can do this.” It may very well be there longer than 70 years.

[Laughter]

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, the way that’s built I think it may be.

Linc Van Sickel: I mean, we actually dug down around the piers. We went down and...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, and checked on the foundations?

Linc Van Sickel: ...checked on the foundations of the piers and so forth. We did a pretty thorough job. And then, we went out for bids, and at this point in time, I got very involved with PennDOT. PennDOT – the money we were using – came through PennDOT. It was set aside for transit and rails-to-trails.

Paul G. Wiegman: ISTEA money.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, but it’s now called ISTEA, but in those days it was something else.

Paul G. Wiegman: Something or other.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, the same thing. And, this money was supposed to be spent by September 30th, I think, of ‘97. And, I was having a big problem. The biggest problem was PennDOT was a busy organization and they had one bridge engineer in District 9 over in Hollidaysburg. And, our plan had to be approved by

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

this bridge engineer. And, I'm having a hard time with names. David, the guy that I was working with, who was a PennDOT employee that I worked with – an engineer – and I had taken him on two different bicycle rides up and down the trail. In fact, later on, we did an environmental assessment on the trail. That was what we had to do to...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay – before you could actually build the corridor?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, and David – he's still working for them – I can't think of – I mean, I should've gotten notes out here with all this.

Paul G. Wiegman: No, some of those things I'll dig out of the files.

Linc Van Sickel: No, Dave was very helpful. But, he couldn't move this engineering, and we had to get the drawings approved before we could go to bid by the bridge engineer.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, PennDOT had to approve the drawing?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: And, he had to approve them.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Linc Van Sickel: And, he was backed up with other bridge projects. And, meanwhile, this date is approaching us. So, I knew Tom Ridge was very interested in biking. And, I learned that, and so I composed a letter to the superintendent of District 9 over here.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, in saying that this whole project was under – we had a time limit – we had to spend this \$1,250,000, and if we didn't get it spent by September 30th, we would lose the money. And, this would cause untold political problems besides ramifications in business and so forth. And, I composed this

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

letter and gave it to the county commissioners, and I suggested they send it to the superintendent of the PennDOT over in Hollidaysburg with a copy to Tom Ridge.

Paul G. Wiegman: With a copy.

[Laughter]

Linc Van Sickel: And, I never referred to myself. They agreed to do it. They sent this letter off, and about two days later, Dave calls me up – and I got to think of his name – and said, “Linc, you can’t believe what those crazy county commissioners are doing.”

[Laughter]

He says, “They sent this letter to my boss with a copy to Tom Ridge” and he said, “Before the boss could even read it Tom Ridge is calling him up wanting to know what’s going on down there. Why aren’t we getting this bridge approved?”

Paul G. Wiegman: He knew where to go.

Linc Van Sickel: I said, “Dave, I can’t believe they’d do something like that.” I said, “I’ll have to talk to him” but I said, “What’s going on?” He says, “Well, the guy is looking at the drawings is now.”

[Laughter]

So, I said, “Okay. That’s good.” But, I said, “I apologize for those commissioners. I can’t believe they’d do something like that. I’ll try to keep them under control up here, but we want to work with you.”

[Laughter]

So anyway, the drawings were approved. We went out for a bid and we were \$100-some thousand dollars shy of money there. By the time the bids came in, there was – I thought \$200,000. I think maybe \$200 to \$250,000 shy when the bids

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

came in. So, I'm at the Allegheny Trail Alliance Board reporting this and Larry Ridenour...

Paul G. Wiegman: Ridenour, right.

Linc Van Sickel: ...was working at the Steel Valley at the time.

Paul G. Wiegman: He was on the Steel Valley board then?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Or, was the executive director.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. And, Larry says, "Linc," he says, "We got \$750,000 of those funds." Same...

Paul G. Wiegman: Same money.

Linc Van Sickel: Same money. He says, "Why don't we transfer them up to your district from District 11?" And, he says, "We're not going to be able to use it until this time expires." They were under the same impression that we had to spend it by December 30th.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay.

Linc Van Sickel: They couldn't spend it either. So, I said, "Okay, very good." And, we got him to get District 11 to write a letter to District 9 approving to transfer this money and so forth. So, they transferred \$750,000.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, it was that simple?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, boy.

