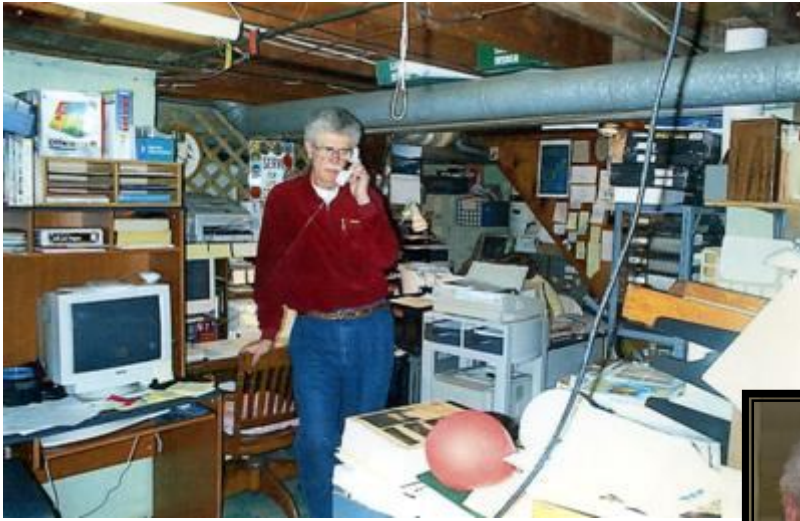


Learning to Carry On Without Howard

by Irene Szabo



Jacqui Wensich



The Finger Lakes Trail across upstate NY was started 46 years ago, and for nearly 25 of those years, Howard Beye was THE major volunteer for the organization that tends it. He was a deeply involved trail chair, keeping track of map updates, organizing and training those who adopt portions of our 880-mile trail system, tracking volunteer hours for every one of them during an annual “census,” arranging Challenge Cost Share projects, and organizing every one of our three to four special work-week projects, the annual “Alley Cats,” and handling the majority of correspondence with the state agencies who host many miles of our trail.

Until seven years ago, the entire office for the Finger Lakes Trail Conference had also been in his home for seventeen years, where he and his wife Dorothy filled map and T-shirt orders, answered phone and mail questions, and kept our early data base while performing all the normal office functions required! Needless to say, Howard and Dorothy received the Wally Wood Award as a couple back in 1991, and subsequently the Howard Beye Lifetime Distinguished Service Award was created. He was the second recipient of that rare honor.

Once the North Country Trail started up and the FLT became part of that great dream, Howard jumped in with both feet, serving on the NCTA board many years and acting as the primary FLTC coordinator with various NCT programs over the years. In 2001, his picture graced the cover of their magazine *North Star* when he was awarded the NCTA Lifetime Achievement Award. Obviously Howard exhibited



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incredible long-term dependability and dedication; those qualities coupled with his manic capacity for endless hours of detail work at his desk along with his unflagging enthusiasm for big Alley Cat projects like building bridges and log shelters made Howard that one -in-a-million volunteer who can never be replaced.

In other words, it's hard to imagine how the Finger Lakes Trail Conference would have grown up through its formative last few decades into the capable organization it is now without a super-volunteer like Howard. Thus it is crushingly difficult to imagine how

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Howard Beye: An Appreciation

by Irene Szabo

Howard had the most astounding...and maddening...capacity to work at thankless desk tasks for long hours, typing away two-fingered. Before he retired from Rochester Gas & Electric, he'd be at his FLT desk in his basement until 1 a.m. and start in again at 5. It never occurred to him he shouldn't call people late in the evening, but once he was on the phone, even if it neared 10 p.m., you couldn't wash him off with kerosene.

"Howard, I'm late for an appointment and my hair is on fire."

"Okay. Just one more thing..."

However, he ironed his own Boy Scout uniform and sewed on his own patches. This counts in his favor.

When the man who had been our trail manager forever died suddenly from a stroke during his Boy Scout troop meeting in September at the age of 75, mere weeks after building a shelter during his last Alley Cat week, I was stunned, couldn't believe it and still can't, and was horrified at how suddenly a whole life can end with a

snap. What I didn't realize was how thoroughly Howard had soaked into my head over the years.

