Rail-to-Trail Testimonials
supporting the proposed
Adirondack Rail Trail

A major new tourist destination that will provide economic, recreational and health benefits for Adirondack communities.
PROPOSED: A year-round, multi-use recreation trail extending 90 miles through the Adirondack Park.

COMING SOON: This 34-mile section will connect Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake.
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September 15, 2015
Rail trails enhance quality of life

Guest Commentary
By Gwen Loose
York County Rail Trail Authority

In anticipation that plans may soon be announced by New York state regarding the best use of the 90-mile rail corridor between Lake Placid and Old Forge, I'd like to comment on a rail-to-trail conversion that I've been involved with since 1997.

The Heritage Rail Trail County Park is a 21.5-mile, multi-use rail trail that is one of the most popular recreational amenities in Pennsylvania's York County. It extends from the city of York's historic district to the Pennsylvania-Maryland state line (the historic Mason-Dixon Line), where it makes a seamless connection to Maryland's Torrey C. Brown Trail and continues for another 21 miles.

The southern half of the Heritage Rail Trail passes through rural farm- land and small towns. The northern section winds through the picturesque valley of Codorus Creek, with long sections of uninterrupted woodland interspersed with farm fields.

The most recent user survey was done three years ago. Analysis of the data, accumulated from the infrared counters and completed surveys, indicates an estimated 281,145 annual visits to the trail, resulting in a total economic impact of over $4.4 million into the local economy.

This rail trail has brought a resurgence of new business opportunities to the small towns along its route. In New Freedom, a little over 4,000, there are three new businesses serving trail users — a bike shop, sports bar and ice cream shop along one street in south of the trail. In May, the bike shop and ice cream shop were full, and the bike shop had a steady flow of customers. The next day along the line, fittingly named Railroad, has a bed and breakfast and a café, right next to the trail. A small settlement up on the ridge, called Rock, has a small museum and has been fully restored to its original appearance, with a history museum on the first floor. The New Freedom Station was restored to its early Pennsylvania Railroad days, and now contains a museum on railroad history along with a café. Both stations are staffed by Friends of the Heritage Rail Trail Corridor.

As elsewhere, bicycling is the predominant form of recreation on the Heritage Rail Trail. However, the use of the trail for walking/hiking increased to 25 percent, and running/jogging nearly doubled to 10 percent since the last survey. When asked to report on any ancillary activities while on the trail, 39 percent of trail users reported enjoying bird-and-other-wildlife watching, while 19 percent visited museums at the train stations and appreciated the interpretive signs along the trail.

It should also be noted that the Heritage Rail Trail appeals to an increasing number of users who regularly visit the trail to maintain and improve their health and fitness.

Also noteworthy from a cultural perspective: Two train stations have been repurposed to commemorate historic events, including a stop-over by President Lincoln at Hanover Junction on his way to deliver the Gettysburg Address. The Hanover Junction station has been fully restored to its original 1860s appearance, with a history museum on the first floor. The New Freedom Station was restored to its early Pennsylvania Railroad days and now contains a museum on railroad history along with a café. Both stations are staffed by Friends of the Heritage Rail Trail Corridor.

In all, the Heritage Rail Trail County Park features seven railroad structures that are listed on National Register of Historic Places.

If asked to identify the single greatest benefit conferred by our rail trail, I think it can be reduced to eight words: “It is the happiest place in York County.”

Gwen Loose is executive director of the York County Rail Trail Authority based in Seven Valleys, Pennsylvania.
Lessons from the Lehigh Gorge

Guest Commentary
By Bob Thomas

I've enjoyed bicycling and backpacking in my native Pennsylvania since I was a Boy Scout in the 1950s and early 1960s. In the late 1970s I started to hear stories of a spectacular 25-mile-long gorge in the Pocono Mountains where the Lehigh River dropped over 700 feet in its course from the old mining town of White Haven in Luzerne County down to the county seat of Carbon County at Jim Thorpe.

But the news came with a warning: In spite of its unbroken forest, beautiful waterfalls and whitewater, numerous evocative ghost towns and impressive abandoned stone works,
Withlacoochee State Trail (46 mi.)

Florida by bike

To the editor:
Over the past few years, many letters have appeared in support of converting the rail corridor connecting Saranac Lake, Lake Placid and Tupper Lake into a trail for bike riding and other outdoor activities. I'd like to add another "rail trail" to that list, one which has interesting similarities to what has been proposed for the Tri-Lakes. It's one of many such trails that my husband and I visited last winter.

It's called the Withlacoochee State Trail and extends 46 miles in central Florida from Citrus Springs in the north to Dade City in the south. For much of its length, the trail parallels the Withlacoochee River, a favorite paddling stream. We stayed about halfway along the trail in Inverness at the Central Motel, a pleasant, inexpensive lodging place that caters to bike riders like us.

We spent one day pedaling south on the trail and another day exploring the northern section. The route was mostly rural — through the "real Florida" we had been looking for. It was a great way to be sightseeing, with friendly people and little communities along the way with bike shops, restaurants, etc.

Just south of Inverness is the Fort Cooper State Park, where we cut off the Withlacoochee Trail to ride and walk on 5 miles of nature trails. Along the way we learned about local wildlife and regional history, including the Seminole Wars and Seminole culture.

Later, some research with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection revealed that of its 39 state parks surveyed, the Withlacoochee Trail (described as a "linear park") had the most visitors and greatest economic benefits. The "annual attendance" was estimated at 405,632. The "direct economic impact" was $30,139,500, based on an average per-person/day expenditure (by non-local visitors) of $99.91. It was estimated that the trail supported 422 jobs and generated over $2 million in state sales tax revenue.

It's nice to think that someday soon we won't have to go to Florida, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, Virginia, Michigan or Pennsylvania to ride our bicycles on a superb rail trail. It appears that we may soon have such a trail in our own backyard, one we can enjoy on a daily basis during much of the year.

Rachel Rice
Saranac Lake
Lessons from the Swamp Rabbit Trail

Guest Commentary
By David Banks
Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

For the past 30 years, a rail-to-trail movement has been sweeping the country. Abandoned or obsolete railroad lines like the 34-mile travel corridor linking Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake are being converted into recreation trails that celebrate regional history as they provide health and economic benefits to local communities.

Consider the three-year-old Swamp Rabbit Trail, which runs 20 miles along the Reedy River between Greenville and Travelers Rest in South Carolina. I've enjoyed this trail many times while visiting family nearby, and I've seen its economic benefits for those communities.