Linc Van Sickel: And so, we went ahead and placed the bid, and I had like \$500,000 more money than I could spend. So, we quick engineered the section from Garrett to the viaduct.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, so that's where the money came for that connection then?

Linc Van Sichel: Yes, plus we engineered the connection. We didn't have enough money to do the connection from the other side of the Pinkerton Tunnel – the second bridge, the High Bridge – Pinkerton Bridge. We'd already had done the trail around the horn. I think we already done that.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, you did? Okay.

Linc Van Sichel: We already done that. And, we'd already done, in fact, one of the first things I did was supervise – I did some inspection work for the – we had a contract already done to recover the two Pinkerton Bridges.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sichel: Yeah, that was already done.

Paul G. Wiegman: So, that was done, and then the...

Linc Van Sichel: And, I oversaw that in that construction but just as an inspector. And so, the trail was done around there. So then, we engineered all the way to Broad Markel's property. We figured we'd go all the way to Broad Markel's, and his son had what he owned. And, once we got there that he would – that's what put force of trying to come up with. He was delaying this whole thing the whole time.

Paul G. Wiegman: In other words, instead of stopping at the Fort Hill road you went all the way down to...

Linc Van Sichel: All the way down to Broad Markel.

Paul G. Wiegman: All the way to Broad Markle.

Linc Van Sichel: And meanwhile, Broad Markle had been appointed to the Parks and Recreation Board the same time I was. He was a member of the Parks and Recreation Board.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, he was? Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sichel: So, he came to all these meetings. We're working with the guy trying to get him on board to convince him what we were going to do for the best of the community.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, that's the property at McClintock Run and Cucumber Run?

Linc Van Sichel: Yeah, he had about a mile and a half there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

Linc Van Sichel: So meanwhile, he dropped off the board. I mean, he came for a while, and then he just quit coming. And, we figured that this would make it nowhere serious. So, anyway, we had enough money to do those two things. And meanwhile, Linda Boxx asked me to be vice president of the board.

Paul G. Wiegman: Of the ATA?

[Laughter]

Linc Van Sichel: Yeah, she got elected president. And then, a year after she became president, she asked me to take over and become vice president. And so, I was vice president of that board for five or six years – I don't know – until I retired.

Paul G. Wiegman: I see, okay.

Linc Van Sichel: But, the year before I retired from the board I decided – meanwhile – in '99, 2000, I bought an island up in Canada.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, yeah, we talked about it, right.

Linc Van Sichel: And so, I was getting torn between my island and Canada and riding the trails, and doing stuff down here. And, I began to realize that I was pretty much spreading myself too thin and I wasn't getting any younger. And so, the last year or two, I was really stretched to try to keep up with all the stuff that I was

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

doing with rails-to-trails and that. But, I wanted to stay on board to get the job done.

Paul G. Wiegman: Now, what you were doing was getting the bids ready, and the contracts ready and then overseeing the contractors as they worked?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was the go for, and I just kept everything rolling.

Paul G. Wiegman: You kept making sure that they were doing these things?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, the things would happen. You know, I mean, I was working through the Planning Commission. I was actually able to use their secretarial help and so forth.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay. Somerset County planning.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, I would have a Monday morning meeting with Dave Mankameyer at the time – as long as he was in office – and Brad Zerfoss.

Paul G. Wiegman: And, Brad was involved?

Linc Van Sickel: Brad was head of the planning.

Paul G. Wiegman: He's still head of the Planning Commission.

Linc Van Sickel: Right. So, Brad – I'm more or less – I reported to Dave Mankameyer, but my liaison was with Brad Zerfoss. And, he and I talked a lot about the things that we had to do, but he didn't have a lot of time to devote to this. He had a lot of other things to do – big time. But, we had a weekly meeting for an hour or so, and I used their resources, but I worked out of the house, basically.

Paul G. Wiegman: Now, were you on the trail on a regular basis watching the contractors?

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. I would go out when there was a contract in force, I would be on that job at least – I hired – with the Salisbury Viaduct – we hired Sean Isken’s group to do the inspection also. I mean, you needed a full-time inspector there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right on the project? Right.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, and I was still the county’s representative making sure that – if there was a problem, they’d call me up. Like, well, when we were building this section between Garrett and the Salisbury Viaduct. I mean, we had the farmer there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, it goes on...

