

Associated Press

Pennsylvania AP News

Jun 6, 2010 4:50 pm US/Eastern

Appalachian Trail Museum Opens In Central Pa.

GARDNERS, Pa. (AP) — Josh Gourley had another name last year along the Appalachian Trail: Ewok.

The Hagerstown, Md., resident gave himself a fanciful trail name, as do many who make the 2,178-mile trek from Maine to Georgia. And a desire to reconnect with the journey drew him to Saturday's grand opening of the new Appalachian Trail Museum in central Pennsylvania.

"The trail will always be memorialized in my heart," Gourley said, adding that he was glad to see it commemorated in a museum that was "an affirmation and a celebration of a lifestyle."

Several hundred people attended the opening of the museum in a 200-year-old former grist mill in Pine Grove Furnace State Park in Cumberland County. They saw that lifestyle celebrated even in the official "ribbon" cutting: the material used was duct tape, which is used to repair everything from tents to hiking boots along the trail.

Cutting the tape was 13-year-old Benton MacKaye Schwartz of Northampton County, whose parents met on the trail and named their oldest son after the man who first proposed the path in 1921.

About 100 visitors from 11 different states even hiked six miles in to the ceremony from the Kings Gap Environmental Education Center. They included Cumberland County Commissioner Rick Rovegno, who said the county visitor's bureau is looking to market the area as the center point of the Appalachian Trail.

Rovegno said he recently sat around a campfire in New Zealand with people from a half-dozen countries, and nearly all of them knew about the trail.

"It's a world-famous footpath," he said.

One of the speakers, John Quigley, director of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, said trails can be the centerpiece for economic development. He called the Appalachian Trail "a glorious natural resource and a way to connect people to the outdoors."

Many speakers praised the volunteers who maintain the trail and created the museum. They said a consultant had estimated the cost of building the museum at \$525,000, but volunteers brought the cost down to \$50,000.

Museum president Larry Luxenberg said worked for a dozen years to make the museum a reality, but he said there is more work to be done.

"We still have thousands of stories of the trail to tell," he said. "I'm continually surprised at the intensity of the affection for the AT."

Online:

Appalachian Trail Museum: www.atmuseum.org

Information from: The Patriot-News, <http://www.pennlive.com/patriotnews>