

Ribbon-cutting formally opens Rec Path

BY TOM E ASTMAN THE CONWAY DAILY SUN

CONWAY — The MWV Trails Association's North Conway Rec Path was feted at a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the northern terminus of the 2.9-mile paved recreation path Tuesday morning



Steve Swenson cuts the ribbon to formally open the North Conway Rec Path at the northern terminus near Cranmore on Tuesday morning, with (from left) Chris Meier, Larry Garland, Burr Phillips, Bill Aughton, Ray Mitchell, Lisa Holcomb, Doug Armstrong, Jill Brown, Rob Adair, Jeanne Twehous, John Colbath, Darren Celso, Earl Sires, Sharon Wroblewski, Joe Kenney, Ted Wroblewski, George Hunton (obscured), Tim Scott and Sally McMurdo. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

attended by nearly 100 people, most of whom played a part in bringing the project to fruition.

Among them was retired SAU 9 psychologist Steve Swenson, 90, with his wife Sally, formerly of North Conway but both now of Exeter and Fryeburg, Maine, who had the original vision more than 20 years ago to create a recreation path.

Swenson — who boasted he now has an electronic trike — said he in late July rode the then recently opened paved path with his sons Peter, a former pro mountain biker, and Carl, a three-time cross-country ski Olympian, and that he was thrilled to see it come to fruition through the teamwork and hard work of so many of the people involved.

“Everyone who is here today played a role in some way: so, here’s a handshake, a pat on the back and a clap for a dream come true! We did it!” exclaimed Swenson, wearing a Red Jersey Cyclery racing jersey, at the end of the proceedings, at which all present rose to give him a standing ovation.

Serving as master of ceremonies was Chris Meier, president of the MWV Trails Association, and an attorney with Cooper Cargill Chant.

Meier said the project’s overall cost was \$3.6 million, with funding from the New Hampshire Community Development Tax Authority (\$240,000); \$300,000 from the Connie Davis Watson Foundation; \$300,000 from the Ham Foundation; \$200,000 from the Gibson/Woodbury Charitable Foundation; \$100,000 from The Berry Companies River Run; and

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MWV Trails Association President Chris Meier (right) welcomes the crowd at the official ribbon cutting for the North Conway Rec Path at the north end of the trail at Cranmore Mountain on Tuesday in North Conway. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

thousands of dollars from businesses and individuals as well as fundraising events such as the “Rock the Rec” concerts and even Mountain Meisters “pay-to-run” fundraisers, all held at Cranmore Mountain.

Among the other speakers during the 45-minute event were capital campaign co-chairs Ted and Sharon Wroblewski of Intervale; Conway Selectman John Colbath on behalf of board chair Mary Carey Seavey and the board; Ben Wilcox, president and general manager of Cranmore Mountain Resort; Michelle Cruz, executive director of the MWV Chamber of Commerce; Executive Councilor Joe Kenney (R-Wakefield) of District 1, who played a key role in securing state and federal support for the project; Chuck Henderson, who read a congratulatory letter from U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.); Patrick Carroll, representing U.S. Rep Chris Pappas (D-N.H.); and Ben Belanger, representing U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.).

Kenney told the crowd: “I never had a doubt that the MWV Trails Association would be capable of carrying out this vision.”

After Meier noted that the trails association had already secured the funding for a \$2.2 million, 2.2-planned extension from Cranmore to the Intervale Scenic Vista and to Bartlett in the not-too-distant future, and with hopes for some day extending to Fryeburg’s paved recreation trail and beyond, Kenney said, “OK, onward and beyond!”

Also speaking were Janel Lawton, director of the New Hampshire Outdoor Recreation Industry Department Department of Business and Economic Affairs, who called the project a symbol “of the appreciation New Hampshire has for the outdoors” and economic development tied to recreation and the state’s scenic beauty; Paula Bedard of the N.H. Bike-Walk-Alliance, who hailed the local rec path as one of the most significant in the state; and Tim Kershner, director of communications and public affairs for Memorial Hospital, which served as host sponsor of the ceremonies, speaking on behalf of interim hospital president Jill Brown.

It was Kershner who seemed to best encapsulate the spirit of the day, noting: “Obviously, one of the hospital’s greatest goals is to make this a healthy community. Perhaps the largest benefit is the example of the community coming together and sharing values, building healthy relationships in our community.”

Also striking a chord was Wilcox, who like Bedard and Lawton said the rec path opens up opportunities to people of all abilities.

He said Cranmore was thrilled to once again partner with the town of Conway to create a healthy outdoor pathway, later telling a reporter that he sees the in-town local year-round resort as “Conway’s park.”

Meier praised the work of the A.J. Coleman and Son crew headed by Chris Murray who built the Rec Path. He also praised MWV Trails Association vice president and trail project chair Larry Garland, publicity chairs Jeanne Twehous and Sally Mac-Murdo; the Wroblewskis and others on the committee for their hard work. He then singled out Christine Thompson, who wrote the successful Northern Borders grant application, as well as former MWV Chamber of Commerce executive director Janice Crawford and successor Cruz for their partnering with the MWV Trails Association on the effort.

Not speaking during the ceremony but among those in the audience was Garland.

Prior to the ceremony told the Sun about how he had first sent a letter to the New Hampshire Department of Transportation in 2017 to propose the idea of using the former Route 16 bypass corridor alongside the North-South Road for the project.

Garland reasoned that it could qualify as an alternative transportation route for a \$1.6 million Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant.

“That alleviated some of the obligation of the state to have to pay back the federal government for the land acquired for the bypass,” Garland said.

Also speaking after the ceremony, engineer Phillips told the Sun his task was to make sure that the paved path met regulations concerning grade, making sure it was under 5 percent to make it more open to persons of all abilities. His goal also was to make it interesting, which accounts for the curves in the layout between Cranmore heading south to the intersection with the second trailhead at Thompson Road.

After the ceremony, Tyler Ray of Granite Backcountry Alliance lauded the project, telling the Sun the rec path “is a perfect tie-in of the outdoors to business.”

After the ribbon cutting, as people on bicycles or walking took to the path, and others pushing baby strollers made their way, Sarah Kimball of Jackson — who has continued to cycle despite battling physical challenges — was asked for her reaction. “It’s great — it provides everyone with a beautiful, safe path to be outside and enjoy exercise and the scenery.”

The three access points to the Rec Path are Cranmore, Thompson Road and Hemlock Lane.

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From left: Cyclist Sally Kimball, Sally and Steve Swenson, and MWV Trails Association Vice President Larry Garland are seen at the trailhead after the official ribbon cutting ceremony for the North Conway Rec Path on the north end of the trail at Cranmore Mountain on Tuesday. (RACHEL SHARPLES PHOTO)

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