Linc Van Sickel: Peter Brink, yeah.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: And, he had two crossings there.

Paul G. Wiegman: Yes, right.

Linc Van Sickel: And, he was very concerned about being able to take his equipment across there and so forth. And, we wanted to put in gates there. So, he had to open the gate and shut the gate on both sides. So, Peter Brink is his name. He’s a big-time farmer got – I think he was farming 500-some acres and milking 400 or 500 cows big time. He had five guys working for him but a very industrious farmer. So, anyway, we met with him and the county commissioner’s position was always they’d work with the neighbors of the trail as best they can. Keep everybody happy. Let’s not get any – there’s not any friction here. So, I had to work it out with him that we put the gates on the trail rather than on his property so that the people riding the trail had...

[Chuckle]

Paul G. Wiegman: Had to go through the gates rather than the cows had to go through...

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah, well the machine did that, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, that would be a lot for him to open the gate, and close it, and cross it, and open it again.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah, yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Sure, yeah.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And so, we had to have gates otherwise the ATVs would come roaring through. So, that was one of our number one objectives was to keep the ATVs because they were using the trail full-time all the way.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I read some things back in '75 that after the ride took place, they had to put out notices saying that the trail – the railroad – has not yet been abandoned because people were driving in their cars, and they were driving on the railroad tracks, and trains were still running.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Oh, my God.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I know. From that time in '75, people began to use that whole right-of-way.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Well, they took the rail up and took the ties up, but then it was an ATV heaven.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yeah.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And, of course, with ATVs, and hikers, and bikers just don't mix.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** No, no.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And so, we had to keep them off. I mean, it was a hiking/biking trail. So, I mean, things like that I did all that kind of public ...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** You did those kinds of – right.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: We had an incident out there on the other side. And then, as we went along, as we got that done, we started doing preliminary engineering on the section all the way to the Big Savage Tunnel. In fact, the Big Savage Tunnel – I was working on all that stuff trying to estimate what it was going to cost. Because at the same time the Allegheny Trail Alliance had hired an engineering company out of Pittsburgh to do a cost analysis of completing the whole trail from Pittsburgh to Cumberland.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay, from Pittsburgh...

Linc Van Sickel: To Cumberland.

Paul G. Wiegman: ...all the way to Cumberland?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah. And, that report was a big report, and that's in the files. So, I was working with those guys in the Somerset County section to come up with ideas. I mean, how much money was it going to take?

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Linc Van Sickel: And, I mean, we went through the Big Savage Tunnel and estimated that. We developed estimates, and I used Sean's group to do that – some of that – and some of it because we had done a lot of work already and gotten some pretty firm figures. Now, with the first two sections we built, we didn't build under PennDOT's supervision and oversight.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, so that's Rockwood to the low bridge at Pinkerton and that's Rockwood to Garrett?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, and that was all done without PennDOT's requirements. And, PennDOT, basically tried to build this thing. I mean, their specifications were like building a highway.

[Chuckle]

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: Everything had to be built to take care of big trucks. And, you couldn't get around that because their computers were all – everything went by computer and their computers weren't built to recognize anything else but big trucks.

Paul G. Wiegman: Big trucks, yeah.

Linc Van Sickel: So, you had massive culverts and all this stuff. And so, the cost went up, however, we got a heck of a lot better price.

[Laughter]

So, our money – so anyway, by that time – after I had been on the board for two or three years – I was getting pretty good knowing it wasn't going to cost us a whole lot to building something using PennDOT. And, that seemed to be the most likely source of the money. And, the Big Savage Tunnel being a real problem because we all knew that that was the key to getting through.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was the key, right.

Linc Van Sickel: I mean, after we got over the Salisbury Viaduct and the Keystone Viaduct with another big one. That's a big hurdle, and then but the major one was a tunnel. And, I worked with the Bureau of Mines in Pittsburgh, and I got two of those guys to come out. And, we spent – we got a nice report from them as to what we should do and worked it out. It was a bare-bones project at that point in time.