An intriguing aspect of this trail is its formal name: the Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail. In 2007, the Greenville hospital and health care network made a $1 million grant to help open and market the trail. Why? Because it saw the community outreach value of this "naming opportunity." More to the point, the Greenville Health System recognized that this safe, easy, accessible trail would encourage enjoyable exercise – biking, walking, running, etc. – and thus confer a major public-health benefit on surrounding communities.

"They realized this would help to get people out and about," Colin Young of the Greenville County Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department told Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates. "They saw it as a way to fight obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, even mental health problems."

How has the Swamp Rabbit Trail fared so far? A report issued in December shows that there were 501,236 annual visits to the trail, up 20 percent from the previous year. The great majority were bicycle riders. Some 25 percent of visitors – accounting for 125,236 user days – were tourists from outside the "upstate area" of South Carolina who spent $6.7 million while in Greenville County. The trail has clearly served as a catalyst for new business development.

The survey was conducted by Julian A. Reed, associate professor of health sciences at Furman University, and was partially funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Bikes Belong Foundation.

In 2013, the mayor of Travelers Rest (pop. 4,576), a community the size of our Tri-Lakes villages, was quoted in the Greenville News as follows: "The trail has been phenomenal for the whole county, but more so for us in Travelers Rest. I can't begin to tell you how much of an economic boost it's been to this town." A 2012 Greenville News editorial described the Swamp Rabbit Trail as "one of the most popular assets in Greenville County, proving that when it comes to such trails, if you build them they will come."

Out of 55 parks and other public recreation facilities in Greenville County, "this is by far the most popular," according to Colin Young, who says it has inspired people who haven't bicycled in years "to get back in the saddle now that they have a perfect place to ride bikes right here in their own backyards."

Colin also noted that kiosks have been set up along the trail providing historical insights into the region, including a history of the railroad that once plied this corridor. More interpretive kiosks are planned, as is a 5-mile extension of the trail.

Though no survey has yet reassured the impact of the Swamp Rabbit Trail on local property values, Young said there's a lot of anecdotal evidence that the trail is a big selling point for real estate: "Our office gets calls from people telling us they are moving here because of the trail and asking 'How close can we get?'"

Dianna Turner, city administrator for Travelers Rest, also gives the trail a rave review.

"We've probably quadrupled our number of downtown businesses," she told the Times-News, a newspaper based in Hendersonville, North Carolina. "We used to have dozens of empty buildings on Main Street. Now there are only a handful. Even on U.S. 25, which is our bypass, we've seen considerable growth. I think Travelers Rest has more media exposure and people are more enticed to come here and make an investment because of the trail."

On Jan. 12, the Greenville City Council voted unanimously to provide $2.5 million for an extension of the Swamp Rabbit Trail. Bob Mihalic, governmental affairs coordinator for Greenville County, told Fox Carolina television news, "Where Greenville County owns the rail lines -- we're always looking for ways to turn those rails into something productive for the community."

David Banks lives in Lake Clear and is a board member of Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates.
Another rail trail success story

Guest Commentary
By Dick Beamish
Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

What we could have here in South Carolina recently to ride our bikes on the Swamp Rabbit Trail. The Swamp Rabbit is a 20-mile long recreation trail in former railroad corridor, connecting the city of Greenville with the small town of Travelers Rest on the edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Rachel and I checked in at the Hampton Inn at Travelers Rest, a favorite with bicycle riders, in a room overlooking the trail. From our window we could see cyclists passing by, and we also noticed, in the lobby and later in the breakfast room, a number of unusually tall, lean, long-legged guests. These folks, it turned out, were professional distance runners from Boone, North Carolina, recent college graduates who were spending three-weeks here in training. The Swamp Rabbit Trail, the perfect place to run, is what drew them to Travelers Rest.

That first afternoon we biked on the trail into the village, a place the size of Saranac Lake where travelers used to stop before continuing west across the mountains. Like many rural towns, Travelers Rest had experienced a long economic decline, but the town seemed on the upswing.

We were struck by the impact of the Swamp Rabbit Trail. We rode past businesses with names like Swamp Rabbit Storage and Swamp Rabbit Brew & Taproom, with a bike rack out front. In fact, bike racks were everywhere. We pedaled past the Carriage House, a vestige of the Swamp Rabbit train that once operated here, which serves as a refreshment parlor. There was the Whistle Stop Cafe and even a medical facility labeled Trailhead Dentistry. We stopped at an extensive bike shop and outdoor outfitting store, whose manager told us that this year he plans to expand his bike-rental business to 40 bicycles a day.

North of Travelers Rest we came to a sign that said, "End of the trail for now." A woman walking her dog told us of plans to extend the trail all the way to North Carolina.

Next day, biking toward Greenville, we encountered the usual eclectic mix of rail trail users. There were families with small kids with training wheels on their bicycles, exercise walkers with a seriousness of purpose, more casual walkers chatting and laughing, gung-ho cyclists in colorful garb intent on a rigorous workout, sightseeing cyclists like ourselves, dog walkers and parents jogging with baby strollers — all ages and sizes, in all stages of physical fitness, out for some fresh air and exercise.

Here and there we saw signs promoting a real-estate subdivision. One sign said, "Like running on the Swamp Rabbit Trail? You'll love living on it!" This confirmed what we'd noticed elsewhere. Because they are considered a prime recreational amenity, these rail-to-trail conversions can be a big selling point for real estate.

Soon we were passing by Furman University, so we cut off to bike around this beautiful campus with a lake in the middle. The name Furman U. rang a bell with us. In doing our pre-trip research, we'd seen a study by Furman's Health Sciences Department tracking the usage of the Swamp Rabbit Trail. Released in January, the study determined that there were more than 500,000 visits to the trail in 2014, a significant increase over the previous year.

Most users were cyclists. Some 25 percent of last year's visits were from tourists like ourselves. The other trail users were residents from surrounding communities. The study calculated that visitors from afar spent a total $5.7 million here last year.

Back on the trail, we continued to see signs with the symbol of a rabbit and the formal name, "Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail." Our research had revealed that the hospital-medical center for Greenville County has been a major sponsor of this rail-to-trail conversion, having contributed $1 million to help get it going. Why should a medical enterprise support such a project? One reason is pretty clear — i.e., the public relations value of being identified with the county's most popular recreational asset.

