

Trail Talk

News for Friends of the Catharine Valley Trail

Fall-Winter 2007

Trail Will Add Unique Dimension for Guests at New Hotel

Guests at the new \$14 million, four-story Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel will soon join other visitors to the area in being able to enjoy Seneca Lake, downtown Watkins Glen, and the Catharine Valley Trail. The hotel, now under construction, will be a unique mixture of convenience and beauty that will be unmatched in the region. Finger Lakes destination tourists, visitors to the International Raceway, business travelers, and conference attendees all will find the natural beauty of the area easy to access and enjoy on a daily, year-round basis—only steps from the hotel's front entrance. The new hotel will hold 104 rooms and suites, a ballroom, indoor pool, fitness center, and a 300-person conference facility.

The CVT will provide hotel guests one more special item to enjoy, adding to the pleasure and experience of their stay, according to executives with Hart Hotels Inc., the hospitality



Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel, currently under construction on the Seneca lakefront.

management firm building the Watkins Glen Harbor Hotel. The firm worked with the community to create a hotel design that was distinctive and that shared some of the traits of the great Adirondack hotels of the past. "The trail adds to that mystique," explain Hart Hotels officials, "by giving guests an opportunity for healthy, natural outdoor fun and relaxation."

"The Catharine Valley Trail gives all our visitors a wonderful opportunity to explore the natural beauty of

Mission

Friends of the Catharine Valley Trail foster a public, multi-use trail and natural corridor along the abandoned Chemung Canal and railroad system. We promote trail use by all residents and visitors through publicity, special-events planning, and liaisons with regional tourism agencies, in accordance with guidelines established by NYS Parks. Our goal is to facilitate a safe and enjoyable trail experience.

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CVT MAP INSIDE
AND AT
WWW.CVTFRIENDS.
ELMIRAMPO.ORG

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My Last Column (but not goodbye)

I'll claim credit for helping to write the section of the Friend's group bylaws in 2004, which stipulates that officers are limited to three-year terms. I had both personal and organizational reasons for wanting that limitation, having seen too many not-for-profit organizations become dependent on the efforts and the leadership of just a couple of individuals. It becomes a burden for the individuals and limits the organization's ability to become truly community based. This December, my term as president of our Friends group comes to an end, and I will be leaving the board.

I first heard about the CVT shortly after the 1991 passage of the historic federal transportation bill, ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act). The bill added a variety of new responsibilities for organizations such as the Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council, ECTC. (In my day job I am the director of the council.) For the first time it became a goal, with devoted fund sources to make bicycling and pedestrian transportation a reasonable alternative to car travel—a task that we enthusiastically embraced.

I learned of Ed Hoffman's efforts to establish the CVT and called him to offer

assistance. At that time he believed he could be more effective in progressing the CVT if he avoided the cumbersome government processes. He did suggest some other pursuits for the ECTC, and our Rail-to-Trails Study was the genesis for what is now the Big Flats Trail. Ed successfully acquired the needed funding, purchased the land, and after much negotiation, conveyed much of the private property needed for the CVT to NY State Parks in 1997. The time for serious planning was at hand.

In 1998 Schuyler County Legislator Pat Hastings and Chemung County Executive Thomas Tranter approached the ECTC and asked us to apply for an Appalachian Regional Commission grant to complete a Trail Master Plan and a Tourism Development Plan for the CVT. We received the \$75,000 grant. During the significant public outreach that was conducted to develop the plans, I met many of the people who have helped to progress the CVT and who have filled important roles with our Friends group. A significant outcome of the planning process was the validation of the importance of the CVT. It would both improve the quality of life for residents and create another activity for the increasing number of visitors to our area,

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Second Annual Live Like Liz Run/Walk—A Success

On June 10 about 200 runners and more than 200 walkers participated in the Live Like Liz 5K run/walk and one-mile fun walk on the CVT—the second year for the event.



Courtesy Charles Haeffner The Odessa File

The Live Like Liz committee would like to thank everyone who made the event a success. (And they apologize for the mix-up in the length of the race—something about flagged trees...They aren't exactly sure what happened, but promise to work to make sure it doesn't happen again.) Other than the shortness of the course, the race day was perfect.

The Elizabeth Amisano Ovarian Cancer Education Fund (also known as Live Like Liz, Inc.), is a group of people working together to promote awareness through education of the symptoms, risks, early detection, and prevention of ovarian cancer.

Speakers—who talked about oncology, genetics, and cancer survival—and a ceremony remembering Liz (a resident of Watkins Glen) began the day, with the races following.