Paul G. Wiegman: How do you mean?

Linc Van Sickel: I mean, we were going to put in a steel lining like a major underground hollige [? 0:40:12.1]. Have you ever been in a coal mine?

Paul G. Wiegman: Yes, right.

Linc Van Sickel: Okay, you know when there are major holliges, they put in a steel lining in to hold a roof up...

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Right.

Linc Van Sichel: ...and protect everything from falls. And so, that's what we decided to do just to get through, and we could've done it. And, our estimate – at the time – was \$3 million to do it that way.

Paul G. Wiegman: Wow.

Linc Van Sichel: But then, the momentum was building. The DCNR was very involved. As Linda Boxx used to say, "The stars were in alignment."

[Laughter]

Tom Ridge was a biker. He was a governor...

Paul G. Wiegman: Tom Ridge was a biker. John Oliver was...

Linc Van Sichel: John Oliver was head of DCNR.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, right.

Linc Van Sichel: And, the guy that was chairman of the Transportation Committee in the House was Geist.

Paul G. Wiegman: Geist, yeah, right.

Linc Van Sichel: So, Rick Geist from Altoona and he's a big biker. And so...

Paul G. Wiegman: It all worked together?

Linc Van Sichel: Everything went together. I mean, we'd go down to Harrisburg. I mean, Linda and I and a couple other guys usually went to Harrisburg two or three times for meetings with the legislatures and so forth. And, Linda, of course, was the catalyst for the whole thing. I mean, there were a lot of people that were involved, but Linda came along at the right time and the right place. I can't say enough about Linda. Linda's ability, and know-how and just plain work – a lot of work.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: Exactly, exactly. She just keeps at it. It's very close to her and a project that she dearly loves.

Linc Van Sickel: So, I just thought of the guy at PennDOT's name, Dave Sherman – Dave Sherman.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, Dave Sherman.

Linc Van Sickel: You may know Dave. He's been involved with a number of projects. He's still working for PennDOT. That's basically the involvement that I've been. I mean, about the time that we got the viaduct done and we had this section from Garrett to Rockwood done and we were building this section – we built the section from the Pinkerton High Bridge down to Broad Markel's property. I think we had already bid it out. And, I had used up this money that Mankameyer and his little package of money that was paying me \$850 a month. That was gone.

Paul G. Wiegman: That was gone.

[Chuckle]

Linc Van Sickel: I mean, at this point in time, I was working three, four days a week.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, wow, yeah

Linc Van Sickel: And, I didn't want to do this. I had other things I wanted to do in retirement. I enjoyed it up to this point, but I said to everybody – I said, "Guys, this is a full-time job. You can't expect anybody to do this on a part-time basis."

Paul G. Wiegman: Yeah, that's a lot of work. It's a lot of work.

Linc Van Sickel: It's just been a full-time job ever since. That's when they hired- they got...

Paul G. Wiegman: Brett.

Linc Van Sickel: Brett Hollern.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Paul G. Wiegman: So, when you left doing that, that's when Brett came on first as an intern and then ended up being...

Linc Van Sickel: Well, he was working for the Planning Commission at the time.

Paul G. Wiegman: He was working for the Planning Commission, right.

Linc Van Sickel: He didn't come on as an intern. We hired him in – well no. I'll tell you how that worked. We wanted to move him out of the Planning Commission, and the county didn't want to fund the money. So, we got- there would be county commissioners all through this whole process were very much supportive of this whole trail. But, in order to keep from having a lot of static from the populace – from the people – they maintained that no money would be spent- no tax money was to be spent on this trail.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: There was no tax money that was spent – ever. Now, that didn't say people like Brad Zerfoss and Dave Mankameyer himself, and Dave Steel weren't spending quite a bit of time. And then, when Dave Steel's day – when they were working down there – I mean, they had engineers down there that probably spent half his time on this in building the first two sections.

Paul G. Wiegman: I see.

Linc Van Sickel: But, they didn't want to come up here and have a guy – paying some guy off of their payroll to build this trail.

Paul G. Wiegman: Right, I understand. Right.

Linc Van Sickel: So, Linda said- they went up and got this grant from... The state has a program where they'll pay 100% – what did they call – circuit riders.