The other reason is also obvious when you consider the health benefits of a running, walking, biking trail used regularly by thousands of local citizens. With our national epidemic of obesity and its related diseases, what could be better for public health than encouraging regular exercise in a safe, peaceful, picturesque setting?

A few miles on, the trail led into downtown Greenville. What a great way to arrive in this thriving, historic city center! The trail threads through a gorgeous downtown park surrounding the falls of the Reedy River, a waterway we'd been following since Travelers Rest.

As we toured around town, it appeared that the revitalization of Greenville has been aided and abetted by the Swamp Rabbit Trail, though many other factors are involved. At the other end of this recreation way, however, the Swamp Rabbit has played a decisive role in the rebirth of Travelers Rest.

We have much to learn from this success story.

Dick Beamish lives in Saranac Lake and is the founder of the Adirondack Explorer magazine and a member of the board of directors of Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates.
Riding, eating along a Vermont ex-rail trail

To the editor:
The Adirondack Scenic Railroad has issued a report on the benefits of restoring passenger service between Utica and Lake Placid. The report, which is all about regress rather than progress, seems to exist in a parallel universe with no connection to ours.

To get a more realistic perspective, my wife and I embarked on a two-day escape to Vermont to ride the 26-mile rail trail from St. Albans, near Lake Champlain, to Richford on the Canadian border. It’s called the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail, and it follows the Missisquoi River most of the way.

We drove and ferried over on a Wednesday afternoon, checked into a motel in St. Albans, had a pasta dinner at Chou Bella’s restaurant and attended a chamber music concert in a church overlooking the municipal park. Next day, on our bike ride to Richford, we lunched at the Abbey Restaurant in Sheldon and later checked in at the Grey Gables Mansion B&B, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, in Richford. We enjoyed a dinner of fresh halibut and beef au jus, supplemented by much-needed and well-deserved draft beer, at The Crossing restaurant. Next day we pedaled back to St. Albans, where we’d parked next to the Athena Restaurant, where we enjoyed an end-of-journey lunch.

We bicycled about four hours each way each day, including lots of stops to snack and smell the flowers. We breathed fresh air, traveled at a leisurely pace exercising mind and body, took in the sights and smells of the countryside, and chatted with fellow travelers. Herewith some reminiscences:

During much of the first day, Jay Peak, the northern terminus of the Green Mountains, drew ever closer. Red-winged blackbirds carried on as we biked past cattail wetlands. Bright-yellow goldfinches fitted about. From the woods came the song of wood thrushes, the Vermont state bird. Watched turtle safely cross the trail (no cars or tracks to worry about). Enjoyed aroma of newly mown hay. Observed a million or so sprouts of new com. Crossed Missisquoi twice on old railroad bridges. River often in sight, sometimes wide and slow, other times fast and white. Passed maple groves where trees are tapped for sap. Saw many cows. Also passed goats, sheep, horses and one rooster.

Encountered the following fellow travelers: Group of pre-schoolers herded by two adults. Jogging mother pushing baby in stroller. Elderly cyclists and walkers out for daily exercise. Retired man recovering from hip operation, cycling on level rail trail to get back in shape for hills. We noted side trail connects with new housing development, no doubt big selling point for realtors.

In sum, an up-close visit to our neighboring state, plus exhilarating, heart-healthy exercise suitable for all ages. Isn’t this what we should be doing with the travel corridor in our own backyard? Isn’t it high time to create the Adirondack Rail Trail connecting the Tri-Lakes with Beaver River, Big Moose and Old Forge?

To join us, sign up at www.theArta.org.

Dick Beamish
Saranac Lake
Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates
Rail trails boost property values

Guest Commentary
By Craig Della Penna

Some years ago, I was invited to Saranac Lake to speak to public officials and business people about establishing a rail-with-trail along the underutilized corridor that bisects your towns. I remember speaking before a sizable crowd in the beautiful ballroom of the Hotel Saranac.

In more recent years, the debate has shifted as it became evident that combining a trail with a railroad on the same one-track corridor would be impractical and costly. The push now is to create a full-fledged recreational trail on the rail bed. The costs vs. benefits of converting the historic corridor. If properly executed, I believe it could be one of the finest rail trails in the country.

I've been watching with interest as various studies have come forward and the state has recommended 1) that the section between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake become a trail and 2) the section between Tupper Lake and Old Forge be considered for an expanded tourist train. I've also heard talk about the potential popularity and economic benefits of having a long-distance rail trail connecting your Adirondack communities. The success stories for comparable projects include the Erie Canalway Trail between Albany and Buffalo, the Cape Cod Rail Trail in Massachusetts, the Virginia Creeper Trail in the Blue Ridge Mountains and the P'tit Train du Nord, a 130-mile rail trail that extends from just north of Montreal to the Laurentian Mountains.

The Adirondack Park is rich in tourism venues and natural attractions but doesn't offer much for family bicycling. Clearly this "Adirondack Rail Trail" would help fill that need by providing a safe place for bicyclists of all ages to enjoy fresh air, healthy exercise and wonderful scenery. One thing I haven't heard about in this discussion, however, is the impact of the rail trail on residential property values.

This is where I'd like to contribute my two cents to the discussion. In my day job, I am a Realtor in Northampton, Massachusetts. My specialty is the sale of homes that are close to rail trails and other sorts of greenways. And I don't just talk the talk on this subject. I walk the walk (literally and figuratively). I know firsthand what it's like to live near a rail trail because my home is 8 feet from the trail that connects the towns of Northampton, Hadley and Amherst, Easthampton, Williamsburg and Southampton.

Our house was built in 1865. Three years later, the railroad came to town and was built right next to the house. The railroad officials felt bad for the owners of a house so close to the tracks; to mitigate any damage from the shaking caused by passing trains, they reinforced the plaster ceilings with lath strips nailed up from below. Because that wasn't very nice to look at, they hung taut but flexible canvas on the ceiling below the laths.

The railroad went away in 1969, and the corridor became a trail in 1981. We bought the rundown house in 2001, and after entirely renovating the place, we opened as a bed and breakfast two years later. We named it the Sugar Maple Trailside Inn. Since we see only cyclists and pedestrians going by, the house doesn't shake anymore (though, for old times' sake, we saved one of the canvas ceilings).

I may be the first Realtor anywhere to focus on houses near rail trails and similar recreation ways. About half of my business is in this category. As a consequence, I am one of the top Realtors in the Five College Area of western Massachusetts.

