

DOING GOOD IN
Your Backyard.

Wanda Shirk

Potter County

Endowment Fund

*To secure the future operations
of the Susquehannock Trail Club.*

Blazing Her Own Trail of Giving

Some people have called Wanda Shirk “The Trail Lady.” But if you ask Shirk, she’ll tell you that she’s best described by these six “L” words: Lover, learner, leader, liver, leaver of legacies.

The reality is that she’s all of the above.

Shirk has hiked hundreds of miles, including about 25% of the famed Appalachian Trail. She’s hiked trails throughout Pennsylvania; belongs to an assortment of trail clubs, and served as the president of both her local club and the Keystone Trails Association; and she was once given the state forest hiking trails award and a lifetime achievement honor from the Keystone Trails Association.

She *is* The Trail Lady.

But the longtime Potter County, Pennsylvania, resident is also a mother, former foster parent, two-time widow, retired teacher, former board member of the Community Foundation for the Twin Tiers (CFTT), and was instrumental in the creation of an organization endowment fund with CFTT that benefits the Susquehannock Trail Club.

“Ten years ago, when I retired from teaching, I took on a project here in Potter County helping to raise money,” Shirk said. “When I was finished with that project, another retired teacher had died and left \$200,000 to our town library and \$200,000 to her church. At the library, there was a young man who had a vision and thought the library should have an endowment fund. He had heard about CFTT, which then operated in four counties east of us.”

The problem was that CFTT was not active in Potter County at the time, so they petitioned the organization. CFTT agreed and invited Shirk and other Potter County locals to join its board. It was through that initial work with CFTT that she came to understand an





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important truth: “Every single non-profit in the county needs to have an endowment fund to secure its operations for the future.”

As the President of the Susquehannock Trail Club, Shirk envisioned a more robust fundraising campaign than the \$2,500 it raised annually by means of \$10 dues payments—and she knew precisely the way to do it.

“My pitch was that a lot of people like to support an organization they believe in,” Shirk said of what was then a 250-member club. “All sorts of organizations have life memberships, so I said, ‘We need to establish a program that is \$500 for a life membership.’ Let’s see what happens.”

What happened was an explosion of interest, with more people than even Shirk could have imagined renewing their dues at the life membership-level.

For an endowment fund like the one Shirk created with CFTT seven years ago, a balance of \$12,500 is needed before the fund starts earning interest. Today, the Susquehannock Trail Club fund is valued at \$38,000, an amount bolstered by those life memberships and a number of memorial gifts donated on behalf of loved ones no longer with us.

“We have something like 54 life members now out of a total membership of about 280,” Shirk added. “We think of our life members as forever members because their donations will go on to help us forever.”

In terms of hiking, Shirk has accomplished a remarkable amount in a relatively short time. The 71-year-old only took up the activity at age 50 and said she’s come a long way from that first hike where she lacked proper equipment and toted a big, bulky sleeping bag on her back.

In terms of fundraising and charitable investing, Shirk has made comparably impressive strides since first being introduced to CFTT in 2009, and she credits the organization for helping to provide a solidified future for the Susquehannock Trail Club.

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