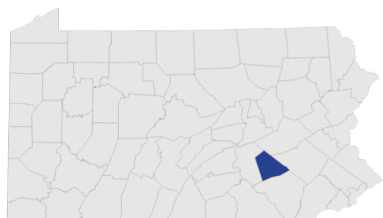


# My Story

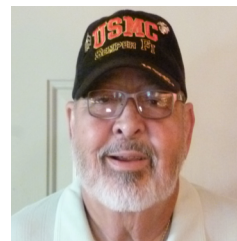


## Giving Back

### Lebanon Valley Rail Trail

By Ben Rodriguez, Volunteer

*"When I decided to retire, I felt a need to give something back to the community, and helping on the trail seemed to fit what I was looking for."*



I was born and raised in Lebanon County, just a few blocks away from the current Lebanon Valley Rail Trail (LVRT). I can remember walking along these tracks as a kid when the trains were still running and iron ore was being shipped to the various operations throughout America. In 1972, the trains stopped running due to flooded iron mines after



**Keystone Fund Investment:** \$1.18 million

**Total Public/Private Investment:** \$3 million

Hurricane Agnes. Then in 1999 Lebanon Valley Rails to Trails began to develop the land into what is now the LVRT. When I finally decided to retire, I felt a need to try to give something back to the community, and helping on the trail seemed to fit what I was looking for. I started out attending monthly meetings, helping with volunteer maintenance, and riding my bike on the trail as often as I could. Eventually I became a member of the LVRT Board of Directors.

Currently we have approximately 15 miles of trail south of the city of Lebanon and are currently working on expanding the trail approximately 10 miles north to join into the Swatara State Park Trail. On the southern end of the county, the LVRT joins into the

Conewago Trail in Lancaster County and extends the trail an additional five miles. Between the Conewago Trail, LVRT, and the Swatara Creek Trail, there will be approximately 40 miles of continuous trail when completed. Because our trail is a former railroad bed, the grades are very gradual. The majority of the trail is crushed limestone.

It has been a privilege working with the Trail Management Team, a group that is totally dedicated to completing a project that is difficult

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but friendly to the community and environment. The trail is used throughout the year by bikers, hikers, joggers, and equestrians. As with most trails, motorized vehicles are not permitted. Weekends are the busy times for trail usage but the trail is never congested to the point where a family cannot have a good time and feel safe with all family members, no matter how old or young. Also, for those interested in observing wildlife, there is a wide variety of birds, reptiles, and mammals that can be seen along the trail.

One thing that I have also enjoyed is helping with the various maintenance projects that are constantly required to keep the trail pleasing to the eyes. We have a small but positive maintenance crew working on the trail, all of whom are volunteers. There always seems to be a tree down, brush to trim, grass to cut, something to be painted, and of course just cleaning up the occasional piece of trash found along the trail. Any materials needed for trail maintenance come from donations, which are greatly appreciated.

One of the other areas I have engaged in is setting up a history display on weekends during the warm weather and at various locations along the trail. The area through which the trail travels has a fabulous history, including the Coleman iron ore legacy. The railroad bed on which the trail is built is also part of the Coleman legacy and has many interesting stories concerning the owners and their business dealings and community entertainment projects. The Mount Gretna area through which the trail travels had several amusement parks, beautiful hotels, lakes, and even a narrow gauge railroad built to shuttle military and visitors within the area. Before the Fort Indiantown Gap military base was built, Mount Gretna was the

training center for the Pennsylvania National Guard for deployment in the Spanish American War and World War One. I can also point trail users in the right direction for local museums and historical places. Many trail users who travel the trail only see a gravel trail bed and the trees, and never realize that so many interesting things went on within this area in times past.

For those who have never used the LVRT, please give it a try; I am sure you will enjoy it. On a weekend, don't forget to stop at Cornwall trailhead and enjoy a cold drink or snack at the Root Beer Barrel. It is open between noon and 4 p.m.

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