Several years ago I did a report for the Massachusetts multiple listing service on houses being sold near regional rail trails. The report looked at listings that touted the proximity of properties to the trails and found that they sold for a higher proportion of the asking price than other houses did. They also sold more quickly.

More recently, I was able to get the MLS to put a "NEAR THE BIKE PATH" button on the website that Realtors use to post listings. This has institutionalized the concept that living near a rail trail, or a similar biking-walking-jogging facility, significantly enhances property values.

Above all, however, rail trails can do much to revitalize communities while contributing to the quality of life for families who live anywhere near them. I wish you luck in this worthy pursuit.

Craig Della Penna, a Realtor in Northampton, Massachusetts, has spoken and written widely about rail trails and their effect on adjoining properties.
A great rail trail experience

To the editor:

As a lover of wild places in general and the Adirondacks in particular, I have read with great interest about the proposed Adirondack Rail Trail. A diversity of reasons to support this trail have already been offered, so rather than try to add to those, let me briefly describe an experience I had with a rail trail in another part of the country.

A couple of years ago, my wife, college-age daughter and I spent a memorable day riding on the route of the Hiawatha Rail Trail (www.ridethethehiawatha.com) on the Montana-Idaho border. First stop was at the Lookout Pass Ski Area. We were fitted with mountain bikes (all equipped with handlebar-mounted lights) and helmets. While a strap-on bike rack was being installed on our rented car, we ordered box lunches and drinks at the deli. When all was ready, we drove a few miles to the parking area at the trailhead.

The ride starts off with a bang: an almost 2-mile long tunnel through solid rock, which made it clear why each bike had a bright light. The trail goes through eight tunnels and over seven high trestles, which really adds to the fun! Inside the first tunnel it was pitch-dark, 58 degrees and dripping with water. At the far end we emerged into a sparkling scene: clear blue skies, green, snowcapped mountains and pine-scented, cool air. Our mud-splattered, daredevil daughter, who had raced ahead, was waiting with a big smile.

Pedaling the gentle, 1.7 percent downhill grade was pleasant and quite manageable for my wife, who suffers from a chronic back problem. Riding along the wide gravel and dirt trail, we passed interpretive signs here and there, and so much pristine beauty. We found a shady spot for our picnic by a clear cool stream. Finally, after almost 15 miles, we came to the end and took our place in line for the shuttle back to the parking area. Converted yellow school busses loaded bikes in back and passengers in the front. The ride back to our car was just as beautiful and included a couple of thrilling hairpin turns on the mountain road. Loading the bikes back onto the car, we pulled out of the lot just as a young moose crossed the road in front of us. What a wonderful day!

As a resident of Brooklyn, I can savor those memories, but I'll probably never go back — Idaho is a long way from here. In the east, the Adirondacks are the only comparably vast wild area. The proposed Adirondack Rail Trail would certainly be something my family and I would enjoy, again and again.

Michael Conley
Brooklyn
**Guest Commentary**  
**By Emily Boedecker**  
**Local Motion**

The Island Line hosts an estimated 150,000 visitors a year. I believe that your proposed trail could be at least as popular.

There are important health and fitness advantages to these recreational assets. Multi-use trails are a perfect place for residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy a wide range of low-impact exercise. Whether it’s bicycling, walking or jogging on this easy, level pathway, the Island Line Trail is used regularly by thousands of local residents.

As one fellow cyclist put it, "This trail provides a safe, scenic place for children and families to enjoy healthy exercise away from the noise, fumes and hazards of road traffic. The trail is also used increasingly for commuting to and from work, and is even used by Burlington's mayor to cycle to the office! It's a great place to be out and about, and I'm sure it will only get better with time."

Emily Boedecker is executive director of Local Motion, a nonprofit organization promoting people-powered transportation and recreation, based in Burlington, Vermont.
Virginia Creeper Trail, VA (34 mi.)

Lessons from the Virginia Creeper

What was he thinking?
State officials recently held four meetings (following the four similar meetings they held a year ago) to elicit more public input on the use of the underutilized railroad bed through the Adirondacks. At the opening of each meeting, Ray Hessinger, speaking for the state Department of Transportation, made a number of misrepresentations, including a pair of unlikely comparisons.

Mr. Hessinger cited the Cuyahoga Valley Railroad in Ohio as a potential model for the kind of tourist train he envisions for the Adirondacks, though there is little similarity. And he singled out the Genesee Valley Greenway Trail, running south from Rochester, as a potential model for the kind of rail trail many of us hope to live long enough to see on our travel corridor.

But there's a problem here: The Genesee Valley trail, which Mr. Hessinger said attracts some 73,000 visits a year, mostly on the northern section near Rochester, is still a work in progress. It bears little resemblance to the 90-mile Adirondack Rail Trail that could connect Lake Placid and Old Forge.

Why, when there are now nearly 2,000 rail trails in the United States, couldn't the DOT spokesman have picked one that more closely resembles what's proposed for the Adirondacks? Take the Virginia Creeper Trail, for example, in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This one is the subject of a cover story in the current issue of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy magazine. The headline highlights its success as a tourist attraction: "Appalachian Engine: The Virginia Creeper Trail Keeps Bringing Visitors Back."

This 34-mile rail trail connects Abingdon, Damascus and Whitetop Mountain in southwest Virginia. This happens to be the same as the distance between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake, which is Step 1 of the wide, level Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates. My wife and I biked the Creeper Trail last spring, and we can attest to 1) its huge appeal for bikers, not to mention walkers and runners, and 2) the marvelous opportunity we have to create something every bit as successful here.

"Today," reports Maureen Hannan, who wrote the article, "the sleepy towns of Abingdon and Damascus welcome about 250,000 trail riders a year, more than 25 times their combined populations. The trail is an economic engine for the communities, generating business for bike shuttle service, rental cottages, restaurants and shops." (Halfway along the trail in Damascus, Rachel and I counted six bike shops in a village of 1,000 residents!)

Tenille Montgomery, the former marketing coordinator for Abingdon (population 8,000) where the trail begins and where we lodged for three days, says that each overnight trail visitor spends more than $700 while staying in the area.

"And according to the town's best estimates, trail-related tourism revenues stand at about $25 million a year," writes Ms. Hannan. Wayne Miller, president of the Virginia Creeper Trail Club, is also cited in the article. Merchants aren't the only beneficiaries, according to Miller. Homeowners have seen jumps in property value, the artisans and musicians of an Abingdon-based folk culture collective are finding new outlets, and farmers enjoy growing demand for their produce.

