

# A TALE OF TWO TOWNS

*The A.T. binds and bands two New York communities together as one.*

HARLEM VALLEY, NEW YORK



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he only train station literally *on* the Appalachian Trail is in Pawling, New York. Just as the Metro-North Railroad Harlem Line connects eight million New York City residents to the Trail, the A.T. serves as a connector between two communities working in partnership on its behalf.

According to Howard Permut, president of the Metro-North Railroad, “the railroad has long supported the hiking community, and in 1990 built a station on the Harlem Line where the tracks transect the A.T. in Dutchess County, New York ... these hiking stops make it possible for someone who lives in New York City to be in the wilderness, on the Appalachian Trail, in less than two hours.”

The Harlem Valley Appalachian Trail Community (HVATC) was born of a unique partnership between the towns of Dover and Pawling, New York. This is one of the first cases of two towns applying jointly for a designation as an A.T. Community and it has been a huge success for all involved, yielding benefits to hikers, the community, and to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC). Community leaders from both towns joined efforts on the application as a single committee, reinforcing their shared commitment to protect and promote the Trail and to offer hospitality to visitors. During the application process, the committee engaged a cross-section of interested parties in the Harlem Valley, and celebrated a successful designation in June of 2013.

“The Appalachian National Scenic Trail is a jewel in America’s National Park System,” Jim Haggett, chair of the Dutchess/Putnam Appalachian Trail Management Committee observed. “It is wonderful to have the Harlem Valley designated as one of more than 30 communities, which helps define the Trail experience and draw so many people to the A.T.” Haggett also explained that the local Trail volunteers greatly appreciate all the support HVATC contributes to “efforts to maintain this recreational resource.”

The Trail enters Pawling from the south at the Beekman-Pawling town line, close to the intersection of Old Route 55 and Route 292. It offers a breathtaking view across the valley from Cat Rocks and crosses the Great Swamp on the boardwalk. The Trail runs through the Pawling Nature Reserve and arrives in Duell Hollow, where the Wiley Shelter is located. Possibly the best known section locally is the Great Swamp A.T. boardwalk that connects to the Metro North Railroad train stop in Pawling, which was completed in 2012 after an extensive effort by the ATC, the New York-New



Jersey Trail Conference, the Dutchess-Putnam A.T. Management Committee and more than 45 volunteers from the community who put in some 3,000 hours to help complete the work.

The highly visible boardwalk is a testament to the efforts of the many area volunteers who had a positive impact and now experience the pride of ownership. The multi-year project to rebuild the boardwalk over the Swamp River has attracted many new visitors to the Harlem Valley.

Early inhabitants of the Harlem Valley (also known as the Oblong) were members of the Schaghticoke and Pequot Tribes. They were blessed with hills and valleys containing areas of open forests, thick swamps and sparkling waters (and trails, no doubt). Settlement under the first land patent in eastern Dutchess County was established in 1704. After the Revolutionary War, municipal divisions were established and the Pawling Township encompassed modern day Dover. In 1807, the New York Legislature separated 26,000 acres from Pawling to create the town of Dover. Municipal boundaries aside, members of the communities continued to work together on economic, cultural, and ecological fronts. Chief among the area’s shared natural resources is the A.T., and protection of the



From top: Attendees for a hike with HVATC and “HIKE for Mental Health” gather at the A.T. Pawling railroad stop – by Donna Chapman; A snowy A.T. Boardwalk in Pawling – by Pete Sander

Trail has always been a priority of both towns.

After the region’s loss of a major employer, Dover and Pawling residents founded the Harlem Valley Partnership in 1993 to create an economy focused on the area’s natural beauty, cultural history, and agriculture and recreational opportunities, allowing the area to become a proverbial “backyard” for neighbors to the south.

Energized by the experience of the successful A.T. Community designation ceremony, various groups have begun projects and programs centered





From top: HVATC co-chairs Constance DuHamel and Pete Muroski celebrate at the official designation ceremony – photo by Peter Cris; The Pawling and Dover Scouts participated in HVATC’s reception of 2013 A.T. thru-hikers, who are recent war veterans with the Warrior Hike program, this past summer – photo by Constance DuHamel

around the Trail and outdoor recreation. The libraries offer resources to hikers and encourage local residents to explore the A.T. HVATC will provide 10 backpacks to the libraries, available for anyone to check out, stuffed full of supplies like guidebooks, binoculars, Trail maps for hiking the nearby section of the A.T., and Leave No Trace information. In addition, Little Free Libraries — mini boxes of books available for hikers placed in a few key locations near the Trail — will be available where passersby can share books and stories with others.

The Pawling and Dover Scouts participated together in HVATC’s Warrior Hike Reception this past summer, and are working on other projects that will incorporate the Trail. The community outreach of

