

Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association



NORTA, Inc.  
P.O. Box 234  
Delta, OH 43515



# The Cannonball Courier

Newsletter of the  
Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association

[wabashcannonballtrail.org](http://wabashcannonballtrail.org)

**Spring 2022**

## NORTA Board of Officers and Trustees

Ed Snyder, President/Trustee- Swanton

Bonnie Markley, Secretary/Trustee- Delta

Patti Gehring, Treasurer/Trustee-Perrysburg

Tom Hall, Trustee-Wauseon

Randy Miller, Trustee-West Unity

Dave Kovar, Trustee- Delta

Tim Gray, Trustee-Toledo

Elizabeth Morey, Trustee- Defiance

Dave Blyth, Newsletter Editor/Trustee- Monclova



I would like to help NORTA, which is an all-volunteer organization. Contact me with news of special projects, events and updates: [norta.email@yahoo.com](mailto:norta.email@yahoo.com)

*NORTA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting responsible use and stewardship of the Wabash Cannonball Trail and associated trails in Northwest Ohio.*

# NORTA celebrates 30 years

Our 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Membership and Volunteer Appreciation Dinner was a great success. Dozens of supporters turned out for the celebration at Trinity Lutheran Church in Delta.

It was a chance to review the improvements, enhancements, and maintenance work done by the many dedicated NORTA volunteers and Trail use partners.

## North Country National Scenic Trail

**Ryan Bowles** reported on progress made for the connector between the Wabash Cannonball Trail in the Oak Openings area and the Buckeye Trail. Much of the work was done to enhance the scenic appeal of the trail.

## New Partnerships

**President Ed Snyder** announced that the Village of Montpelier and Williams County have now joined the other WCT partners--Metroparks Toledo, Maumee, Lucas County, Whitehouse, Wauseon and NORTA.

## Maintenance and Construction

- Mounting blocks for **horse riders** have been installed in Dreamers' Meadow (Williams CR 17) and the parking area at Elmira.
- Volunteer efforts of **Dan Herr** (Herr Construction Co) resolved a water problem west of Elmira that included clean-up and installation of drainage tile at no cost to NORTA.
- Thirty bat houses have been installed along the Trail as an Eagle Scout project.
- YIELD TO HORSES signage has been placed in unpaved sections on North Fork and South Fork.
- Trash on the Liberty Center section of the trail has been removed.
- A portable toilet has been placed at the SR 109 trailhead south of Delta.
- Invasive vegetation on the south embankment at Fraker Mill Bridge has been cleared.

## Special recognition

**Jackson Equipment** for improvements made to the Trail throughout the year as contracted by NORTA.

**Todd and Kelly Bodenbender**, and Bud and **Chris Taylor** for their ongoing efforts in maintaining the Trail on the South Fork.

**Linda Doyle** for designing the unique table decorations at the Dinner using all natural materials to create owls to signify that "NORTA gives a hoot," reflecting the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme of the occasion.

## Award Presentations

**Cindy Faust-Miller** of Britton, Michigan, was presented the North Country Trail Chapter Affiliate-Partner Honor Award by Ryan Bowles for her demonstration of loyalty, commitment, and hard work for the Trail.

**Jeff Smucker** of Archbold was awarded the 2021 "Walt Award," which is given out to the Volunteer of the Year. Mr. Smucker established the pollinator garden at Elmira. He also built the equestrian mounting block at Elmira; using construction materials he donated himself.

NORTA Treasurer **Patti Gehring** was recognized as the Volunteer of the Decade III. In addition to keeping track of our financial situation, Patti is an ardent supporter of the WCT, and is well deserving of the praise and acknowledgement she received for her many contributions to the betterment of the Trail.



