

## Finger Lakes Trail Conference Honors Army Corps of Engineers

The Finger Lakes Trail Conference bestows its 2007 Erv Markert Award on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for hosting the FLTC trail and service center at their Mt. Morris Dam property.

The northern terminus of the Letchworth Branch of the FLT used to be the Hogsback Overlook parking spot along the entrance road to the dam; conference members assumed that permission to continue on a federal reservation would be thorny.

As it turned out, dam superintendent Bud Sinnott welcomed the trail, and the north end of the branch trail has been open since March 1992. Before Sinnott retired plans were underway to build his dream of an interpretive visitors' center.

Meanwhile the Board of the FLTC had identified that a looming need for the FLTC would sooner or later be space and personnel for an office. Howard and Dorothy Beye hosted the full office of the FLTC, including map and T-shirt sales, News mailings, member services, member renewal mailings, and all the trail issues that Howard still tends, for seventeen years in the basement of their Rochester home. By the turn of the century, Dorothy had put her foot down with a three-year time limit.

One day the FLTC's Irene Szabo was at the dam visitor's center with its first manager, Dina Dreisbach. Dreisbach happened to ask, "Do you know any not-for-profits who need office space? We're going to bulldoze the old superintendent's house if we don't find an appropriate tenant." The conference surprised Dorothy Beye by moving the office ahead of her schedule.

The FLTC celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2002 by hosting the spring meeting in Mt. Morris, which included a ceremonial hoo-dow at the trail-sign totem pole in the vast lawn in front of the new office.

Since then, the Corps has continued to foster partnerships with many local organizations in order to expand their recreational offerings at the dam visitor center. The Friends of the Genesee Valley Greenway share space in the FLTC "office" building, and both trail organizations enjoy permanent displays in the lobby of the visitor center. Because both pay heat, but no rent, while the Corps takes care of the building, the hiking organizations "repay" them with programs designed to bring more visitors to the center. They also continue to tend the trail through that location, which brings many visitors in season, and assemble volunteers who offer different kinds of walks emanating from the visitor center twice a month, year round.

Last fall the FLTC embarked on a new project to render 3/8ths of a mile of the Branch Trail south from the parking lot more accessible to all users. The Corps contributed machinery and personnel, their contractor dumped a full truckload of chipped river-bottom debris, and FLT volunteers and Groveland prisoners supplied the primary labor to spread those woodchips down the trail in order to cover exposed bumpy roots that had

become an impediment on this heavily used short piece of trail with great gorge overlooks.

Now the FLTC has received its first Challenge Cost Share from the Corps of Engineers. Application was made last fall for signage expenses to demonstrate to all potential users the exact conditions ahead for this 3/8ths of a mile we are trying to render more accessible, using language and symbols understandable to all people, and we are now enabled to proceed with this project. Volunteer hours spreading chips last fall were huge, plus the value of the contributed wood chips nears \$5000.

Tom Wenzel, Project Assistant, accepted the award on behalf of the Corps May 7, with the thanks of his supervisor, Patricia Hixon, Park Manager.

The Erv Markert Award is named for the FLTC's longtime early News editor and trail chair. It goes to a person or group which helps the trail, even though the recipient may not be a hiker or a directly-related organization.

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Gene & Pam Bavis