Georgianne Vyverberg and I drove to Rochester for calling hours and stood in a long line behind a troop of little Scouts in their uniforms. There were also men in that line who had first known Howard as their Scout leader 50 years ago. Next to Dorothy Beye was a coat tree full of his hats and jackets, each covered with embroidered patches from Boy Scouts, the Finger Lakes Trail, and the North Country Trail. On the floor below were his huge hiking boots, next to tiny brown baby shoes. Dorothy was radiant and smiling, determined to celebrate his life with their daughters.

On the way there, Georgianne said that Howard was the first human she ever talked to about the FLT, and I realized the same was true for me, too. In those days he was the only person at the other end of a phone for the whole trail, so he became THE trail to each of us. After all, he and Dorothy ran the entire operation from their basement office for seventeen years, where they answered

the phone and letters, even the phone call at 2 a.m. from a couple near Ellicottville who wanted to know how to find the trailhead since they were lost. Huh?

Even after we moved the office to a house at the Mt. Morris Dam in 2001, Howard continued the trail management office. Look at the "Immediate Volunteer Openings" advertised on the next page for a small fraction of what he handled for us. The rest of the trail management jobs, plus trying to retrieve the balance of his accumulated knowledge...well, your Board of Managers certainly has a meaty agenda for the January retreat.

My biggest surprise came when I began to realize how thoroughly the man haunted the interior of my head. A week after he died I was doing trail work, and was amazed at how many times I caught little semi-conscious thoughts popping in unbidden, sort of an ongoing mental conversation with Howard, reporting in, so to speak, about what I was doing, how many hours I'd spent that day, what I still had to do. Even a full month later, I caught myself being faintly ashamed for Howard to see the sloppy blaze I'd just painted. It just won't stop.

It's like Georgianne said—he was the first person of the FLT we'd ever known. Once I started hiking, map by map, I enthusiastically sent in trail condition reports to him, and he'd always respond. Pretty soon he recognized a likely suspect (he was very good at that) and offered me my first section of trail to adopt. At the end of every year, each trail sponsor reports volunteer hours, accomplishments, and plans for next year, so no wonder I developed the unconscious habit of "reporting in" to Howard.

I just never realized that I still did it all the time, twenty-two seasons later.

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Without Howard ...

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we will fill his shoes: in September during a Boy Scout troop meeting in his 50th year as a Scout leader, he suffered a massive stroke and was dead within days.

The Board of Managers had tried to prepare for Howard's eventual second retirement, the one from FLT duties. After all, we opened an office and hired part-time staff. Map production was moved to other volunteers, and a few of the trail management functions have gradually been assumed by others, relative "youngsters" maybe a

decade younger than Howard's 75. Every piece of equipment in his home trail office that belonged to the FLTC was marked thus, and we have moved all of the files, equipment, and oh, yes, the trail tools out of his house and garage.

However, we simply do not know who will fill all the roles Howard played for so long. Several "jobs" have been identified and offered in this issue, but as big as some of them are (Alley Cat Coordinator! Challenge Cost Share Planner!), we know these don't cover everything Howard did or knew or just plain HANDLED. □

Howard Appreciation ...

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One thing I'll never know is why Howard worked so hard for the trail, since he never exhibited any passion that I could see. But Lynda Rummel had a wonderful peek at what made him tick just before he died: a landowner was seriously considering closing a section of trail that was especially critical to our route through an adjacent preserve, so Howard and Tom and Donna Noteware met with the landowner and talked about his concerns. As it turned out, it was Lynda who called Howard to congratulate him that their negotiations had been successful. She said, "He was ebullient...I mean, downright thrilled....that they had succeeded. I

had been feeling guilty about not being able to go until I heard the enthusiasm and happiness in Howard's voice. I will forever remember how excited and happy he was, and be grateful that Lady Luck made sure that he (and not I) did this particular job."

Those who worked with Howard on the Paradise Garden shelter this past summer have expressed special sadness at his loss, so I guess working with him on an Alley Cat project was another dimension I missed. Lynda again:

The year we built the Buck Settlement shelter near Watkins Glen, the crew began leaving on Friday afternoon but there were still materials and tools to carry out. I waited in the woods with

some tools; as darkness fell, and feeling a little abandoned, I put on my dim headlamp and stumbled out to the road. There was Howard, waiting and ready to help after he had shuttled workers and tools back to the main camp. Howard helped me load the remaining lumber on a truck and deliver it to the next work site a few miles away. We finished around 11 p.m., and he still had to drive two hours to get home. I was never so glad to see anyone in my life, and of course Howard had not abandoned me...and never would have.