The weather was beautiful, and more than 400 runners/walkers participated. There were lots of spectators, musical entertainment, several organizations with information booths, and foods and beverages. A huge round

of applause goes to the more than 50 local businesses and organizations that donated prizes totaling more than \$4,500.

Through the event, Live Like Liz raised more than \$13,000 toward its mission of raising ovarian cancer awareness through education.

Save June 8, 2008 as the tentative date for the 3rd Annual Live Like Liz race on the CVT!

Trail Construction Update

The stone dust surfacing is in place on the Queen Catharine Marsh section of the CVT and on the section between the Route 14 overpass and Morris Hill Road. The trail crew also did some erosion-prevention work on the west abutment of the overpass.

The timber bridge decks are under construction by the Town of Veteran. We had to replace some of the original lumber due to warping and

also have supplied the town with some power nailers to make their work easier. The steel mounting plates for the deck have been ordered. Once the bridge deck is in place at Fairgrounds Lane, the section of the trail through Queen Catharine Marsh can be opened.

Our crew is currently working on the trail section between the Route 14 overpass and Burch Hill Road. NYS Department of Transportation has volunteered to do the culvert extension work for us at the Burch Hill Road intersection. Our crew is putting up silt fence and doing grading work. The consultant for the Johnson Hollow Creek bridge is working hard to stay on schedule, with the intention of bidding the bridge for construction next year.

We are including prefabricated restrooms for the trail in a regional contract, to install them at a number of facilities around the region.

Negotiations are taking place on the trail route through Montour Falls.

The goal is still to have the trail open from Burch Hill Road to the north no later than June 2008.

by Jeffrey McDonald
NYS Office of Parks
Finger Lakes Region
Recreation and Historic Preservation

Birding on the Trail

[Part 1 of a 2-part series](#)
[Part 2 in the next issue](#)

Owl



What is unique about the CVT for birdwatchers?

The Catharine Valley Trail, now and hopefully even moreso in its future, offers diversity to birdwatchers. Diversity is really the key to recreational birdwatching, or “birding” as it has become known in recent years. For most birders, the quest for a long list of species observed is what keeps them going out looking for birds.

The way to find a diversity of birds is to visit a diversity of ecosystems. Generally, these consist of deciduous forest, coniferous forest, shrubland, grassland, field, wetland, ponds, lakes, mudflats, beaches, and ocean. While the CVT will never cross a beach or ocean or saltwater marsh, it does or soon will pass through or very near all the other ecosystems. As a result, a birder can expect to see and hear a relatively large number of different kinds of birds along the length of the trail.

Just on the existing portion of trail between Millport and

Montour Falls, I know of 102 species of birds that have been observed. This number grows to 128 species with the completion of the trail through Queen Catharine Marsh. Add Seneca Lake at Watkins Glen and the number grows to 155 species. With extension of the trail southward through the Horseheads Marsh the list grows to 167 species.

In addition, a few sidetrips within easy walking distance of the trail can yield more species. Farm fields on Smith Road in Pine Valley can add another 11 species.

Wandering directly into Mark Twain State Park from the CVT adds the potential for 18 more species. That brings the total to 196 species.

Finally, if the grassland area at The Center at Horseheads can be saved from development, add seven more species—for a total of 203 species that I know have been reported along and within walking distance of the Catharine Valley Trail.

Finding the greatest number of species requires visiting the trail several times at various times of the year. Relatively few species can be found all year long. Some are most

likely in the winter, others in the summer, and others at particular times in the spring or fall.

For a single recreational trail, this diversity is probably fairly unique and certainly marketable for ecotourism.

One species of bird along the existing trail that I, as a Chemung County birder, find unique is the mourning warbler. This is a beautiful bird with bright yellow underparts, greenish upperparts, a gray hood, and, at the bottom of the front of the hood, a necklace of black feathers. Until the CVT was opened up just north of Millport, I had never seen a mourning warbler in Chemung County during the breeding season. They are apparently more common breeders around the Finger Lakes and also in southwestern Steuben County.

Another aspect of the trail that is unique in the hilly southern tier is a relatively flat trail. The conversion of railroad beds to trails is providing access not only to more ecosystems like wetlands but also access to a beautiful trail for people with ambulatory disabilities and

those of us who are simply aging and finding hill climbing more difficult.



Woodpecker

What birds can be seen?

Along the existing trail expect all kinds of woodland, shrubland, and suburban species: hawks, owls, woodpeckers, warblers, kinglets, corvids, nuthatches, creepers, wrens, vireos, thrushes, and sparrows.

In the wetland areas, birders should look for various kinds of herons, ducks, geese, swans, rails, ospreys, blackbirds, and more sparrows. With completion of the trail to Seneca Lake, birders will find diving ducks, loons, grebes, cormorants, coots, gulls, terns, and bald eagles.