*Jeff Smucker awarded the 2021 "Walt Award," given out to the Volunteer of the Year*



*President Ed Snyder & Bonnie Markley presents award to Patti Gehring*

# The Wabash Cannonball – A Legacy of Dedication and Determination

According to its website, **The Rails to Trails Conservancy** movement began in the mid-1960s as a quiet Midwest phenomenon barely noticed in the major metropolitan areas of America. The idea: to convert the abandoned or unused rail corridors—which were closing at an increasingly rapid pace across America—into public trails.

As tracks started being pulled out, people began walking along the old corridors, socializing, exploring, enjoying nature, discovering railroad relics and marveling at the bridges and tunnels. At the time, most people simply walked the corridors; although some outdoor enthusiasts skied or snow shod the local pathways in winter. These early users started calling them “rails-to-trails”—a name that quickly caught on. Of course, none of the corridors were paved or graded; that would not come until later.

**The rail-trail movement would see its formal birth with the opening of the Elroy-Sparta State Trail in 1965 and the opening of the Illinois Prairie Path soon thereafter.** In 1980, Congress passed the Staggers Rail Act, which largely deregulated the nation’s struggling railroad industry and allowed for the discontinuation of unprofitable routes. The ramifications of that action were huge: it prompted the abandonment of 4,000 to 8,000 miles of lines each year throughout the early 1980s.

In 1983, Congress became concerned about the potential permanent loss of thousands of miles of rail corridor and amended the National Trails Systems Act to create “railbanking,” a tool to preserve inactive corridors for future rail use, while providing for interim trail use.

**Tom Duvendack** was Manager/Chief Ranger for many years at Oak Openings. He, along with his wife **Marianne Duvendack** lived immediately adjacent to what became the **Wabash Cannonball Trail**, at the edge of Oak Openings Metropark. They were the visionaries who saw the potential of creating a recreational trail on the no longer utilized Wabash Line railroad corridors which run from Maumee to Montpelier (north fork) and Maumee to Liberty Center (south fork).

In 1991 the Duvendacks began holding public meetings in various communities throughout northwest Ohio working to build support for this ambitious project. This small coalition of supporters adopted the name “**Friends of the Wabash Cannonball Trail**” (FWCT) on October third of that year.

To promote the trail, FWCT made its presence known at various local festivals and parades to increase the public’s awareness of this new potential recreational trail. Stalwart volunteers, such as South Toledo resident **Walt Kruse**, an outgoing, grandfatherly, retired plasterer and veteran, made door to door visits to inform local property owners of this potential trail and its benefits.

Other efforts included operation of a concession stand at Oak Openings Metro Park, run by volunteers such as **Walt Studebaker**, a shy, retired letter carrier from Swanton. Walt talked up the trail with a quiet smile from behind the counter or when walking many of the Metro Park hiking trails.

Early financial support for the WCT came from various advocates and groups such as American Youth Hostel. Wauseon Bikeways, headed by **Rose Cohen**, a retired citizen activist, was the driving force in Fulton County; lobbying for financial assistance from Wauseon City and Fulton County officials.

As might be expected when something new and unfamiliar is introduced to a community, FWCT efforts were met with a great deal of resistance; adjacent land owners were adamant that the land be returned to them because the railroad had originally “taken” it from them. Naysayers were also concerned about trespassers on their property, vandalism, theft, drug use, littering and dumping, and undesirable persons from The Big City. As anyone who uses the WCT can tell you, those fears were and are unfounded.

The Fulton County Farm Bureau, which remains opposed to the Trail, joined a group which filed a lawsuit to stop the acquisition of the unused right of way. Fortunately, the court ruled against the opposition, which cleared the way for the birth of **the Wabash Cannonball Trail, one of the most valuable recreational assets in northwest Ohio.**

The hard work of countless volunteers working countless hours finally came to fruition: **The Friends of the Wabash Cannonball Trail incorporated as a not for profit organization on May 25, 1993 as Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association.**

Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG), which bought the right of way from Norfolk Southern on March 24, 1994, then divided the Trail between NORTA (which sold three miles of its share to the City of Wauseon), Metroparks Toledo, the Village of Whitehouse, the City of Maumee, and Lucas County.

