NEWS, ONLINE FEATURES

# Area officials gathered for celebration at Majestic Trails

By Mandy Colosimo, The Bradford Era

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Smethport and Crosby VFW and Legion members stand behind Steve Appleby of the Eldred WWII Museum; Brad Moore, from Congressman Glenn Thompson's office; Pa. State Senator Cris Dush, R-Brookville; Pa. Rep. Martin Causer, R-Turtlepoint; Terry Tessena, veteran; Carol Duffy, McKean County Commissioner; Brenda Fitch, Owner of Majestic Trails; and Ed Ponikvar of Knowledge Point Network, in thanks and in support of what has been accomplished and what is still to come. - Photo by Mandy Colosimo

SMETHPORT — Officials from across the McKean County area as well as the state gathered together on Friday at Majestic Kamp & Lost Trails, Inc. to see for themselves where recent grant money will be spent, and to hear details about future plans.

Majestic Trails received just over $203,000 from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, part of the $1 million in overall grant funding for all-terrain vehicle and snowmobile facilities and trails in Pennsylvania.

Brenda Fitch, owner, was just as overjoyed at the celebration as she was for the announcement of funding, “there is still a lot to do, but this is the start of getting where we want to go. I can’t wait to get started,” she said as she was shivering in the morning sun and chatting with some of the others waiting for the event to begin. She smiled through the entire celebration.

Her business counterpart, Knowledge Point Network Director Ed Ponikvar, gathered the group.

Ponikvar, originally from McKean County, explained how all of what has been accomplished came to be.

“Brenda reached out to me, she knew that I could help with grants and she wanted to do more for veterans, and here we are,” he said after greeting everyone. “This first phase goes to getting the new bulldozer.”

With nearly 1,000 acres, Ponikvar explained, the trail options are extraordinary. Right now, there are a lot of well maintained and well routed trails for all kinds of vehicles. But the true outlook for the park is to welcome all abilities, especially for veterans.

Fitch has always hosted veterans and active duty military. On Veterans’ Day weekend, it is a four-day affair. She would like to see this eventually be a 365-day playground for those who need and want to come for respite.

Fitch and Ponikvar lead the group on a trail ride to the overlook. Most rode with a guide in a side-by-side, but Senator Cris Dush, R-Brookville, followed in the back on an electric dirt bike.

At the overlook, which many in the group did not know existed, the honor guard and rifle squad with members from the American Legion and the VFW in Smethport and Crosby, presented the colors.

“We are truly in God’s country,” said Rep. Martin Causer, R-Turtlepoint, “it’s a beautiful place that is going to serve veterans well. I was certainly glad to work with the fellow elected officials and others in support of the grant to expand opportunities here. The only thing I think about when I look across at this project is all the people it will benefit, all the veterans it will benefit.”

Retired Air Force Master Sergeant, Dush acknowledged his son who is serving and all those who have served, “it’s by God’s grace” there are people and organizations like this one to support them.

McKean County Commissioner Carol Duffy added, “We’re doing things better now, supporting them better. I can’t say enough how much I appreciate those that have served, because without

them we wouldn’t have the life that we have here, the freedoms — this is our country, our county. Let’s work together as a community. God bless America.”

The group met up again for lunch at the Log Home, just down State Route 46 from the trail head. The Log Home is a five bedroom and three bathroom retreat that can be rented at a reasonable rate for stays of two days or more. There is plenty of room to stretch out and relax after a day of riding, and the fire pit looked inviting too.

Ponikvar discussed a few hopes and dreams Fitch has for the future of Majestic Trails.

“The trails bring the veterans in. Get them out there, deeper into the forest, closer to the heavenly Father, and the deeper into the healing,” he said. And, with the addition of some of the equipment and the adventure wheelchair, veterans of any mobility will be able to go out on a mission, “this is what some of them are missing, the mission and purpose — not just the fun and camaraderie.”

Site plans have been rendered and big things are possible. More information is expected in the coming year as details unfold. Majestic Kamp & Lost Trails worked hard to receive this first grant. It took nearly two years. Several longtime users of the trail, veterans, and even U.S. Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-Pa., wrote letters of support.

It will take more grant money down the road to get phase two started, but Fitch and Ponikvar are encouraged by the support from the area, McKean County officials, and state leaders who are all supportive of the military and veterans.



Senator Cris Dush, R-Brookville, enjoyed his ride on a dirt bike while visiting with the recipient of a DCNR grant totaling $203,300. - Photo by Mandy Colosimo



At the top of the easy trail at Majestic Kamp & Lost Trails, Inc. is an overlook area where Brad Moore, district director, representing Congressman Glenn "GT" Thompson, PA-15; state Rep. Martin Causer, R-Turtlepoint; McKean County Commissioner Carol Duffy; and state Senator Cris Dush, R-Brookville gathered to salute the flag that overlooks the valley below. - Photo by Mandy Colosimo




As the celebration was coming to an end on Friday afternoon, officials said their goodbyes to Brenda Fitch and Ed Ponikvar at the firepit just outside the Log Home on the property of Majestic Kamp & Lost Trails, Inc. - Photo by Mandy Colosimo




At the trailhead of Majestic Kamp & Lost Trails, Inc., stands Carol Duffy, McKean County Commissioner. On her right is owner Brenda Fitch who plans big things for the park. With the help of Ed Ponikvar, on right, through his non-profit organization, Knowledge Point Network, they hope to be able to provide a place for veterans of all abilities to enjoy the trails. - Photo by Mandy Colosimo

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