



New connector trail short but sweet

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By Ian Bradley

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ON THE RIGHT PATH—Don Wallace, center, helps Sheila Kuehl, Los Angeles County Supervisor, 3rd District, cut the ribbon during the dedication ceremony of the Don Wallace Multi-Use Trail Connector on April 13. RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

After more than 40 years of campaigning, Calabasas resident Don Wallace, 77, finally saw the hiking trail he'd been dreaming of become a reality. As a testament to his persistence, it was named after him.



TRAILBLAZERS—Casey Dasilva helps Nyla Wallace, 5-year-old granddaughter of Don Wallace, cross the creek as they walk the path named for Don Wallace. RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

The Don Wallace Multi-Use Trail Connector is a 1,518-foot trail connecting the network of Santa Monica Mountains hiking trails on the south side of the 101 Freeway to the trails on the north side, passing under the freeway via a concrete channel.

The trail was dedicated at a ceremony on April 13 after four years of planning and construction. It cost \$3 million to build. The entrance is behind Creekside Village on Agoura Road.

"This is a gigantic day, and I'm overjoyed it's finally here," Wallace said. "This trail is the only way you can connect the trails that are south of the freeway to all the trails north of the freeway. There's no other way. I searched for years.

"The only time there's water (in the tunnel) is when it rains and water comes off the freeway, but it's a relatively small amount of water. I was also interested in getting a way for wildlife to cross under the freeway."

Wallace, a former firefighter, said persistence was the key to getting the trail constructed—lots of knocking on doors, making phone calls and going to meetings.

Mayor Fred Gaines said he was glad the city could be involved in such a unique project. The city worked with the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, Caltrans and the office of L.A. County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl.

"This is all thanks to Don Wallace," Gaines said. "He called me within 48 hours of my getting elected in 2011 and told me to meet him. He walked me through the tunnel and said this was his dream. We've done what we can at the city and county parks, all the various agencies. It's all because of his persistence."

Caltrans owns the drainage culvert under the 101 Freeway that the trail uses to connect the various trails on either side of the roadway.

Kuehl's office funded the \$3-million project using money from its discretionary fund.

John Wicker, director of the county's parks department, said Wallace first started talking about connecting the Santa Monica trails with the MRCA trails north of the 101 Freeway in the 1970s, before it was feasible.

"Not all the trails had come to this point at that time, and his vision was more like, 'someday we've got to make this happen,'" Wicker said. "And now it's all of these parties working together, the City of Calabasas, the county parks, Caltrans and Supervisor Kuehl, all coming together to really bring all the trails here so that we have connectivity and trail opportunities."

Kuehl said construction wasn't just cutting a trail; workers also had to install fences, gates and benches, among other things.

"(We needed) railing, solar lighting in the channel under the freeway, hitching posts, retaining walls in the channel, a bioswale and hardscape planting," Kuehl said. "We also kept the graffiti artwork along the walls of the channel, and that makes it historic as well."

Wallace said the connection will tie together all the local trails and enable hikers to reach the Pacific Crest Trail, which runs from the California-Mexico border to Manning Park in British Columbia.

He said he's always had an enthusiasm for hiking trails, which stems from his love of horseback riding.

"I've had horses for 50 years. My father bought my two sons ponies when we lived in Canoga Park," Wallace said. "We spent our time looking for trails in the San Fernando Valley, and they kept disappearing because of development. So my wife, Jeanne, said, 'Please take me somewhere where I can access trails and keep my horses for the next 10 years.' That was 45 years ago, and we've been in Calabasas since then."

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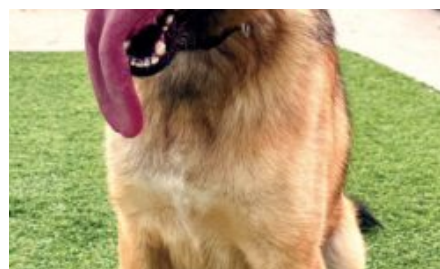
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