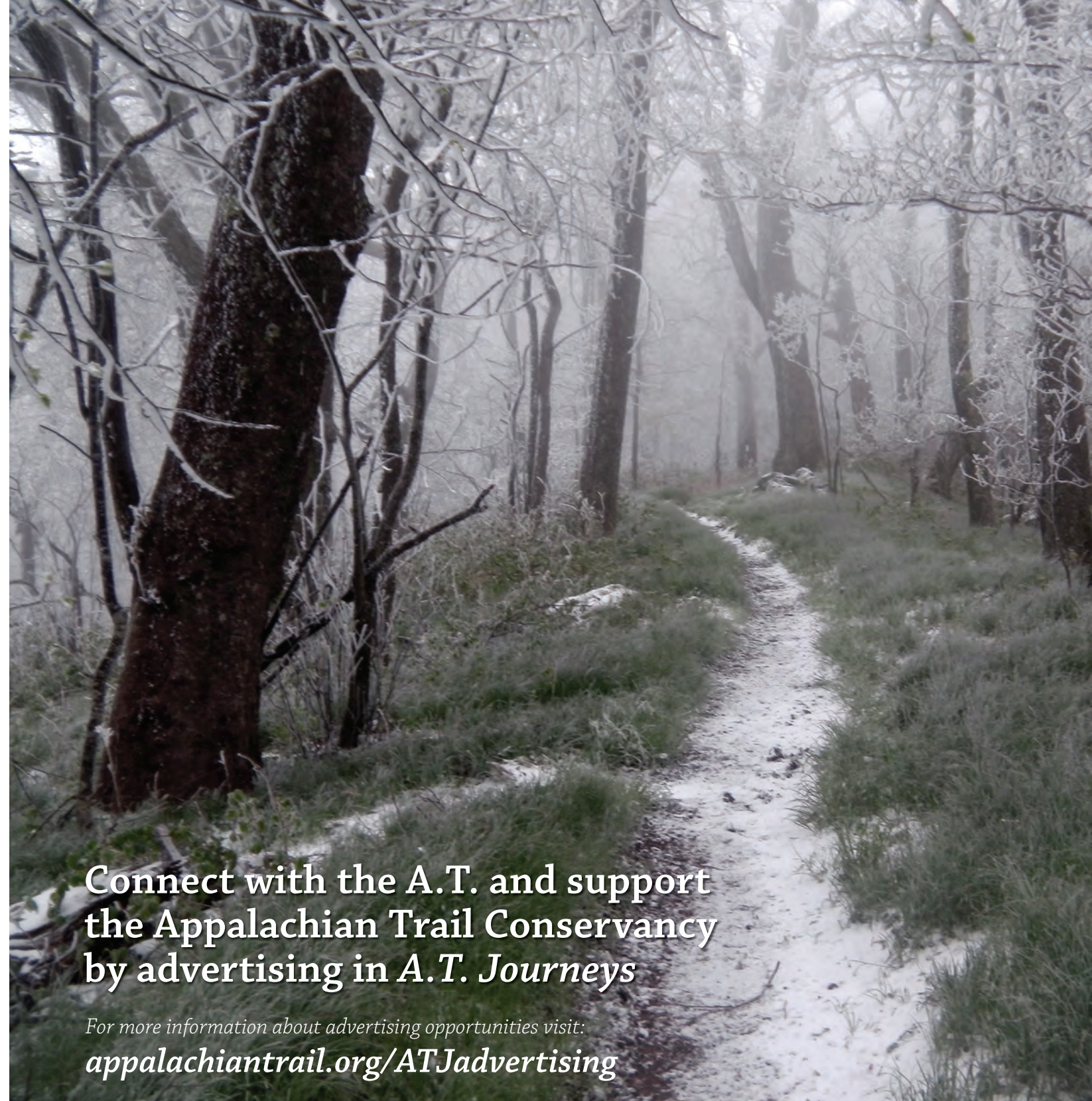
one Trail to Every Classroom program alumni teacher includes efforts to share her conservation knowledge with all the local schools. The HVATC works with local and regional partners to offer hikes showcasing different features of the Trail, including Cat Rocks, a scenic overlook with views of Harlem Valley. These partner hikes bring new audiences to experience the Trail, some coming from as far away as Pennsylvania. HVATC has also reached out to sister A.T. Communities for advice and guidance. The group leverages the resources of a community with a history of collaboration to serve the Trail and all it offers.

These initiatives were the result of an energetic, infectious, and successful collaboration between Constance DuHamel and Pete Muroski, co-chairs of the HVATC. “We reached out early on with ideas to promote the A.T. and to contribute resources to hikers and members of our community,” says DuHamel. “With initiative and cooperation, more than 35 different organizations and local leaders provided letters of support and participated in the application and designation process.”

HVATC created a model by which other towns can work together to leverage their resources. “We are happy to share our experience with other communities interested in joining the A.T. Community network,” DuHamel explains. She hopes, for example, that the Little Free Library and the “fully-loaded backpacks,” will catch on with other A.T. Communities. It is apparent from DuHamel’s fierce dedication that the partnership will continue to grow and support the A.T., its hikers, and the communities’ initiatives.

The residents of the towns of Pawling and Dover appreciate the Trail’s beauty and cultural heritage. HVATC is committed to help maintain it, and encourage others to enjoy it for years to come. HVATC’s home base is Native Landscapes, at the crossroads of the A.T. Boardwalk, Route 22 and the Metro-North Railroad. Native Landscapes’ Proprietor and co-chair of HVATC, Muroski, offers rest and rejuvenation to thru-hikers at his business just a few steps to the north of the railroad crossing. On most days, you can find the A.T. Community Ambassador, Cassie Kessman, there too. 📍

HVATC welcomes input from the hiking community to better meet the needs of all hikers. Find them on Facebook at: [facebook.com/HarlemValleyAppalachianTrailCommunity](https://www.facebook.com/HarlemValleyAppalachianTrailCommunity). For more information about A.T. Communities visit: [appalachiantrail.org/atcommunities](http://appalachiantrail.org/atcommunities)



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Advertising revenues directly support the publication and production of the magazine and help meet the ATC’s objectives. Great Smoky Mountains National Park — by Von Manning