Especially fascinating is the story of how strong opposition to the trail in the beginning soon morphed into widespread enthusiasm for the benefits the trail provides.

"In fact," Ms. Hannan reports, "some of the farmers who once vocally opposed the trail now leave baskets of free vegetables and flowers for trail users."

Kevin Costello, Abingdon's economic development director, acknowledges that a lot of guesswork is required when counting visitors on a public-access trail like the Creeper.

"But one critical fact Costello knows for sure," reports Ms. Hannan, "is that each year, nearly 100,000 visitors begin with a stop at one of the local bike rental shops."

Abingdon's first priority, according to Costello, is to welcome those out-of-town riders before they hit the trail. A new trailhead visitors' center, which opened in October, showcases the area's growing array of businesses. The town is also tackling an ambitious project to make all of Abingdon bike accessible. The idea is to connect bike riders to restaurants, shops and inns.

"Whether you talk with shop owners, town officials, trail volunteers or innkeepers," writes Hannan, "you'll hear a single refrain: 'People always come back.'"

"The pathways to capturing the full economic potential of the Virginia Creeper Trail are still emerging," she concludes, "but one thing is clear: Each visitor on a bike brings the promise of new vitality to this corner of Appalachia."

Our state officials at DOT and Department of Environmental Conservation, who will be reviewing the corridor management plan in the months ahead, have promised a decision in 2015. Let's hope it's the obvious one - a multi-use recreation trail for all ages and abilities. And let's also hope that Gov. Cuomo, who sees tourism development as a key to our economic future, will keep a close eye on the process.

Dick Beamish, a resident of Saranac Lake, is founder of the Adirondack Explorer magazine and a board member of Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates.
To the editor:

I've recently been reading the discussion in your area about the possibility of the Adirondack Rail Trail. I strongly support the efforts to create this multi-use trail and believe it would be one of the best business decisions ever made for the communities along the path. My involvement with the Virginia Creeper Trail in a rural area of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains gives me a lot of insight into the benefits that can come your way.

Briefly, our small town of Damascus, Virginia, was something of a typically slow mountain village before the old railroad was converted to a bike trail. Now we have around 45 lodging establishments in the immediate area, six bike shops which provide rentals and shuttles, numerous restaurants and a community which is attracting both young people who love our outdoor life and retirees like myself who enjoy a community of active people. Of course it helps that the Appalachian Trail runs down our main street.

Estimates run from around 150,000 to 250,000 visitors to the Creeper Trail a year. Many of these are overnight visitors in Damascus and also in the nearby town. The Creeper's economic impact on both towns is massive. The lodging tax alone is a major factor in our town's budget.

I understand there is a group which wants to rebuild the old railroad. Although I share their nostalgia for times past, and wish many things were like they used to be in the decades of my youth, that idea is simply not economically viable. The possibility was considered briefly here but quickly dismissed when it became obvious that rebuilding a railroad that few would use beyond their first visit would be a constant drain on local budgets. The rail trail we have requires little maintenance, has many volunteers willing to work on its constant improvement, and the costs in upkeep are only a tiny percentage of the money it brings in.

Some people here and I think in your area have brought up security issues. I have about 600 feet of trail frontage running next to my property, and the only intrusion so far has been the laughter of children. A rail trail brings happy times for families and individuals, and I hope the authorities who make the decisions up your way will add that to the financial benefits this trail will bring.

Richard Smith
Recreation trails are great for tourists

To the editor:

Tupper Lake is one of my family’s favorite places to visit. I grew up in Tupper and am proud to call it my hometown. My house, growing up, was close to the railroad tracks, and my siblings and I would often race down the hill to wave at the trains going by. It was sad when the trains stopped running, but it has been sadder still to see the railroad tracks fall into such disrepair over the years. While the effort to bring back the trains has been commendable, the feasibility of such an endeavor leaves much to be desired.

My family loves to visit the Adirondacks once or twice a year; it is my children’s favorite place to go. Over the years we have taken advantage of many activities the area has to offer: biking, hiking, skiing, snowmobiling, camping, canoeing, you name it. We recently have been made aware of a campaign to convert the old railroad tracks to a recreational trail. We are very excited about this, having had access to these types of trails for vacation adventures and in our own community.

We live in Sammamish, Wash., just outside of Seattle. Seattle has for years been converting old railroad beds to multi-purpose trails. They recently opened a section near our house (the Sammamish River Trail) that connects to the Burke-Gilman trail into Seattle (more than 30 miles of trail). My family and I use this trail weekly for walking, running or biking. It is a heavily used trail for the area and a beautiful way for many people to experience the outdoors. The trail is flat and can be used by anyone: mothers with strollers, people in wheelchairs, and young and old alike. It is definitely multi-purpose, with many sharing the trail at one time. We have also used the Iron Horse Trail over the Snoqualmie Mountain Pass nearby that includes a 2-mile bike tunnel. This is a hundred-mile trail that connects Cedar Falls to the Columbia River.

In addition, this summer while vacationing in Idaho, we were lucky enough to take advantage of the Hiawatha Bike Trail as well. This is a fabulous trail that has the most breathtaking scenic stretches of wilderness in the country. It is considered to be the “crown jewel” of rails-to-trails and includes 10 tunnels and seven high train trestles. It was a fabulous experience for our family. We are always looking for an outdoor adventure activity to combine with our vacation plans. Adding such a trail to the Adirondacks would attract many people to the area who feel the same.

There are already many visitors to the Adirondacks who go there for the outdoor attractions; this would be a big draw.

Rails-to-trails allow you to see a different part of the country than you normally would. It is a great way for many people to experience the outdoors — whether that is hiking, biking, running, skiing, etc. Please support this endeavor and see that a bike trail becomes a reality for the Adirondacks. A multi-purpose, year-round trail will have a greater economic impact on your communities than a single-purpose summer train.

Laurie Uph
Sammamish, Wash.
Moving the Adirondack economy forward with the rail trail

Guest Commentary
By Pete Nelson
Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

New York state has decided to open the unit management plan governing the rail corridor from Renssen to Lake Placid for review. This is great news for the Adirondacks.

But not everyone is thrilled. Although a large and growing number of people are for the rail trail, there are those who strongly oppose it. In this opposition lies a big contradiction.

Here's the part that is not contradictory: Some opposition comes from those who love the scenic train. With these people I have no quarrel. I like the scenic train, too, but I simply point out that the welfare of communities along the corridor is more important.

