

PARKS & TRAILS NEW YORK

2010 COMMUNITY TRAIL AND GREENWAY AWARDS

OUTSIDE THE BOX AWARD



The award is an open-ended category that recognizes creativity in greenway and community trail design, management, fundraising, or organization.

Until Fred Schaefer came along no one believed that anyone could ever pull off refurbishing a 1.28 mile-long abandoned rail bridge as a trail, 212 feet above the Hudson.

Fred first visited the bridge in the winter of 1993 and found the views to be breathtaking. Over the years, he returned to the bridge many times and each time he fell in love again –captivated by the views across the Hudson and reminded of the social and economic opportunity that creating the longest elevated pedestrian bridge in the world could bring to the region.

In 2004, he became chairman of the nonprofit Walkway Over the Hudson and infused the long-standing bridge preservation effort with leadership and vision. For Fred, the project was a way to combine all his hobbies – photography, history and bicycling while enjoying himself at the same time.

To demonstrate that the project could be done, he showed people photos he had taken of a much smaller bridge refurbished as a walkway in the City of Rochester. And, with the town's permission, he began inviting people to come out on the bridge, no more than ten at a time. Fred took their pictures with the view in the background so they could email the photo to their friends and get them excited about what he was doing. The momentum began to build and money began to pour in.

In 2007, Fred sought the assistance of an old friend, Rob Dyson of the Dyson Foundation. After taking Dyson on a visit to the bridge, he received a \$2 million donation. Though still far from the eventual goal of \$38 million, that gift infused the project with legitimacy, making it easier for Fred to reach out to the wider community, and it set in motion a cascade of grants and donations from individuals; federal, state and local governments; corporations; and foundations.

At every step, it was Fred Schaeffer who was in the forefront organizing fundraisers and awareness campaigns to secure the necessary funding. Most impressive is that once Fred began to work his magic, it took only 16

months to raise the money and bring this awe-inspiring project to completion, uniting communities on both sides of the Hudson. The bridge opened in October 2009 as the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. Ever since, it has seen a steady stream of visitors now approaching one million.

In nominating Fred, Assemblyman Frank Skartados noted his passionate dedication to bringing this splendid gift not just to the Hudson Valley and the State of New York, but to people all over the world.”

For his vision that foresaw the possibility of using an abandoned railroad bridge as a trail connecting Ulster and Dutchess Counties and for his tenacity and leadership that inspired public and private sources to contribute millions to transform the bridge into the Walkway over the Hudson State Park, Parks & Trails New York honors Fred Schaeffer with its Outside the Box Award.