Paul G. Wiegman: Circuit riders, yes.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Linc Van Sickel:** The circuit rider program. They paid 100% of the salary their first year, and 75% of the second, and then 50% the third, 25% the fourth, and the fifth year you're on your own. So, if we do this with Brett, the Allegheny Trail Alliance agreed to raise the matching money, not the county.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay. So, there was a match that came in from ATA again.
- Linc Van Sickel:** From Allegheny Trail Alliance from private money – private funds. So, this was the deal. We had enough money to go that way to pay Brett a reasonable salary to go full-time, which was really needed. And then, Brett came on and really grew in the job and has done a good job.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** So, he picked up from Fort Hill from where it ended at Fort Hill to Confluence or did you finish that part?
- Linc Van Sickel:** No, he did that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** He did that, and then he did...
- Linc Van Sickel:** Actually, when the Pinkerton High Bridge – that contract had been let, but he supervised...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, he supervised it? Oh, okay.
- Linc Van Sickel:** ...from the High Bridge down – I mean, he was the coordinator for that. Again, the inspection on every one of these jobs, we hired full-time inspectors.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, right.
- Linc Van Sickel:** I mean, an engineering company doing the inspection. But, you always need some representative of the county to make sure things were happening – that there were no hitches. And, somebody for the contractor and the inspectors to talk to when they have problems – when problems come in. Somebody shows up and says, "This is my property, get off." You know, we've had things like that happen.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

[Chuckle]

Linc Van Sickel: We had to go down and say, “No, that’s not your property.”

Paul G. Wiegman: So, Brett picked up from the Meyersdale end from the Salisbury Tunnel...

Linc Van Sickel: From the Salisbury Viaduct all the way to the Mason-Dixon line.

Paul G. Wiegman: All the way to the Mason-Dixon, and then the other...

Linc Van Sickel: And, all the way from basically he ran from Pinkerton High Bridge all the way down to ...

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, okay, okay.

Linc Van Sickel: Now, I had done a lot of preliminary work on the whole thing and done preliminary estimates. I mean, I’d gotten the county involved, and I saw we needed to buy a place to park down there in Confluence – a better place to park. That trailhead, we bought that land down there...

Paul G. Wiegman: Behind Riversport?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, we ended up – I mean, I was involved in buying that – getting that going. I started that process and he followed through on that.

Paul G. Wiegman: Okay, okay. And, of course, the trail coming off of the Western Maryland and dropping down to 281...

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, that was going on. That was being done because we didn’t want to try to bridge all the way across that old bridge.

Paul G. Wiegman: Oh, no. That would’ve been a major problem. And, that old bridge is missing a span.

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Paul G. Wiegman:** But, that's the only bridge that is not used.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Right, it's the only bridge that's not used.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And, it would've been very expensive. So, and Dave Mankameyer was very instrumental in getting PennDOT to put that passing, or bike lane, in that bridge.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Okay, that's what I was going to ask. Did you oversee that or did Dave?
- Linc Van Sickel:** No, I didn't oversee it.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** But, Dave...
- Linc Van Sickel:** That was handled by the district out of Uniontown, was it District 12? I think that was district 12.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I think it's District 12, right.
- Linc Van Sickel:** They handled that, and I really wasn't involved with that at all. And, Dave Mankameyer was pushing that and how that happened – but it came out of District 12, not out of District 9.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, I'll be talking with Dave and Brad Cober at one point, and I'll have them fill me in on that part.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah, but Mankameyer really was the early spearhead of the Somerset County. I mean, he had the vision. Hank Parke, of course, has been a worker for the whole thing. He's been on board the whole time. Between he and Dave, of course, Dave got defeated for county commissioner and had to go to work, you know, get a job.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Had to get a real job.
- Linc Van Sickel:** He had to get another job. And so, he's working for the state now as I understand. But, when he was there, I was sorry to

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

see him defeated. I mean, he really had a good head on his shoulders, and Brad Cober as the same. And then, Jimmy Marker has done a good job, too. There's no question. Now, Jimmy has been very pro trail, and now they have the money coming in from this tourism tax.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Right, right.