Now here's the contradictory part: Much of the opposition comes from people and organizations whose stated goals are to bolster the economy of the Adirondack Park. Everyone knows that we face a hard, economic reality: a park losing population and jobs that provide a living wage to residents. For this reason, rail trail advocates have sought to capitalize the route. "...Through a combination of passenger and freight service, the authority could begin to realize a profit in its third year of operation."

By any standard, this rosy outlook has not come close to being achieved.

Yet the naysayers claim these studies are speculative and overstate the benefits. Their arguments over whether the Adirondack Scenic Railroad ever turned a profit, but a balance sheet comparing investment to return on the entire project since the Adirondack Scenic Railroad launched.

In 1970 you could not find anyone outside the area who knew where Sparta and

A former railroad tunnel is used by cyclists on the Elroy-Sparta Recreational Trail in Wisconsin. (Photo from Wikipedia)
To the editor:

The Tri-Lake area can benefit from a recreational trail along the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor, a trail that will provide a safe, scenic, year-round trail accessible to people of all ages and physical abilities. I strongly support this recreational trail, which will transport people and benefit communities. A recreational trail along the Lake Placid-Old Forge rail corridor will benefit the local communities through attracting active families, including bikers, joggers, walkers, birders, wheelchair users, families, cross-country skiers, snow-shoers and snowmobileers. From Gary Soquist’s article on “Economic and Social Benefits of Trails,”

“Nationally, trail-related expenditures range from less than $1 per day to more than $75 per day, depending on mileage covered. Generally, it’s been found a trail can bring at least one million dollars annually to a community, depending on how well the town embraces the trail.” For a community with art attraction and a bike trail (Lanesboro, Minn.), “a trail can mean an annual economic impact of more than five million dollars.” See reference 1.

Communities benefit significantly from recreational trails. Economic impact data has been documented, with significant economic prosperity for rural communities like ours.

“Lanesboro, on the Root River Trail in Southeastern Minnesota, is an often-cited example of the economic impact a trail can have. Pre- and post-trail Lanesboro, a town of about 800 residents, differ dramatically. Before the trail was built, Fillmore County hospitality tax annual collection was less than $250,000. In 2007, thanks to 200,000 trail users each year, hospitality tax collection was $4.7 million.” See reference 2.

“Post-trail Lanesboro boasts 12 B&Bs (with year-long waiting lists), 8 restaurants, an art gallery, a museum, and a thriving community theater well-off enough to offer housing to its actors. Economically speaking, the Root River Trail has been very, very good for Lanesboro.”

The recreational trail along the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor can make the same significant benefit for Tupper Lake, for Saranac Lake, for Lake Placid and for the adjacent communities.

Our local community members and visitors can appreciate our village’s character, their historic nature, the arts that are exceptionally strong here, and our lakes and mountains — and the fact that a bike path flows right through the middle of our communities. “You can sleep and eat here, and there is something to do here at night.” (See reference 3.)

The communities grow through small businesses like bakeries and delis, through community resources like art communities and bed and breakfasts, and through the interest in unique stores and interesting historical museums.

I support New York state reviewing its management plan governing the use of the corridor. I support a recreational trail along the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor. For this reason I am urging the state to revise the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor to include a multi-use recreational plan along the Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor. With hope for establishing a recreational trail,

Melinda “Lindy” Ellis
Saranac Lake
Lessons from the Erie Canalway Trail

As the state considers the best use of our Remsen-Lake Placid rail corridor, there are lessons to be learned from a new economic impact study of the Erie Canalway Trail, which runs across the state from Albany to Buffalo. The ECT is more than 75 percent complete, with 277 miles now open as an off-road, multi-use trail for people of all ages who want to enjoy fresh air and good exercise while soaking up history and engaging with the natural world. (The report is available at www.ptny.org.)

There are interesting comparisons between the Erie Canalway Trail and what we could have in the Adirondack Park.

Guest Commentary
By Dick Beamish
Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

$253 million in sales, 3,440 jobs, $78 million in labor income, and $28.5 million in taxes in the Upstate economy each year.

"Study results were based on trail counts using observational and electronic techniques" and from user surveys "conducted at multiple locations along the trail between June and September 2012."

So how many people make use of the canal trail? The researchers estimated trail traffic at almost 1.6 million visits per year.

"Not surprisingly," they report, "the segments of trail closest to the large urban population centers of Buffalo, Rochester and Albany were estimated to have the highest number of visits - more than 200,000 per year."

How much usage can we expect on the Adirondack Rail Trail? While we don't have large urban centers in the Adirondack Park, the comparison is instructive.

Three-quarters of the vacationers chose the canal trail for biking and natural scenery, 71 percent stayed at least three nights, 44 percent stayed at a hotel or motel, and each of them spent an average of $939 during their visit.

The study's conclusion: "The ECT is clearly an important resource for the local and regional economies of Upstate New York and should continue to be promoted and enhanced."

As 97 percent of the visits to the canal trail are undertaken by persons living within the 35 counties surrounding the trail, the study confirms that the ECT is also "a valued resource and an important contributor to the quality of life in the more than 200 communities along its length."

Bicycle activity is seen at a store in Camillus along the Erie Canalway Trail.

(Photo – Chris Bolt, WAER.org)
Shining Sea Bikeway (10 mi.)

Massachusetts rail trail has been successful

To the editor:

Having discovered the discussion in your pages concerning the conversion of the scenic Adirondack rail line to a trail for recreational use, I wanted to add some observations as a resident of a town that many years ago converted a rail line to a scenic bikeway.

To commemorate the American bicentennial celebration in 1976, the town of Falmouth converted 4 miles of an unused rail bed to a paved bikeway that connects Woods Hole and Falmouth, Mass. The trail that runs along the shore of Vineyard Sound was named the Shining Sea Bikeway in honor of Falmouth native Katharine Lee Bates, the author of “America the Beautiful.” This trail has proved enormously popular, not only attracting large numbers of tourists but also providing a practical way to commute by bike between Falmouth and Woods Hole.

Based on the popularity of this trail, and after protracted debate similar to what you are now experiencing, a further section of the rail bed has been converted, extending the length of the bikeway to about 10 miles. This new extension adds many scenic vistas across picturesque marshes to the broad waters of Buzzards Bay.

It is striking how many visitors come to Falmouth expressly to ride the bike trail, even more now with the new extension. There is growing demand to continue converting the rail bed the rest of the way up Buzzards Bay to connect to scenic trails along the Cape Cod Canal.

