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# Appalachian Trail Museum opens in Pine Grove Furnace

By [MONICA VON DOBENECK, The Patriot-News](#)

Josh Gourley of Hagerstown, Maryland, also known as "Ewok," came to the grand opening of the new Appalachian Trail Museum in Pine Grove Furnace today because he has felt a little detached from the trail since his 2009 through-hike, and he wants to be part of something historic. "The trail is a part of me," he said.

Gourley, like many of the people who hike the entire 2,178-mile foot path between Maine and Georgia, had adopted a fanciful trail name.

The museum is "an affirmation and a celebration of a lifestyle," he said. "The trail will always be memorialized in my heart. Now it can live on in something as large as an Appalachian Trail museum."

Several hundred people attended the ceremony, which featured speeches by museum president Larry Luxenberg, who has been working to make his dream a reality for 12 years; state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources director John Quigley; several relatives of the first pioneers to hike the whole trail; and other officials.

The "ribbon" for the official ribbon cutting was a piece of duct tape, a material used to repair everything from tents to hiking boots along the trail. Cutting the duct tape was 13-year-old Benton MacKaye Schwartz of Moore Twp. in 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, in keeping with the spirit of the museum, hiked six miles in to the ceremony from the Kings Gap Environmental Education Center. Some were avid hikers. Others were happy just to get out for a walk.

Kim Janes of Oswego, Illinois, and Julie Martin of Fort Wayne, Indiana, had driven to the area with their husbands to attend the Carlisle Auto Show and decided a day on the trail might be more fun than another day at the show.

"I had no idea the trail went all the way from Maine to Georgia," Janes said. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I'm all about getting a good day's exercise."

Another of the hikers was Cumberland County Commissioner Rick Rovegno, who has hiked around the world.

Rovegno said the Cumberland County Visitor's Bureau is looking to market the area as the center point of the Appalachian Trail. 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.

Quigley said trails can be the centerpiece for economic development.

The Appalachian Trail is "a glorious natural resource and a way to connect people to the outdoors," he said.

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

One of the volunteers was Rosie Suit of Baltimore, who was sweeping floors, mopping and photographing the work in progress a couple of weeks ago. She became teary when describing what the opening meant to her.

"It's more than I can tell you, it's so great," she said. "Seeing friends, seeing another dream come true."

Luxenberg 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."

The Appalachian Trail Museum, housed in an old gristmill at Pine Grove Furnace State Park, will be open from noon to 4 p.m. daily through Labor Day, then open weekends through October. Admission is free.

To learn more, visit [www.atmuseum.org](http://www.atmuseum.org).