The cultivated fields on Smith Road will produce harriers, larks, pipits, snow buntings, lonspurs, and more geese.

Mark Twain State Park offers bluebirds, hawks, mockingbirds, and more diversity of woodland and shrubland birds.

The Horseheads Marsh will have much in common with Queen Catharine Marsh, but has more open water areas. Sometimes conditions there attract a nice assortment of sandpipers and a variety of swallows.

The grassland area at the Center at Horseheads attracts additional species of sparrows, Eastern meadowlarks, American kestrels, upland sandpipers, and horned larks.

Bill Ostrander
President, Chemung Valley Audubon Society
brown_creeper@sg23.com



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please add my name to the list of Friends, at the membership level indicated below:

basic (\$10 per year) sponsor (\$50 per year)
 family (\$25 per year) benefactor (\$500 per year)

And contact me about helping with:

special events membership development
 publicity trail stewardship program
 website

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____

Mail this form with a check to Friends of the Catharine Valley Trail to:

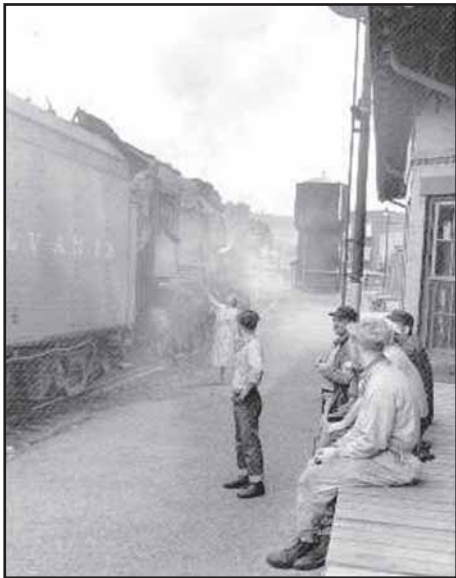
Friends of the CVT c/o Linda Burke
436 Middle Rd.
Horseheads, NY 14845

Friends of the Catharine Valley Trail is a not-for-profit organization. Your contribution is tax deductible.

Thank you for your support.

You'll receive your Membership Card in the mail shortly.

Fifty Years Ago



Courtesy Jim Shaughnessy

Even though they may have been the only way to get anywhere further than a day's walk from home, few people thought to take pictures of canals or early railroads in operation. Our thirst for a peek into the way it was along the Chemung Canal or subsequent railway perched above it is seldom satisfied. So it was delightful to find this picture of the Watkins Glen station in *Classic Trains* magazine (Spring 2007), taken by famous railroad photographer Jim Shaughnessy in August 1956.

His pictures often show railroaders at work, especially during the last of the days when a large percentage of local people were still thus employed, when railroads were such an integral part of our social and commercial fabric. (In 1894 up to 67 passenger trains per day stopped at nearby Elmira! In fact, until 1923 there were two railroads

in the now quiet valley of our Catharine Valley Trail—both the Pennsylvania RR, bearing coal and passengers north toward Geneva on the railbed we walk today, and the Elmira & Seneca Lake Railway, one of the first inter-urbans in NY. As a commuter conveyance, however, the E&SL did not succeed, taking a tortured 90 minutes to travel 22 miles, so duplication of service and slow running did it in.

The Watkins Glen station still exists, with enough additions that one must squint a moment to divine its native shape, at the little park where the CVT begins. We're looking south in Shaughnessy's picture, lake to our left. Not only is this steam locomotive an oddity as late as 1956, when diesels had replaced most and the water tanks they depended upon, seen in the background, but a woman dispatcher is a far greater oddity. During World War II a dozen years before, women took many jobs in previously all-male bastions due to a wartime shortage of men, and some stayed on afterwards. In the summer issue of *Classic Trains*, Don Jilson of Lowman wrote to the editor that the woman pictured was Louise Overhiser. She is handing a slender wooden wand up to the engineer; he'll hook his arm through the hoop, remove a piece of paper tied to it containing his train orders, and toss the hoop back. The men in the foreground are the crew of a

local freight, waiting for her to give them clearance to depart.

To help us envision our trail only 50 years ago, Jim Shaughnessy has given us permission to use his picture on an interpretive panel planned for that site along the CVT.

Irene Szabo
Finger Lakes Trail Conference

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Trail Will Add

the Catharine Valley," says Mayor Judy Phillips of Watkins Glen. "When they're done enjoying the trail, visitors can walk to shops or restaurants on Main Street. Everything is right here for them."

