

David Brickley is ready to make the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail a reality.

**By Amy
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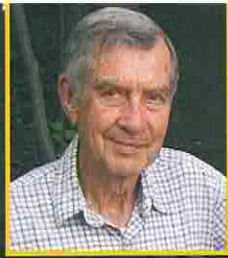
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n the early years of the 20th century, one of David Brickley's heroes, Governor Percival Baxter of Maine, tried to persuade his state legislature to designate the area surrounding Maine's Mount Katahdin a state park.

His fellow pols refused, so after Baxter left office he purchased the mountain and 6,000 adjacent acres and donated it all to the state. For three decades, until his death in 1969, Baxter added to his gift parcel by parcel, ultimately donating more than 200,000 acres of land. It is known, of course, as Baxter State Park.

Emulating Baxter's foresight, Brickley applied the same strategy, acquiring the rights to the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail (DRHT) in Virginia's King George County, the ninth-fastest-growing county in the United States according to recent Census Bureau statistics. This particular chunk of an old CSX railbed starts at Route 605 in Sealston, Va., and runs northeast 15.7 miles through the county. Thanks to Brickley, it will not be developed into oblivion.

Brickley, a resident of neighboring Prince William County, first saw the railbed in 1999 when he was director of the Virginia Department of



Joe Williams protected the right-of-way for nearly 10 years.

PHOTOS: FORREST MCCORMACK

David Brickley: Determined TRAIL

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Conservation and Recreation (DCR). "I was convinced it was worthy of being a rail-trail," he recalls. "The beauty on either side—the wetlands, the flora, the fauna—it's just great. If you don't preserve special places like these, they will be lost forever."

Yet Brickley and his DCR staff were unable to win backing for the trail development project from King George County's Board of Supervisors. Later, after he had left the DCR, Brickley made a deal with Joe Williams—a former planning commissioner in the county who had bought the land in 1997—to acquire the rights to the railbed. Like Governor Baxter nearly a

century before, Brickley—or, officially, the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail Association—became the owner of the cherished parcel.

Seated at his kitchen table, which is covered with trail maps fresh from the printer, Brickley says, "At such time as we can convince the board of supervisors [to support the DRHT], we'll turn it over to the state." For now everything from clearing the trail to meeting with its opponents falls to Brickley.

The negotiation skills Brickley honed as a lawyer, and in 22 years representing Prince William County in the Virginia General Assembly,

served him well when he initiated meetings with two groups opposed to creation of the DRHT. One is a gun club whose shooting range stands to be curtailed by the trail; the other is a church whose congregation protested in vain in 1941 as the federal government laid down track between the church and its cemetery. (The railroad was built then to carry people and supplies to and from Virginia's Dahlgren Naval Base to support the war effort.)

Discussions continue with the pastor, Brickley says, noting that a possible compromise would be to detour the trail so that the burial ground and sanctuary are no longer separated. "Not only could we put the property 'back together again,' but what better time to put up some kiosks about the history of the church?" he says.

As for the gun club, Brickley says he believes a compromise both trail supporters and club members can support has been attained, in the form of a trail detour coupled with safety precautions by the club.

Since Brickley established the nonprofit Friends of the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail, many have voiced their support and donated money. Seventy or so volunteers are clearing brush and hauling railroad ties most weekends to prepare the trail for walkers and bikers. Among them is Joe Williams.

"David has been able to do far more than anybody else could," he says. Williams says his wish, like Brickley's, had always been to see the railbed conserved as a nature trail.

A Vietnam veteran and former Boy Scout, Brickley describes persistence as his chief ally throughout his career—as a soldier, legislator, lawyer and, now, trailbuilder.

"Once I get my teeth into something I believe is important, I try not to let go," he says. "This trail is that important to me."

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