



Robin Andrews

In 2009, I was on the Village Board. It was soon after the controversial site plan approval for Summit Heights. At any and every opportunity, Brian Johnson (fellow Trustee) and I had worked to squeeze more for the village out of Mr. Mattikow, the owner. One of the things we had gotten was a right of way which would enable a trail to be cleared from one side of Summit Heights, with access to the lake, and then back out in a loop. If the development was ever fully built out, there would be no access to the lake without this right of way.

Now with the vision and possibility of a trail, we wanted to begin to create public access so that the community could use the trail. The old access road was already being informally used, but the ice storm of 2008 had felled a lot of trees that now limited access to even that path.

Philmont resident Mark Decker, Assistant Director of the WorkForce program at Columbia-Greene Community College, had shared with me that there was a federally funded grant program to employ youth who could benefit from work experience (so no cost to the village!). They could work during the summer, as long as someone was willing to manage them. I told Mark that we needed a crew to help us cut and clear a trail at Summit Heights. What he offered was 7 teenagers from the Berkshire Farm Boys program. These kids were in a group home because they had been in trouble of some sort in the past.

We arranged for them to work from 9am-1pm every day for 6 weeks. I found someone to help flag some additional areas for the trail, and people from the community generously let us borrow tools so the boys could do the trail clearing. Everything was ready. The boys arrived and got to work. Imagine my surprise, excitement and horror when in those first four hours on Monday, they did the entire section of trail I

had outlined for the first *week's* work! How was I going to occupy 7 hyperactive young men for SIX weeks?!

We got a lot done! There were days when they helped the DPW with the foundation for the new community room at the library. There were days when they painted the DPW building, as well as the interior of the Community Center at the lake. They spent a week under Doug Cropper's supervision cleaning up debris from the ice storm at both Summit Lake and Forest Lake. They freshly painted every fire hydrant in the village. Then, they spent two weeks under Timothy Smith's supervision cutting out the sod at the Village Green to form the pattern for the Labyrinth, which would be filled with stones by the Emerson College Alumni group that had created the idea. In the last week, they went back to Summit Heights, deep into the woods this time, to cut back the deer path that led from the "picnic area" to the lakefront. They could not use power tools; they used hand saws and clippers to pull back the brush and clear the way.

I was so proud of these boys, the work they did, and all that they had accomplished on behalf of the village. For me, it was a crazy six weeks of running around looking for projects and supervision. In the end, the boys were all able to add good work experience to their resumes. More importantly, they could take pride in helping to complete projects that would benefit so many people. They had come from all around Columbia County, and one of them noted that he looked forward to visiting Philmont in the future and seeing that library room and the trail, knowing that he had had a hand in their creation. He said he would never forget those six weeks.

There was a movie made about the building of the labyrinth on the Village Green, but the boys couldn't be in it because we were not allowed to take their photos. These kids lived in the shadows of society, and yet they were able to shine, even if unheralded, in Philmont.

By Robin Andrews, 2019