As individuals who enjoy and now take for granted our splendid bikeways, we hope you will have success in the proposed conversion of your incomparable scenic rail bed to a recreational trail. We would come as soon as you open, especially as one of my wife’s most formative childhood experiences was summers at the Moss Lake camp. The concept of visiting Moss Lake as a bicycle destination is quite spectacular.

We both hope that your community is able to resolve the current issues and repurpose this amazing asset which surely would be one of the most compellingly beautiful such trails in America. It seems that you have the trail analog of the “Field of Dreams.” I am confident that “if you build it, they will come.” We surely will.

Sincerely yours,
Charles Mann
Falmouth, Mass.
To the editor:

As enthusiastic advocates of a multi-use recreational trail in place of the little-used train track, we were pleased to see the Tupper Lake village board vote 4-1 in favor of revisiting the unit management plan that governs use of the rail corridor through the Adirondacks.

We live half of the year on Upper Saranac Lake and the other half in Cape Cod. Our house is 1 mile from the Cape Cod Rail Trail. From here you can ride 50 to 60 miles on this trail without being in traffic. It is a wonderful resource for us but especially wonderful for the economy of Cape Cod. We can ride as long as there is no snow, but walkers, runners, snowshoers and skiers enjoy it also.

The trail is used year-round but especially in the summer and during the spring/fall shoulder seasons. When we are here in the summer we usually ride early in the morning because there are so many people on the trail during the middle of the day. Not everyone comes to the Cape to go to the beach. Bike shops are everywhere. There are links into all the towns abutting the trail. It is a boon to the economy, as a multi-use trail will be to the Tri-Lakes region and to every other town it serves.

The proposed multi-use recreational trail will become a major tourist destination, not to mention the 100,000-plus campers at Fish Creek and Rollins Pond campgrounds who bring bicycles with them. They would be only an hour’s ride on a safe, easy path to Tupper Lake and could easily make a day trip to and from Saranac Lake.

Jim and Chris Crane
Upper Saranac Lake
Great time on the Pine Creek Rail Trail

To the editor:

We are writing this letter to tell readers about our recent trip to bike on the Pine Creek Rail Trail in northern Pennsylvania.

Since it is a "destination trail," we traveled about seven hours from our home in Long Lake to get there. It is 60 miles long, and since we bike about 20 miles a day and did "out and back" trips from the trailheads, we were in the area for six days. The trail parallels Pine Creek and travels through state forests and private property following the route of the former Pine Creek railroad bed. Even though there were high mountains surrounding us, the trail itself has no more than a 2 percent grade at any point. The surface is fine stone dust, and even though there had been a hard rain, there was no mud. It was well maintained by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, with blowdown promptly cut. Solar-powered, composting, handicapped-accessible, clean restrooms were provided along the trail as well as parking facilities, resting benches and bike stands. At road crossings there were gates and stop signs. There were also picnic tables and camping areas. Along part of the trail there was a parallel bridle path.

These are some of the things we saw along the trail: lots of bikers of all ages and riding all types of bicycles, walkers, runners, joggers, parents pushing strollers, handicapped people in motorized wheelchairs, canoeists, kayakers, fishermen, horseback riders, horse-drawn cart tours, lots of birds, wildlife and wildflowers. Highlights were some large turtles laying eggs in the sand next to the trail and a large timber rattler sunning on the stone dust. There were signs along the trail to keep 3 feet away from the snakes and stating that they would not be aggressive if left alone.

Needless to say, we went by fast! We also met a retired English teacher who had become a Pine Creek Trail advocate. He took our picture and said he was, with our permission, going to post it on Facebook as octogenarians riding the trail on a tandem recumbent trike. He told us that there were people in the area who were against establishing the trail until they saw the economic boost that it brought.

Our hope is that this kind of trail might become a reality in the Adirondacks. Maybe not in our lifetime, but sometime!

John and Jackie Mallery
Long Lake
Maryland trail went from doubt to acceptance

To the editor:

As a seasonal resident of the Saranac Lake area, but one that visits year-round, I have been following the rails-to-trails debate with interest as it reminds me of a similar debate 30 years ago in Glencoe, Md., where I live.

The situation isn't entirely the same as the trail line in Maryland was not in use at the time it was converted to a bike-hike trail, so there wasn't a conflict with an existing constituency like the train supporters in Saranac Lake, but it nevertheless created controversy, as any change does. People who lived in the rural hamlets that were originally rail stops objected to the potential influx of outsiders bringing trash, creating traffic and possibly property damage. After six months of hearings and debate, the trail was approved, and 30 years later it has proved to be a great resource for thousands of hikers, runners, cyclists, dog walkers and families with young kids. It has even become part of the East Coast Greenway, a rails-to-trails system from Boston to Florida. Concerns about trash, traffic and property damage have given way to widespread support of the trail, as it has proven to be not only a great recreational asset but something that has enhanced the value of all neighboring properties.

Again the situation differs from the debate in the Tri-Lakes area as there is an active group using Saranac-Lake-to-Lake-Placid rail line, but I can say from firsthand experience that rail trails are extremely popular resources and only enhance the appeal of an area, even one with as many recreational opportunities on the Adirondack Park.

David Warfield
Glencoe, Md.
D.C. rail trail is popular

To the editor:

In July of this summer, I visited my family in Washington, D.C. The temperatures during the day were in the 90s, so many people decided to exercise very early in the morning. I was surprised to see hundreds of people out enjoying themselves before 9 a.m. on the former Washington & Old Dominion railroad corridor. They were biking, walking and running on a trail that stretches 45 miles from the Potomac River, near Washington, to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The W&OD Trail takes its name from the railroad whose trains ran along the right of way from 1859 to 1968. The demise of the railroad was hastened by the improved road system and increased number of motor vehicles. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Our Remsen-Lake Placid line through the Adirondacks began operating in 1892 and ended service in 1972 for the same reasons. The demand for freight and passenger service had disappeared, yet the railroad bed has been sitting mostly idle ever since! This is one of our greatest resources, yet we are failing to take full advantage of it.

Scenery along the W&OD trail is like that from a train window, but the viewing is better when you are physically using the trail, as I was. When you are jogging or biking or just strolling, you are not only a spectator but a participant as well. You are outdoors enjoying the beautiful surroundings, smelling the forest, feeling the cold air, being an active participant rather than sitting in a train looking out the window.