Linc Van Sickel:

It's now funding Brett's salary completely and he's in a new position now as overseeing the trail and the construction and finishing up the construction – and he'll be working full-time.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Yeah, sounds like you're going to be very proud next spring when the thing opens.

Linc Van Sickel:

Yeah, I am. I'm going to take a ride on the trail with some friends. Actually, people I biked with before. They're two couples from the Philadelphia area.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Oh, you did mention that, yeah.

Linc Van Sickel:

They're coming up. We picked a trail in the middle of the leaf time – like the second week in October...

Paul G. Wiegman:

Perfect time.

Linc Van Sickel:

And, we're going to ride the trail from – I guess we could start at Woodcock Hollow, but we'll start at Frostburg.

Paul G. Wiegman:

I don't know if there's a way to get to Woodcock Hollow other than riding from Frostburg down and back, which is kind of silly. But, not a ride from Frostburg...

Linc Van Sickel:

We're going to ride from Frostburg and we're going to stay overnight in Rockwood.

Paul G. Wiegman:

Oh, okay.

Linc Van Sickel:

And then, we're going to stay overnight in Ohiopyle is my plan.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, okay, okay.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And then, finish up down below Connellsville. And then, I've got a person in town here that has a big van that's going to drive us down to Frostburg and then pick us up down to Connellsville and bring us back here. We're going to spend one night here and bike for three days and then come back here.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Well, thank you for taking the time, and good luck on that ride. Now, you can kind of sit back and enjoy it.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah. And, I surely want to be there when the opening is. I hope that the date is set.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It's not set yet, but...
- Linc Van Sickel:** Probably will be in May or something. I would think it would have to be early.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I wouldn't mind seeing it on May 21st, which would be the 31st anniversary of the last ride.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Of the last ride. Yeah, because it's going to be a big event for the whole – but where are we going to have the event?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Probably around the Salisbury or probably around Deal.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Around Deal?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Around Deal. Deal is the highest point on the trail, but that just seems like a good place to have it. I don't know. It could be anywhere.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Yeah, I'm interested to see it. Is that parking lot and everything done in Deal?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** I haven't been down there recently.
- Linc Van Sickel:** I don't know if the memorial...

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

- Paul G. Wiegman:** They're working on it.
- Linc Van Sickel:** The memorial and all that?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** The memorial is going to be out and the only thing missing right now really is the Bollman Bridge. And, it's still sitting there. It's still over the CSX tracks, so...
- Linc Van Sickel:** Well, that's another whole problem. I mean, I think it's great that we're doing it. It would've been easier to not do it.
- [Laughter]
- Paul G. Wiegman:** It's kind of ironic that the shortest bridge on the trail is the one holding up opening the trail, but it'll be nice to have.
- Linc Van Sickel:** And, we have sections to do. I mean, that section around Garrett.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Oh, yeah, right.
- Linc Van Sickel:** That needs to be done.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** And, there's money for that now.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Is there?
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Yes, there's money for that. There's \$800,000 to do that.
- Linc Van Sickel:** How are they going to...
- Paul G. Wiegman:** Just like they did at McKenzie Hollow and Harnedsville – excavate the road, put in the culverts, and then put the road back on top.
- Linc Van Sickel:** Are they? Because there was a wetlands on the other side of that. I don't know what they're going to do about that.
- Paul G. Wiegman:** We can mitigate that. I think there's some things that we can do.

VIDEO INTERVIEW – LINC VAN SICKEL

Linc Van Sickel: Because that is what stopped me at that point in time.

Paul G. Wiegman: Was the wetlands on the sewage plant side or on the water plant side?

Linc Van Sickel: The water plant side, yeah. Because that became – when I went through there with the environmental engineers from PennDOT – they said, “There’s no way you can put a trail over here.”

Paul G. Wiegman: And, did that same thing happen at Garrett – right around Garrett or between Garrett?

Linc Van Sickel: Yeah, same thing. They stopped us at Garrett. After that, I never took environmental engineers through until I was sure it was dry enough to take them.

[Laughter]

I didn’t want to go through that again.

Paul G. Wiegman: Maybe we better cut that from there.

Linc Van Sickel: Take that out of the tape.

[End 00:55:09.1]

gt-t/cr-p

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