

Remarks by Kim C. Steiner
Director, The Arboretum at Penn State
Bellefonte Central Rail Trail
Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony
Friday, May 19, 2006
10:00 a.m.

Good morning!

We are standing on part of the bed of the old Bellefonte Central Railroad. Completed in 1886, the railroad offered regular passenger service to State College until 1946 and freight service until 1975, when most of the line was abandoned and the land turned over to adjacent landowners.

As you may know, if you are familiar with our plans for The Arboretum at Penn State, about one mile of the railroad lies within the Arboretum, traversing it at its widest point, and converting the railroad bed to a hiking/biking trail is part of our master plan for the circulation system for the Arboretum – not just the internal circulation system, but also a low-impact “throughway” for the public to get into and out of the Arboretum and see much of what it has to offer.

When I hired Kate Reeder in 2000, one of the first tasks I gave her was to find out what we had to do to get state funding to build the rail trail. I thought we had a possible winner because this link had been identified as an important component of a community bike trail system in a study done by the Centre Region Council of Governments in the mid-1990s. By October of the following year we were ready to apply for funding with proposals that Kate had drafted.

Obviously, we got the money!

But in October 2001, we were looking at the apparently impossible tasks of getting an award for *exactly half* of the estimated construction costs from DCNR and *exactly half* from PennDOT through the Centre County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) . . . AND convincing Penn State, College Township, Ferguson Township, Patton Township, and the Borough that they should *each* contribute a certain amount so that if *everyone* agreed to participate, we would have exactly enough to fund expected design costs.

In other words, the stars had to be in perfect alignment to make this happen, and apparently they were. In fact, other critical pieces fell neatly into place when on two other occasions we had to return to the MPO for additional money.

But we were not lucky . . . we were *fortunate*, fortunate that so many people were willing to step up to the plate to help make this happen. I count among these our township supervisors and borough council members and of course the members of the Centre County MPO who sometimes surprised us with their willingness to help make this happen; members of our state legislature – Sen. Jake Corman, Rep. Lynn Herman, Rep. Mike Hanna, and U.S. Rep. John Peterson – who wrote letters of support to DCNR and PennDOT; and members of the Penn State administration who came through with commitments for project management and trail

maintenance and ultimately with a commitment to help fund the rest of construction when, in the end, we came up short in our goal to create a trail that reached the Penn State/Toftrees property line.

After asking our other speakers to limit their comments to 2-3 minutes, I realized that I personally had to thank too many individuals to follow my own rule. So I might speak a little longer than 3 minutes, but this is important.

I also want to acknowledge the letters of support we received from the following persons:

Robert Jacobs – Centre County Planning Office
Jennifer Shuey – The ClearWater Conservancy
Mary Repsher – Ridge and Valley Outing Club
Jamie Bridges – Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Brian Dempsey – Centre Region Bicycle Coalition
Betsey Howell – Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau
John Coleman – Chamber of Business and Industry of Centre County
Teresa Sparacino – Downtown State College
Paul Simpson – Geisinger Health System
Eric Bernier – Centre Area Transportation Authority

Members of the project management team include the following professionals and staff:

Kent Baker, College Township engineer
Cassandra Schmick, director of planning and zoning in Ferguson Township
Doug Erickson, Patton Township engineer
Mark Whitfield, public works director for State College Borough
Erik Brown, PENNDOT coordinator
Alex Tatanish, regional adviser (DCNR)
Penn State personnel in various departments (Glen Cauffman, Robert Cooper, John Gaudlip, Peter Rubba, Randy Swope, Douglas Wenger)
Erdman/Anthony Associates, Inc. (design firm for the trail): Donna Newell, Richard Stees, and Kevin Kozain

Another kind of support is being provided by Sue Barsom who is organizing volunteers from the Centre Rails-to-Trails Association to patrol the trail monthly to help us identify maintenance issues.

As I mentioned, this first phase of the project did not quite take the trail to the Toftrees boundary, and we must thank the Centre County MPO and Penn State, again, for contributing money this time to construct the last .4-mile of the original trail design.

Finally, I want to single out four individuals whose personal commitments of energy and enthusiasm for this project have been absolutely critical for its success:

Rick Gilmore, associate professor of psychology at Penn State and active member of the Centre Rails-to-Trails Association, who has been extremely active in organizing volunteer brush-clearing activities, rallying support among local municipalities, helping procure support letters, and providing testimony when needed.

Judy Larkin, with the Office of Physical Plant at Penn State, whose usual dogged determination as project manager was a key factor in this project from start to finish.

Trish Meek, transportation planner with the Centre Regional Planning Agency, without whose support, guidance, technical assistance, and personal dedication beginning in the year 2000 we could not have gotten out of the gate with this project, let alone finished it.

And Kate Reeder, my arboretum program assistant, who I think everyone will agree was the glue – the epoxy, the superglue – that held this coalition together through thick and thin.

With us this morning to offer their comments are State Senator Jake Corman, Karen Michael, PennDOT's Assistant District Executive for Design, Wes Fahringer, Regional Adviser for DCNR, and Robert Crum, Planning Director for the Centre Regional Planning Agency.

Thank you.