

Senior Plus Article

Approximately 15 years ago the town of Readfield had a very unique opportunity to acquire over 35 acres right in the middle of town for both conservation and community trails. At the annual town meeting a local resident and private land use consultant presented a program that would allow Readfield to obtain the property with a small investment by retaining all of the property except 4 acres that could be sold to cover most of the town's cost. I spoke at the town meeting how this land had so many potential uses that it was too good an opportunity to let pass. The voters overwhelmingly voted for the purchase. This would be the beginning of an 8 year labor of love for many Readfield senior citizens. Because the land had sat for 12 years after town acquisition, and I had just finished up 5 years on a trail advisor volunteer board with the State of Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, I said it was time for Readfield to have its own Readfield Trails Committee (R.T.C.). The committee would be totally committed to building trails within the village for people of all abilities, (D.A.P.) DIFFERENTLY ABLED PEOPLE. The surface when finished would be a blue stone all weather material. Let it rain, let it pour, it would make no difference. You would also be able to walk looking at all Mother Nature provides and not have to keep your head down to keep from tripping on roots or rocks underfoot or fall off slippery bog bridging. Parents and grandparents would be able to use jogger strollers and battery powered wheel chairs would be welcome.

The Select Board at that time would give the R.T.C. a clear mandate to "build it and they will come". Yes, the roster of seniors that would be involved would be so typical of Maine; an orthopedic surgeon, nurse, school teachers, entrepreneur, postal workers, retired state and military, P.E. Profession engineers, and chemical engineers from the pulp and paper industry. For the next 8 years, muscles seniors had long forgotten maybe didn't come to life, but they sure came to their attention. What would follow would be tens of thousands of dollars of manual labor and tractor donation time to build the trails and use this so called in kind contribution to obtain Federal and State grants. Especially pleasing to seniors was a gift of \$3,000 from the disbanded "Readfield Little Town Club" Many seniors had spent over the years a lot of time with the club and now

to see monies used to build trails within Readfield was very rewarding. Just like the reward when seniors who have been supportive of the local schools over the years are now using the area medical providers and find so many of their medical providers are local kids that returned after medical training or went directly from high school to Maine General. What is that saying? "What goes around comes around"

The first thing that had to be done was to establish an "Open Space Plan". The plan would state that "the R.T.C. should work to create a permanent system(s) of trails throughout Readfield to accommodate a diverse group of users, including snowmobiling, hiking, bicycling, and skiing and connect key conservation lands and other key areas (e.g., schools) through landowner agreements, conservation easements donations and purchases, and purchase conservation lands and rights of way".

2013 - 2014 was one of the most productive years for Readfield Trails and its senior volunteers on two fronts. With the charge to get to downtown Readfield, blue stone all weather trail connections were made with the Union Meeting House on Church road which abutted the already in place blue stone Town Library trails. Once down to the Library users had access to the new sidewalk taking them to the Town Office and the new Mill Stream Dam trail network. The dam itself had washed out many years ago and although there are no plans to rebuild the dam itself, a pleasant visit on the footpath bridge can observe water flowing over remains of the original dam. A group from Readfield, including Conservation and Trails is organizing a Dam Landscaping committee working with a landscape architect donating his time with sketches including suggested plantings. A 17 year old high school graduate who will enter Unity College this January has volunteered to head up the Dam Committee.

So how did the town of Readfield over 8 years invest \$1 to get back \$9 in return over 8 years? Many of the senior volunteers had been working their own back forty with tractors for years. Others as P.E. (Professional Engineers) in retirement or winding down their practice gave valuable onsite service from unique rip rap methods to water erosion control. They advised using larger

culverts which would be safer to maneuver around and offer more angles of attack. These professionals with years of experience gave correct estimates of the amounts of free fill material that R.T.C. would receive from the town's recently completed side walk project. Using estimating methods from text books was not enough - this is where the senior engineers knew we would have to multiply by two and three times to cover the actual woods conditions with extreme slopes and many small ravines and washouts. With the engineers expertise we were able to square off the trail base creating a safe walking situation. Our senior engineers were on the field shooting elevations on one of the coldest November days. Also, an engineer estimated that there was a 300 yard fill pile buried in the woods many years ago from a nearby road project. How to get this valuable 300 yards out? Three of our senior volunteers were chainsaw certified, as they had been stewards of sections of the Appalachian Trail through the Maine Appalachian Mountain Club. These volunteers had all the safety equipment: Steel toed shoes, chaps, helmet with ear protection. It was a grueling process that was aided by other seniors with loppers and small hand saws hauling away the brush as the chainsaws maneuvered their way through the thick underbrush. As so often happens in life, in an ironic twist of events, senior volunteers responsible for building trails for less abled individuals would now find these very woods trails what they need to use themselves.

The R.T.C. kept professional and accurate record keeping information that would enable Maranacook Community School to acquire a \$ 30,000 grant from the State of Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands Recreational Trails Program. The school hired a professional contractor to do their portion of the trail system.

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) works in the following way: The schools \$30,000 grant would require either a 20% financial contribution or a 20% in kind match. This in kind would come from the Readfield trails that as a nonprofit town abutter would put in an 1800 foot trail connecting the Fairgrounds Park with the schools SUICIDE HILL application. Little funds would actually come from the Town of Readfield for its own 1800 foot section adjacent to the Readfield cemetery.

Speaking of the cemetery, it is with a great deal of satisfaction that we have received many complements from complete strangers because of our connecting the Readfield trails network with a spur trail into the cemetery. Through consultation with the Cemetery Committee it was determined that during this difficult time for family visiting a grave site of a love one having access for an all-weather surface walk out to the Maranacook look out to view the lake would be appreciated. Even after a heavy rain storm with the blue stone under foot, dress shoes are appropriate attire.

Within the first week of senior tractor volunteers and rakers laying down the sidewalk and church road free gravel base fill material over a geo-tech water liner, the in kind dollar contributions quickly added up. The state allowed \$45 per hour for tractor volunteer's work and \$10 for manual labor. Also would be a credit of \$15 a yard for the town's free gravel fill. The senior engineer's recommendation to keep daily working logs as they had done during their careers was instrumental in the school getting a quick 2 week turn around for their funds that they had to upfront. By the seventh week it was a done deal, we had not only gone over the \$6,200 of in kind monies. With three quarters of our work completed the total of in-kind was \$ 19,547.35. Tractor volunteers in kind \$7,597.50. Consultant and clerk of the works \$3,125.00. Senior labor \$2,035.00. In kind donated materials from town sidewalk and church road fill \$6,816.35. Because Readfield Trails would do another nearly \$5,000.00 of in kind work that season, combined with the school \$30,000.00 the Readfield community netted trail work in 13-14 of nearly \$55,000.00.

This in kind results occurred 5 years ago when Readfield trails applied for an \$ 11,000.00 grant with a \$ 2, 200, in kind matching. The in kind ended up being over \$14, 000, Project total \$ 25, 000, 00.

These results did not come as any surprise to the Readfield Trails Committee. So many organizations and individuals had told us once started they would like to pitch in and help. For the past 8 years, Kent's Hill School twice a year has a community service day providing Readfield trails with some very enthusiastic students, with much needed manual labor for projects that can only

be done one hand at a time. With a lot of stretching, bending, reaching, lifting and just plain grunt work the students made sure the day's work is not a 2 Aleve day for seniors. This also saves money as rip –rap water erosion control material is not used in excess while accomplishing the water control process.

A second community service day was provided by the junior class of Maranacook School on September 23, 2015. A total of 24 students and staff joined advisor Kristen Levesque in an all manual 101 hours of service. It was a day of great enthusiasm and inspiration provided by the students for those of us working beside them. Providing the strength that only young bodies have, the students lugged in wheel barrows far away from the rip –rap pile to the job site of 150 yards away. A senior retired P.E. -professional engineer- had recommended that we use rip-rap stone to create water bars in a 200 foot trench. These water bars would slow down the velocity of water coming down from the new ball field French drain installed last fall north of the trench. Today as we in Maine monitor the upcoming late weekend hurricane Joaquin, I can report the students hard work is paying off as both the water bars in the trench are doing the job, the same said for the new blue stone all weather material they put down. This despite receiving nearly 5 inches of rain in the last 24 hours. Students also put down the all-weather blue stone on the connector trail that had been torn up this spring while we were installing much needed 20 x15 culverts. With the help of students and community volunteers we are getting ever so close to having the whole fair grounds Park section of the trails network available for, differently able people. Sooner or later every individual through injury or age are less able then when they were younger. This trail will be there for them.

Special thanks go out to the 15 adults that were using the trails the day the students were working. It was very thoughtful to stop and take the time to tell the students how much they appreciated their work on the trails and why the trail system walks is almost a daily routine. Again thanks for being so considerate.

With all this student activity on trails I am reminded of something said about:

Healthy and active students

Healthy and active families

Healthy and active communities

Seniors, as perhaps no other age group, are not surprised when as a result of volunteering a new individual comes into your life and then pops up immediately in another area of volunteering. So is our connection with Maranacook School an advisor Kristen Levesque. My wife and trail member Ann has for 25 years been the coordinator of the Christmas giving tree at our church. Over the years thousands of presents have gone out to children in the area who otherwise would not have some well-chosen quality and practical presents Christmas morning. Ann had a call from Betty White, The steadfast volunteer leader of many decades at the Mt Vernon Food Bank. Betty informed Ann that their connection at Maranacook had retired and Ann would now be working with -Kristen Levesque- for the gift giving project with Maranacook School students. Ann is looking forward to teaming up once again as she did on student community volunteer day with Kristen.

Private land owners continue to talk with Readfield Trails on how they might work with us to carry out the open space long range plan to connect varying sections of the town with safe DAP trails . Hopefully we will be able to nurture a younger generation to carry on the mission.

How do we in America continue to be so successful generation after generation in brings out so many individuals who as seniors give so much of their time, talent and finances? Perhaps the young woman in Atlantic City coordinating those of us from churches all over the country to rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Sandy nailed it when she told me, "Volunteer projects like this work because this is where the volunteer wants to be". Yes, we were not drafted. Our Atlantic City Sandy relief tee shirts say "coming back strong with a flood of volunteers".

R.T.C. has a flood of senior volunteers, moving with the same initiative they had in their workplace before they retired. When two of the senior trails volunteers inquired why over 12 cords of tree length logs remained stacked up at

the end of the new ball field after a year, they were told if you would like to cut and split the logs they could be donated to Readfield citizens who qualified for home heating aid. That is exactly what they did. Total monies saved by the Town of Readfield nearly \$3,000. Often in church work projects, each person is bringing a special gift and talent. This has been evident with our volunteers.

September, 29, 2015, is a very special day for Readfield Trails. It is one of validation. At its beginning 8 years ago the goal was to create a trail network for all users, young and not so young, fit and trying to get fit including those in wheel chairs. On this date, 60 year old David used his battery operated wheel chair to do the nearly 2 mile loop in his hard tire wheel chair. 22 years ago David had a water skiing accident that left him with a broken neck and put him in a Boston hospital for 7 months. After returning home to Maine he would soon be back to Boston for another operation. Since that time David has been a diligent member of the Manchester Y.M.C.A. working out 5 days a week and of course being an inspiration to all of us at the Y. On this trip through the Fairground Park Trails David pointed out some suggestions along the trail for wheel chair improvement. One section had been crowned due to water overflow which now thanks to the students work has been diverted. That section needed to be squared off. David said the wheel chair easily handled the terrain. He will be back in a couple of weeks when the foliage is at its peak.

With David in the wheel chair and Ann and I walking beside him, it had a very special meaning. We know I could have been in that wheel chair. At age 21, I was engaged in the sport of cliff diving. One day as Ann and our best friend John looked up from 35 feet below I turned to set up my dive and slipped down to 18 inches of water. One month later Ann would wheel me out of the Rutland, Vermont hospital. Yes, I had broken my neck. The night before I was to leave the hospital, Agnes my very special nurse told me I would have some hard days coming up but predicted I would be up and about in a month. She was right. Not so Agnes said of the 17 year old across the hall that dove in the shallow end of a pool and would never walk again. The next morning as I headed out and glanced across the hall I must have felt what today is called survivors guilt.

Call them A.D.A. or D.A.P.-trails for-” differently abled people” it is the new frontier of trail building for an aging and injured population in America. And many members of the military who have spent a life time as outdoors enthusiast are coming home with special needs. With the results of David’s trip in his wheel chair we will be contacting the Travis Mills Foundation for wounded military in Rome- Belgrade’ about 12 miles away of our Readfield system. Along with maps, a special invitation will be given offering personalized tours by volunteers of the Readfield trails. The diverse user group from young to old through town on the trails seems to grow by leaps and bounds each month. In discussion with trail users they are applying the old sports adage “ you” get in shape to ski, you don’t ski to get in shape”. That is what many are doing at the Fairgrounds trail system this fall - getting in shape. By the volume of participants It appears, by the volume of participants, that the citizens of Readfield made the right choice in the kind of trails they allowed us to build in the heart of Readfield. I, and on behave of other senior citizens that have been part of this trail system for many years thank the citizens of Readfield for their support and encouragement by giving us this very unique opportunity at this stage in our life.

Gary Keilty – chairman –R.T.C. -

685-4303

tykel@myfairpoint.net