**The official ribbon cutting for the first open section of the Wabash Cannonball Trail was held on the South Fork in Colton, on April 2, 1994.** The tracks had been removed for years and the Trail was largely as it is seen today; but not as well-groomed and maintained. When asked how many years it would be before the Trail would be open, **NORTA president Ed Snyder** replied confidently, “Within 48 hours NORTA will open the first approximately 2 1/2 mile section of the Wabash Cannonball Trail.” Other officials in attendance at the celebration included TMACOG Transportation Planner **Diane Evans**, the mayors of Maumee **Steve Pauken**, and Whitehouse **Diane McGilvery**, and Director of Toledo Metroparks, **Jean Ward**. Dozens of hikers, biker riders, and equestrians celebrated the opening.

Many area residents and visitors to the area use the Wabash Cannonball Trail and never think about the hard work and persistence it took to make it happen. Activists with a vision and dogged determination worked hard to make that potential a reality. What a wonderful legacy.

**Ever hear of The North Country Trail?** It is the longest National Scenic Trail in the U.S., stretching 4,800 from North Dakota to Vermont. It joins the Wabash Cannonball Trail in two different spots. The North Country Trail also shortcuts through Maumee State Forest and the unique habitat of Oak Openings Metropark. For more information about the great work done by our good friends at NCT visit:

[https://northcountrytrail.org/trail/ohio/northwestern-ohio/](https://northcountrytrail.org/trail/ohio/northwestern-ohio/#northcountrytrail)  
[#northcountrytrail](https://northcountrytrail.org/trail/ohio/northwestern-ohio/#northcountrytrail)

# Tom Striggow's Lasting Contributions to the WCT

Long-time trustee and officer, Thomas Striggow, has resigned from his seat on the board of trustees and the office of Vice-President. Tom has been a supporter of the Wabash Cannonball Trail since the early days, joining NORTA in 1994, and becoming a Lifetime member in 2001. A stalwart volunteer and enthusiastic trail proponent, he was elected to the board in 2002 and then elected Vice-President in 2016.

Tom's dedication to the trail is exemplified by his recognition as the **Volunteer of the Year six times**. He was (and is still) active in the cleanup and maintenance of the trail corridor. He was always the first to respond to a notice of a fallen tree or an obstruction along the trail. Fallen leaves on the bridges - Tom to the rescue. Broken fence rail - Tom to the rescue. Illegal dumping - Tom to the rescue. He is a true trail ambassador, always talking up the trail to those he encounters on the trail, as well as espousing the many benefits of the trail at public meetings. His many posts to our Facebook page kept users up to date on WCT happenings.



When you see Tom Striggow on the Trail, be sure to say “THANKS”!

**The NORTA trustees have appointed Elizabeth Morey to fill the board position for the remainder of the fiscal year.** Elizabeth brings enthusiasm and a fresh perspective as an ultra-runner with plenty of on-the-ground experience with the Trail. Welcome, Elizabeth!

Trustees are voted into office every year at the fall business meeting by the members. Consider volunteering your expertise to serve on the board. And be sure to renew your membership to insure your right to vote!

Northwestern Ohio Rails-to-Trails Association, Inc. (NORTA)  
Membership Form

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Memberships can also be renewed online at  
[www.WabashCannonballTrail.org](http://www.WabashCannonballTrail.org)

Membership Categories:

\_\_\_\_ Senior/Student \$10      \_\_\_\_ Individual \$15      \_\_\_\_ Family \$25

\_\_\_\_ Patron \$100      \_\_\_\_ Business/Organization \$50

\_\_\_\_ Lifetime \$1,000 Donation      \_\_\_\_ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to help out this all-volunteer organization!  
Contact me with news of special projects or events.

*Contributions are tax deductible*  
*Membership year runs from September 1 – August 31*