The proposed Adirondack Rail Trail would connect Lake Placid and Tupper Lake, and run from there all the way to Old Forge. It would be the best thing that could happen to the Adirondacks – for tourists and locals alike. This historic rail bed could easily and inexpensively be converted into a recreation trail that would be second to none in the United States. Let's get on board!

Carmen Ordonez
Saranac Lake
Feeding a rail-trail addiction

By Dick Beamish

Guest Commentary
Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates

My wife Rachel and I have been getting to know portions of our country up close and personal. We do this by riding our bikes on old rail beds that have been turned into pathways for biking, walking, jogging, enjoying nature and absorbing local history. Part of the fun has been talking with people and making new friends along the way.

This experience has proved both delightful and sad. Delightful because there’s no better way to be tourists. Sad because it shows how we have been losing out here in the Adirondacks. By not taking advantage of the old rail corridor that connects our communities in the Adirondacks, we are missing the boat in every respect: recreationally, economically, health-wise and by squandering a unique opportunity to improve our quality of life.

As we discovered on a trip this summer, Michigan is at the forefront of this national movement, with rail trails seemingly everywhere: along the shores of Lake Huron, Michigan and Superior, and along countless lakes and waterways in between. We also spent a memorable day on Mackinac Island, where all the roads and paths are reserved for walking, biking and horse-drawn vehicles. No cars, buses, trucks or motorcycles on this enchanted isle—just nature, scenery, history and tranquility.

More recently we travelled to Rhode Island to pedal the spectacular East Bay Bicycle Path along Narragansett Bay, then on to Cape Cod to do the Shining Sea Bikeway from Woods Hole to North Falmouth along Buzzard’s Bay. Here’s how W.

Redwood Wright described this trail in Spritsail, a historical journal about Falmouth and vicinity, under the title “A Triumph of Citizen Action.”

“It is one of the treasures of Cape Cod, passing by Little Harbor, cedar swamps and salt marsh, coastal ponds and beaches, through tree-lined arcades and quiet residential neighborhoods. … Venture out on the Shining Sea Bikeway between dawn and dusk, any day of the year, and you will not be alone. In the winter old friends, or at least familiar figures, are out for a little exercise, commuting to work, enjoying the scenery, on foot, bikes, roller blades or, on snowy days, cross-country skis. Summer is a busy kaleidoscope of tourists and locals of all ages, training wheels to 18-speeders to wheelchairs, every kind of human-powered rolling stock, joggers, strollers, clothing sedate to bizarre. Everyone is having a wonderful time. … In spring there are the changing patterns of new greenery, in fall the gaudy splash of changing leaves, and always the comings and goings of birds large and small, occasional coyotes and fox, and all the glorious sounds of nature.”

On arriving back in Saranac Lake, we received an email from a resident of Rochester, He had read in the Adirondack Explorer about the state’s plan to review the rail corridor between Lake Placid and Old Forge to determine its best use.

“To provide a glimpse of what a bike-able trail can be,” he wrote, “look also to the P’tit Train du Nord in the province of Quebec, a trail our friendly neighbors to the north have turned into a great draw for cyclists from all over. My wife and I, along with 13 friends, rode this route through the low-lying hills of the Laurentians north of Montreal in early August. This is something that anyone enjoying the wilderness experience from the vantage of a bike saddle should not miss. “The rails are completely gone. The traffic is mostly bikes, with some walkers, the occasional Mom on in-line skates ripping along the paved section near Mont Tremblant, a race-style pram in front. Many of the old stations have been turned into restaurants, museums and tourist-friendly shops. Great little inns and restaurants abound. We enjoyed four days of beautiful, relaxing, car-free cycling along the 124-mile route. Does anyone else see how a 90-mile version of this trail through the much-more-impressive wilderness of the Adirondacks could be?”

That was all we needed. The weather forecast looks good, so tomorrow (as of this writing) Rachel and I are off to bike that very same trail from Mont Tremblant, at the halfway point, to Mount Laurier at the northern end. And just think. Someday soon, if our state leaders act as they should, we could have something like that right here in our backyard!

Dick Beamish is a resident of Saranac Lake, founder of the Adirondack Explorer magazine and board member of Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates.
Prior to my retirement earlier this year from the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, I was in a position to visit more than 100 rail trails between Maryland and Maine. I also conducted surveys of trail users on more than 40 of those trails.

A lot of information has already appeared in commentaries published here about the number of new tourists who would use such a trail, how much they will spend and the new businesses that will be spurred on by this new type of outdoor activity. Based upon my experience, all of that will happen.

What hasn’t been pointed out often enough is the impact that a trail connecting Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake will have on the year-round residents of the region and the full-time summer residents as well. As one trail user in our area is often quoted as saying, “The trail is the happiest place in the county.”

Why is that? The answer can be seen on the faces of the bicycle riders, walkers and joggers. People are engaged in activity that they enjoy. They are outside in a natural setting, enjoying healthy exercise. They are relaxed, and the pressures of everyday living seem to melt away. And not surprisingly, they are often smiling.

Rail trails perpetuate a greater sense of community. Driving along Route 86 between Lake Placid and Saranac Lake at 45 miles per hour, you might be able to wave to a neighbor going in the opposite direction if you recognize his car. Walking along a rail trail at 3 miles an hour, or riding a bike at 10 miles an hour, you can actually say, “Hello, how are you doing?” Walkers stop and chat with neighbors and can make new friends. Cyclists stop and help each other out with a thrown chain or a flat tire.

Community organizations and nonprofits see the trail as a safe venue on which to hold fundraising events. One trail I’m familiar with had 17 different organizations hold events on the trail during a single year. The peace and safety of the trail, well away from automobile traffic and other forms of congestion, has led to larger turnouts and thus increased fundraising. The linear nature of the rail trail makes it an ideal venue for community art and craft festivals, racing events such as 5Ks and even marathons, and family-oriented activities such as a pumpkin walk.

The rail trail becomes a focal point of local pride; it takes on the identity of a prized asset that represents the soul of the town or village. It becomes a point of reference when you talk about your community. For example: “It’s the ice cream shop at the corner of Main Street and the rail trail.”

Finally, the 34-mile rail trail will lead to a better quality of life for residents and visitors in the Tri-Lakes. It’s a place where you, your friends and family can take a walk or ride a bike, or go for a safe, scenic run. It’s a place to clear your mind, meet a neighbor, walk the dog, get some exercise and smell the flowers along the way.

I, for one, can’t wait for it to be completed.

Carl Knoch, a resident of New Freedom, Pennsylvania, produced a trail development plan in 2012 for Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates.