

KEMO 15h Commemoration Event – Dave Poes, October 28, 2017

Good Evening and thank you for coming out this evening to commemorate, and if we all have enough to drink, to celebrate, the 15th anniversary of the Kennesaw Mountain Trail Club. If you don't know me, I am Donald Olds, another volunteer here, just like you. I am standing in tonight for Scott McKay, our club President.

We should thank Dave Poe's for hosting us this evening. Be sure and come back for lunch sometime and support Dave for having us.

In the Spring of 2002, two local Boy Scout leaders, Richard Angeli and Fred Feltmann, used the trail over Little Kennesaw Mountain to train for a backpacking trip. The trail was in such bad shape that they decided to volunteer to spend some time fixing that trail. From this idea the trail club was born. They probably didn't know exactly what the club would become or how long it would last, but knowing these guys, I also imagine they didn't spend much time thinking about it either. Unceremoniously, they just wanted to make a positive difference in the park. In that, I believe they have succeeded beyond their wildest expectations.

15 years later, because of their initial diligent efforts, here we are gathered this evening, if only for a couple of hours, to share our common love for and bond we have in volunteering at the park.

Could I have Richard and Fred please stand and could we give them a round of applause as thanks.

Fred, while you are standing, could you come up and say a few words about the beginning of the club?

FRED

Thank you, Fred. Fred, most of you may know, is solely responsible for me being a part of working on the trails and for that my chiropractor and massage therapist are deeply grateful.

What would tonight be without taking you through a bit of history!

The year was 1864 . . . oops, wait a minute, wrong script.

On October 19th 2002 the first organized trail club activity was a trash pick-up day when 25 volunteers picked up 40 bags of trash.

The black doggie bag hadn't even been invented yet and Harry's mustache was a slightly different shade of silver, but it was deemed a success.

November 9th 2002. The second Saturday, the first trail work day was held. More than 60 people of all ages turned out to work on the trail at the top of Kennesaw Mountain.

In the fall of 2003 the new trail segment, now known as the Little K switchback was begun and completed in late 2004 adding a half mile of trail.

In June of 2005, the park organized and held their first National Trails Day.

In January 2006 the club received its first challenge grant of \$30,000 for the construction of the 'equestrian-capable' bridge at what we call Barfield Bottoms over John Ward Creek. The bridge opened in August 2007. We have built a few of those bridges since and even got the cost down considerably.

In Sept. 2007 the first Earthworks newsletter was issued and the club contributed many hours to the long-term strategic plan of the park.

In May of 2008 we held the first Garlic Mustard Pull, Garlic Mustard is almost non-existent in the park today.

In 2009 with 8 spry recruits, a Trail Ambassador Program was begun and headed up by Anne and David Strand. This program has trained and deployed Trail Ambassadors to greet and assist visitors and assisted the NPS with observing safety, maintenance, and enforcement issues on the trails. Today we have 64 trail ambassadors.

Now I would like to ask one of our favorite club members, David Strand, to add a few words about the Trail Ambassadors.

DAVID

Thank you David. I think we should take a moment right here and have everyone thank David and Anne Strand for their years of tireless

dedication and support of the trail club and the ambassadors. In many ways, their support is unequalled in this room and without it 15 years of moving rocks and dirt, as well as directing wandering hikers, would not of been possible. So, David and Anne, thank you.

Moving on through our history, 2011 saw several firsts:

First Earth Day was supported

First National Parks Day was supported

First horse patrol and with it, the

First "Master Ranger Corps" member in Larry Shogren.

Do you know it takes 500 volunteer hours per year to become a Master Ranger? That is a huge commitment and accomplishment.

We probably never know if Larry had 500 hours or he had 250 and his horse had 250, but we have had several club members become Master Rangers since that time and it is a sincerely dedicated group of individuals who we should be thankful for. So, thank you Larry for setting the example for us and for being the first master ranger.

In 2011 the club built a new web site and supported the first field of flags.

And we removed five acres of bamboo around the south end of the park. That too, is almost eradicated today, given the diligent efforts of

club members like Harry Carpenter, Cam Graham, and Danny Leigh.

In 2012 we held the first Winter Trails Day and I am told a week later we held the first “living with frostbite” class in the visitor center, but that may not be true.

The Teens, Trenches, and Trails program was introduced to high school kids to the benefits of hiking and trail work. Since then we have supported an incredible number of school programs in the park.

We celebrated the 10th anniversary of the club in 2012. How many of you were NOT here for the 10th?

In 2013, the club completed 17 major trail projects, and began intense preparations for the 150th commemoration event in 2014.

2014 was dominated by the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War. We saw the completion of the 24-gun trail and several fundraising efforts to commemorate the battle of Kennesaw Mountain in June 1864.

The 150th commemoration saw our unwavering support of the reenactors, the historians, and the hundreds of visitors that visited the park. Many of us worked long hours during the months leading up to

the big date and continued even longer hours during those 4 days putting in the last-minute touches that were needed and supporting the park quietly from behind to keep everything running smoothly. For our tireless efforts, the club was awarded the 2014 Hartzog Award as the outstanding volunteer group in the National Park Service.

This is an award we all should be proud of and we should never forget where it all began, on a washed-out section of trail on Little Kennesaw just 15 years ago.

The last three years have been a whirlwind of activities and planned events. More of the same of what we do best really – dirt, rocks, crib walls, benching, deberming, dips and nicks, not to mention helping with the education of a few thousand school children and adults through history interpretation programs and directing lost souls along the trails, and as part of all of that, we were led by one of our most popular and beloved club members. Although he is retiring from the club, he has given to the club with more heart than any of us. As a matter of fact, he probably would have given his entire heart had Pat not put her foot

down.

I am talking about Doug Tasse, of course, who was trail director and then our club President the last few years.

Doug would like to share a few things with us this evening. I think he even brought his guitar. Doug please come on up and share with us.

DOUG

Thank you Doug. I look forward to continuing to go ROMEO breakfast', so you can keep telling us what we need to be doing better around here, me in particular. I can't thank you enough for mentoring me for the past several years and teaching me things like learning to fall off a Ditchwitch and not get hurt. A skill I use a few times a month. So thank you.

I just have one more thing this evening and then David and Anne are going to let us help them serve the 15th commemorative cake that David baked us early this morning.

Before we close and you are all going to need something to drink. Does everyone have something?

I am going to read a message from our club President Scott McKay, who could not be here this evening as his mother has him on restriction, but I just wanted to thank you all again for coming and ask you stick around for a while. I also wanted to thank each of you once again for your dedication to the park and the club. At a risk, I mentioned a few people tonight, and there are so many people like Jay Haney, Jay Dement, Cam Graham, Larry and Sherry Shogren, and of course, Jerry Givan, who have given their time and passion to the club and have been awesome examples for the newer members, but in reality we could not do what we do without every volunteer in this room and those that could not join us tonight. Our current team of Ambassadors under Janie Brier probably has a larger responsibility now than ever before and our new trail staff under Bruce Rugg, Bill Gurrie, Ken Hales, and Paul Eubanks are organizing work days better than ever, by each taking diligent responsibility for their roles. It takes all of us and with all of us that is what makes it rewarding and fun.

As you may know, Scott's family has a bed and breakfast at Acadia National Park in Maine. The park encompasses some of the most beautiful land in the country and his family owned some of the park land years ago. He sends this note from there this evening:

I am sorry I cannot be there to celebrate with you in person. I hope you are all having a great time exchanging stories of old.

My excuse is lame. My 88-year-old mom says I have to take her to the 32nd "closing of the Inn". It was supposed to be next weekend but got moved up a week. I really would rather be celebrating with all of you.

Hopefully Doug has shown up. He is sure to have some stories of our past years. Doug, we miss your presence on the trails days!

When I started volunteering with KMTC, we were a small group of people trying to make the trails nicer. Our biggest event of the year was national trails day.

We soon branched out to include the Trail Ambassadors and developed an infrastructure to register volunteers and track hours.

Then we grew more to start helping with other park events and became more diverse and less trail maintenance centric. Our biggest event then was the 150th, which has yet to be topped.

From the dreams of a few, together we have grown a great organization that we hope will outlive us and continue to do good for many years to come.

What I like best about KMTC is that we are helping to protect and preserve this park for future generations. And with the Interpretation work and trail work days we do help to educate and entertain the many visitors which gives them good memories about the park we care so dearly about.

Most ventures fail in their first 5 years, I was here to celebrate the 10th and we are now at the 15th. We have not failed! This year we are continuing to improve our infrastructure and document our best practices to make it easy for the next generations to continue to run the club with excellence.

We are also working with the park to embark on some really serious fund raising. I can see the day where we have a much bigger budget and will be doing much bigger things for the park. Maybe even an endowment program to provide perpetual support to the trails and certain programs. Time will tell.

What I do know makes a difference is what each of you put into the trail club. Each one of us is part of the whole. Together we are building the trail club's future, a few steps at a time.

A toast to you all and God bless. . . . Again, thank you for coming and let's have some cake!