

Greenways Oak Ridge – how it all began

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on October 26, 2010)

In 1997, Dan Robbins, chairman of Greenways Oak Ridge was quoted in The Oak Ridger speaking regarding the future and expectations of the then young initiative to establish greenways throughout Oak Ridge. He was quoted as he was standing at the entrance to the Cedar Hill Greenway, the first greenway completed and dedicated on September 18, 1994.

Dan said, "It [the system of greenways] let's people in the neighborhood get out and walk around and not have to come down to the Civic Center and go around and around. Once we get the whole system complete in 20 years or however long it takes, you will be able to go from one o place in the city by bike or on foot without having to use motorized transportation, so kids can go to school, to the marina, to the park, to downtown. It used to be that way. I am told that there were walkways, boardwalks, through the greenbelt. It re-establishes that feeling."

We are now 13 years from that quote and 18 years from the initial idea that became Greenways Oak Ridge. A tremendous amount has been accomplished. Teamwork between the City of Oak Ridge, the Department of Energy, the Greenways Oak Ridge volunteer organization and other contributing organizations has resulted in what must surely be one of the very best greenways in the area, state, nation or even the world. We can and should be proud.

But all the wonder that is included in each trail, each path, each walkway, did not happen without the deliberate and dedicated efforts of numerous individuals, groups and organizations. As with any worthwhile project or initiative, greenways required the personal dedication of a leader or sponsor.

It required someone who not only cared about greenways but was passionate and determined enough to become personally involved. It took some one individual who would step up and be publically recognized and associated with the idea...the same exists today – good ideas only flourish when someone becomes personal with that idea and dedicates time and energy to accomplishing it.

Evidently this most recent successful effort started with what has been credited as the brainchild of Robert (Bob) N. Ogg, Vice President and Manager of CH2M Hill's Oak Ridge Office. Ogg first approached the Oak Ridge City Council in 1992 presenting a concept of greenways for Oak Ridge.

This initiative by Ogg resulted in a plan to oversee the development of greenways in Oak Ridge and the formation of Greenways Oak Ridge. He and a group primarily of workers at CH2M Hill's Oak Ridge Office first broached the subject of greenways in Oak Ridge with City Council. They were told to come back in a year with a report that proposed how to implement and fund greenways in Oak Ridge.

When Bob Ogg became sick with lung cancer, Dan Robbins was asked to chair the task force that ultimately became Greenways Oak Ridge. Ogg struggled and lived to see his dream begin to become a reality and even attended the City Council presentation where the report that had been requested of him before he became ill was presented. Sadly Bob died soon after.

I understand there was supposed to be a plaque created to commemorate Bob Ogg's role in helping establish the initiative that became Greenways Oak Ridge. The plaque was to have been placed at the entry to the Cedar Hill Greenway, but I have looked there and can't find it. If anyone has any information about this plaque, please contact me at 482-4224.

Dan Robbins has continued to chair the organization and remains in that position today. He is a strong advocate for greenways and realizes the importance of keeping the dream alive of a network of trails that covers Oak Ridge.

He is currently promoting an improved concept of bikeways in Oak Ridge. The recently improved Turnpike west of Illinois Avenue is NOT what he desires. He points out that we have had at least two

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deaths in the past few years from cars running over bike riders who were travelling with traffic on the side of the traffic lane. A better solution, Dan says, is to separate bike trails from roadways.

Dan is recognized for his practical understanding and appreciation for the necessary consensus building needed to assure the ongoing success of the greenways projects. He is also known to be persuasive and passionate with regard to the greenways. He has helped created a high degree of support for the concept among public officials as well as many private individuals.

The relationship between Greenways Oak Ridge and the city's Community Development Department as well as the City Parks and Recreation Department and the city planner has played a key role from the very first greenway at Cedar Hill through all the many others developed over the years. Maintenance of the trails is also a key element in the growth of the concept into a sustainable reality.

But the real key to the phenomenal success of greenways in Oak Ridge is the fact that making greenways a reality in oak Ridge has been and remains today a true grass-roots community effort. It may well be the best such initiative in our history.

Greenways Oak Ridge is an organization that can be justifiably proud of accomplishments thus far with a fine map showing 11 completed greenways published in 2007. Other greenways have been added to the existing ones such as Gallaher Trail, added March, 2009, and McKinney Trail added to the North Boundary Trail.

Other trails are being identified, such as the Dillis Orchard Road Trail in the Black Oak Ridge Conservation Easement. Jim Evans, of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency in April of 2010 was featured on Knoxnews.com telling of this trail. There are other trails close such as the Cumberland Trail and Frozen Head State Park, so walking trails in Oak Ridge fit right in to our surroundings.

Several Oak Ridger's recently participated in a 50K trail run on the Cumberland Trail. Susan Donnelly was the director and organizer of the run. Susan has also worked with Greenways Oak Ridge to promote trails within Oak Ridge. Leonard Martin and my son, Zane, ran the trail and Kerry Trammell helped with the aid stations. What a beautiful day it was with the leaves changing color on top of Cross Mountain. Makes you appreciate East Tennessee!

The Melton Lake Greenway is a story of its own, having been begun in 1997 and Phase IV now finally getting near reality. It is an example of the struggle required and the steadfastness of Greenways Oak Ridge as they work with the city and others to make dreams a reality. There will be more on this greenway in coming installments of this series of articles about the history of Greenways Oak Ridge.

And then there is my favorite of the trails in Oak Ridge, the North Ridge Trail. There will be more on this one as well.

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The beautiful east entrance to the North Ridge Trail, a favorite greenway of mine.