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Appalachian Trail Museum set to open

By [Joseph Cress, Sentinel Reporter](#)

The opening this Saturday of the Appalachian Trail Museum is a credit to all the volunteers who were behind the idea every step of the way, a museum society board member said Wednesday.

"Saturday is going to be a celebration and dedication to the hard work that went into the restoration of the grist mill to house the exhibits," said Joe Patterson, a volunteer on the communications committee. "We're excited about actually opening the doors and having the public visit."

The museum is located in the National Historic District of Pine Grove Furnace State Park across the road from the Pine Grove General Store.

It is also near to the Ironmasters Hostel, and two miles from the midway point of the trail. Both the store and hostel are popular stops for trail thru-hikers.

The exhibits will honor those who laid out and first hiked the 2,179-mile trail that connects 14 states from Maine to Georgia.

The museum tells stories of the founding, construction, preservation, maintenance, protection and enjoyment of the trail since its inception in the 1920s.

The grand opening ceremony starts at 11 a.m. Guest speakers include John Quigley, secretary of the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; David Startzell, executive director of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy; and Rebecca Harriett, superintendent of the Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.

Local dulcimer, banjo and harmonica musician and recording artist Tom Jolin will perform before and after the dedication.

In addition to performing on National Public Radio, he has performed for the vice president of the United States and with Garrison Keillor.

Diligence of volunteers

Following the museum opening, visitors can participate in afternoon programs featuring presentations by relatives of the pioneer thru-hikers, information sessions on hiking the Appalachian Trail and history briefings on the Pine Grove Furnace area. There will be children's programs throughout the afternoon.

Larry Luxenberg got the idea for the museum about 12 years ago. He later became founder and president of the Appalachian Trail Museum Society, which led the effort to open what is being called the only museum in the United States dedicated to hiking.

"The museum became his vision," Patterson said of Luxenberg.

"He was the key guy in getting this done. Seeing it open shows a tremendous amount of diligence on the part of Larry."

Saturday is also National Trails Day and, in conjunction with the museum opening, there will be South Mountain hikes and trail maintenance outings.

Restoration work on the 200-year-old mill was done by volunteers under the leadership of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club's North Chapter "Yankee Clippers" crew, Patterson said. The interior space was designed by LSC Design while Graphik Masters fabricated the exhibits, he added. Both companies are from York. The exhibits were designed by Bonnie Ralston of New York City.

Celebrating the history

The museum will portray not only the history of the trail, but also the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual experience of the Appalachian region and the culture of hiking, Patterson said.

Specific exhibits honor Benton MacKaye, who came up with the trail concept, and Myron Avery, who spearheaded construction that was completed in 1937.

The first feature exhibit of the museum is one of the hiker shelters built by York native Earl Shaffer, who, in 1948, became the first person to hike the trail from end to end.

Other thru-hikers featured include Gene Espy, who, in 1951, became the second thru-hiker, and Grandma Gatewood, who was 67 when she became the first solo woman hiker in 1955 and later the first person to hike the whole trail more than once.

The museum also features an exhibit on Ed Garvey of Falls Church, Va., who popularized long distance backpacking in the 1970s.

In the museum's hiker center, thousands of pictures of Appalachian Trail hikers will be on display.

Visitors also will be able to meet thru-hikers who will stop at the museum to register, record their progress, make notes and leave messages.