"Our goal for the area has been to become one of the premier day-destinations in the Finger Lakes Region," says Mayor Dianna Overhiser of Montour Falls. "With the new hotel added to all our other amenities—the International Raceway, Watkins Glen State Park, Seneca Lake, the Seneca wineries, and the Catharine Valley Trail—we are beginning to see years of planning coming into reality. We can see the light—and it's beautiful."

J. Kelsey Jones

(Schuyler County Partnership
for Economic Development)

My Last Column

making the trail an important contributor to our local tourism industry. The community made it very clear that the original plan for the CVT, connecting Watkins Glen State Park and Mark Twain State Park, was insufficient—to truly provide all of the expected benefits, the trail needed to connect Seneca Lake to Horseheads.

I'm proud of what our community, in partnership with our friends at State Parks, has been able to accomplish, both in trail development and in the development of our Friends group. I am disappointed that the completion of the trail is still years in the future and that much of the recent efforts of the Friends group have been devoted to advocacy for the completion of the trail rather than enhancing the experience of trail users. A real validation for the efforts of our Friends group came this year when both Schuyler and Chemung counties and the ECTC agreed to provide the initial funding for paid staff to help the Friends progress tasks that could not be done effectively by volunteers. We hope to have some form of staffing in place before the end of the year.

It seems like 10 years is my self-imposed term limit for board membership. I spent nine years on the board of the Tanglewood Nature Center

and Museum in Elmira, during which time their spectacular new building was built—a must-visit if you haven't been there. My leaving the Tanglewood board, via term limits, closely coincided with the formation of our Friends group. (I remain a Tanglewood volunteer.)

Recently I became chair of the Chemung County Commission on Human Relations. The time that the commission will require, combined with a busy job and home life—maintaining and enjoying the almost-100 acres of land that my wife and I share with our two dogs and abundant wildlife (yes, the bears still visit regularly, so the number of bird feeders has been permanently decreased)—makes my goal of slowing down somewhat illusive.

Like Tanglewood, the CVT will always be near and dear to my heart, and I won't be going away entirely. In my roles with the ECTC and the Steuben-Schuyler Transportation Committee, I will continue to work to see that the entire CVT is completed, becoming a key link in what will eventually be an impressive bicycle and pedestrian network in our region.

I can't write this last column without expressing thanks to some of the many folks who have been key to our success — though I do worry about leaving out some important

people. Current board members Michelle Benjamin, who chairs our very busy Special Events Committee; legal advisor Bill Morse, who was instrumental in forming our Friends group; Danielle Hautaniemi, who chairs our Planning Committee; and our Treasurer, Linda Burke, all have been involved with the Friends group from its inception—and they have filled important roles. Rick Ek is the primary person behind the creation and operation of our Trail Steward Program, and board Secretary Charlotte Winkky fills another crucial role. The on-going efforts of these dedicated people will enable the Friends group to elevate the role that the CVT plays in our community.

Thanks to all of you who are supporters of the CVT. I hope to see you on the trail.

Jay Schissell
President, Friends of the CVT

New Members

The following individuals and families recently joined Friends of the Catharine Valley Trail:

Marcia Douglas

Reverend Michael and Susan Hartney

Pat and Mark Van Doninck

Jim and Linda Ziembra

Events in the Nature Network

AT TANGLEWOOD

*Birds of a Feather

Saturday, November 17, 2007

2:30–3:30 pm

Get up close and learn about our two resident birds—Sophie, the great horned owl, and Icarus, the broad-winged hawk.

Free. All ages.

*Radical Reptiles

Saturday, November 24, 2007

2:30–3:30 pm

See wonderful, scaly creatures in action—geckos, snakes, turtles, and a skink.

Free. All ages.

*Animals with Bad Reputations

Saturday, December 29, 2007

2:30–3:30 pm

Who's the baddest of them all? How long do they live being so strong and stubborn? Free. All ages.

*Sponsored by Tanglewood Nature Center and Museum, Elmira Info: 607-732-6060

ON THE CVT

Cross-Country Ski

Saturday, January 12, 2008

(if no snow, February 19, 2008)

10 am to noon

With Brett Brubaker.

Meet at the South Genesee St. trailhead in Montour Falls.

Info: 607-535-4300

ON THE RIVER

Chemung Basin River Trail Partnership

Learn about the new Chemung County River Master Plan, events, and river news.

Info:

www.chemungrivertrail.com

SCHEDULE THE CVT

To schedule walks or events on the CVT, contact Michelle Benjamin, Schuyler County Chamber of Commerce.

Info: 607-535-4300;

tourism@schuylerny.com



In care of
Elmira-Chemung Transportation Council
400 East Church Street
Elmira, NY 14901

Take a Walk on the CVT!