

John Jury's Memories of the Green Circle History

I have often been asked about the history of the Green Circle. Here are my memories.

The Green Circle might be traced back to a trip we took to Fort Collins, CO many years ago. While visiting my brother-in-law there, we went for a jog and we ran on a paved trail that connected two of their larger parks. I remember thinking that was a great idea.

Later, as President of the Stevens Point Parks and Recreation Commission in 1982, we realized that the city would be 125 years old the next year and we wanted to do something to celebrate. There were two lots privately owned between Bukolt Park and Pioneer Park (later Pfiffner/Pioneer Park). With interest growing in the river as it cleaned up after years of pollution, we decided to try and secure those two lots and connect those two parks in an effort "to give the river back to the people" as a birthday present. We were successful in those purchases, and volunteers eventually cleaned up junk that had collected along the riverfront over the years. Once cleaned up, we could see the beauty of the area and we knew we were on to something good.

Next, we decided to throw the community a birthday party, and of course, much of it would be along the new riverfront. I suggested a sesquicentennial event we would simply call .125 that utilized different venues along the river from Bukolt to the downtown bridge. It was very successful and eventually became what we know today as the Riverfront Rendezvous. The next year (1984), a paved trail connecting Bukolt and Pfiffner Parks was constructed. In surveys, we learned that the new "riverfront park" had become the community's favorite park. The people said they loved the trail, but that it was just not long enough.

Bill Burke was the county planner at the time, and in a planning book he had just published, he included maps of park lands, corporate lands, state lands, etc. I sized the various maps and colored in the corporate and publicly owned sections on transparencies. When I put them together and held them all up to the light, a clear route was formed. For the next few years, I talked about a trail that would circumvent the community. I called it 'Cooperation Trail' because it would connect Plover, Whiting, Park Ridge, Stevens Point, Hull and the Town of Plover because at the time, the various municipalities didn't seem to agree on many things. I must not have communicated the idea well because it just didn't seem to connect with anyone.

In 1988, our family moved to a new house in Hull so I could no longer serve on the city's Parks and Recreation Commission. Later that year, however, I was invited to a community leadership symposium sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce to talk about the future of recreation in the area, probably because I had become the chair of the Long Term Hotel Tax Committee. One of the five ideas I suggested was the development of this circular trail system. Bill Werner, in-coming chair of the Chamber and Al Noel, President of Sentry Insurance, liked the idea and they asked that we meet to flush out the idea. But I don't think I really ever got the chance to flush it out ☺.....because....

About this same time, several recently retired men were looking for some way to serve the community. Dan Trainer was the past Dean of the College of Natural Resources at UWSP. Roy Menzel had been a public relations professional. George Rogers, an environmentalist, had been for many years the editor of the Stevens Point Journal. Jerry Ernst had been the Director of Portage County Parks and Recreation. Along with Gary Speckmann, the new County Parks and Recreation Director and Tom Schrader, the Stevens Point Parks and Recreation Director, these six men, along with many others through the years, met every Friday from 1989-1996 at the same table in Al's Diner to start solving all the problems that had to be resolved to create this "circle."

An overall plan was needed. Ron Zimmerman, Director of the Schmeckle Reserve, indicated he had a very good grad student, Dave Aplin, who could take this project on. Roy Menzel donated all the proceeds of his book, "Hometown on the River," to help cover the costs of a feasibility study. That was the best money we ever spent. Dave isn't noted too often in the history of this project, but he should be as nearly 90% of what Dave suggested in that study has become the route of the circular trail, which by now had a new name. The committee thought instead of the Cooperation Circle, it should be named for the environmental corridor it would become...it would be a "Green Circle."

Because my life had become extraordinarily busy at the University from 1989-1996, my involvement was limited to helping with some newsletters, community connections, fund raising and cheering on the committee. I do remember two particular days, however. The first was with Al Hill, the previous Director of Stevens Point's Parks and Recreation Dept., when we walked the River Pines area and imagined where the trail would go. The other was walking the Holiday Trail (now the Brickyard Trail section) with Tom Schrader a few years later doing the same thing. It was always such a thrill to see the finished product later. The truth is that I first envisioned more of a single track kind of trail, not the 8' crushed granite trail we enjoy today.

When Roy Menzel told me the trail would essentially be done when they got the underpass completed on Patch St. in 1996, we decided we needed to have a grand opening. I had always been a programmer so I couldn't resist volunteering to coordinate that day. Many people walked a part of the trail June 1, 1996 and 80 went all the way around. Interestingly, that was the day I first imagined the *Walk Wisconsin Marathon* that has become a regular feature of our community today.

Shortly after the grand opening, there was a bit of a split within the fifteen member Green Circle Committee with which I had become actively involved again. Several of the committee members were interested in spokes and spurs to and from the Green Circle, thus creating more natural corridors and alternative transportation opportunities within the community. A core group, however, felt that the focus should remain on maintaining what had been developed. The group split into two groups; the original Green Circle Committee, and a new group called the 'Friends of the Green Circle' which I chaired. We were involved in connecting the Hoover Trail with the Circle, and starting conversations with Plover about other connections that might link up. The Hoover Trail also connected with the Tomorrow River Trail. Eventually, we decided it was important that the groups reconnect so we all were on the same page and it has remained that way since 2001.

We realized we needed a regular revenue stream if we were to keep the trails maintained properly, and we also understood that if we were to secure sections over time, we would need even more money. So from 2001 through 2004, I pulled a programming crew together and produced a bike ride around the Green Circle called "Happy Trails." We generated about \$5000/year, but realized eventually that all we really had to do was to ask the community for regular support. An annual 'ask' campaign since then has created a maintenance fund that is kept at the Community Foundation.