

Meet Jeff Brewer

By Danny Bernstein



Jeff Brewer has been a member of CMC for years, even though he's never lived in Western North Carolina. After Allen de Hart, Jeff is also the person most associated with the [Mountains-to-Sea Trail](#). That's not a coincidence since Allen and Jeff have been working together on the trail for so long. I had a chance to talk to Jeff when I took a trip to the Triangle.

Jeff was born in Wilmington, on the coast. When he was in eighth grade, the family moved to Durham. "I went to Louisburg College, where I met Allen. My dad gave me Allen's book and told me that one day there will be a hiking trail through North Carolina." Jeff had done some backpacking on the A.T. with scouts.

Allen was a history professor who also taught hiking and backpacking courses. Jeff's dad had been in Allen's class at Louisburg. His father pointed out that Jeff could take backpacking as

his Physical Education requirement in college. "And by the way, son, the book I gave you on this NC trail. That was written by the prof who teaches the backpacking courses."

Jeff started Louisburg College in 1996. He worked in Allen's gardens, officially called [Franklin County Nature Preserve of the De Hart Botanical Gardens](#), a small private garden open to the public. He also went on trips to help Allen with his hiking guides.

"We went to West Virginia to scout some trails. One weekend, we drove from Pilot Mt. to Wake Forest to come up with a road route for the MST. I was the scribe in the truck and filled a legal pad of instructions. My hand was stiff after that weekend."

"We stayed with R.M. Collins, the founder and organizer of the Sauratown Trail. R.M. put together the private owners on the Sauratown Trail."

When the MST seemed to be forgotten by the State of North Carolina, Allen talked to Jeff about starting Friends of the MST, a nonprofit organization to keep the momentum of the MST going.

"Well, what does have entail?" Jeff wanted to know. "Oh, a little work," Allen said. "And by the way, I want you to be president of FMST."

When Jeff got to NC State, he was running a nonprofit out of his dorm room. "We had voice mail," Jeff recalls, "but instead of having a message, like *let's party on Friday evening*, we kept it very professional. *You've reached the office of Friends of the MST.*"

"Allen took Friends of the MST seriously and so did it. I put in many hours but I learned a lot. I was president from 1997 to 2009. Then John Jaskolka took over for a year. And now Bill Sadler is in for his second year. When I stepped down, my email went down by 75 percent."

In 2003, Jeff hiked the MST. "I needed to see the whole trail for myself and took a leave of absence from his work." Since then, he's done the John Muir trail in 2006 and the Wonderland Trail in Rainier in 2010. He's also section hiked the A.T. from Fontana Dam to Pearisburg, Virginia.

Jeff's MST Maintenance Work

Jeff is head of the FMST task force which has built the trail around Falls Lake, in Raleigh. He explains:

"It took four and a half years to build 33 miles. We finished in November, 2010. Sometimes, we had 150 people come out on a workday. After one workday was over, it was time to plan for the next time. Now we have five maintenance days a year."

"Our section maintainers on the Falls Lake section are organized like CMC. All together, we maintain 60 miles of trail. I organize the workdays. I walk other people's section when they can't do it. I keep emphasizing that you need to be walking your section."

People lived here before Falls Lake was finished in 1981. There's still one man who's bitter about having to sell some of his land to the Army Corp of Engineers. He didn't think he got paid enough for his land. When people moved out, they left mattresses, stoves, and trucks.

I asked him when the stuff is garbage and when it's considered an artifact.

"When we're cleaning the trail from 9am to 3pm, it's garbage. After 3 pm, it's an artifact."

But sometimes the maintenance crew can't even pull out tires from the lake. They turn them in to the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission for recycling but sometimes the Commission doesn't have the money to pay recyclers to get rid of the tires.

It took seven years to work on a MOA (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Army Corps of Engineers and four and a half years to build it from Penny's Bend Nature Preserve to US 50. From US 54 to the Dam, the trail had already been built by the Triangle Greenway Council in the 1980s for the MST.

So what are the challenges on the MST?

"Building the trail across private property. From Smithfield to New Bern, in the coastal Plains, we're out of public land. I think the MST will be a DOT bike trail or canoe trail down the Neuse River. [But you can always walk it.] There's a lot of wetlands. Some locals call it "letlone", i.e. leave it alone."

When he's not on the MST

During the week, Jeff is busy as an asbestos consultant. He's a partner in a small company that removes asbestos. "We do mostly popcorn ceilings and kitchen floor." His wife, Amy, works as a Proposal manager at SAS, a major software company in the Triangle. "We went to high school together and then reconnected." They have a daughter, Lalen, born May 2009 and a black and white cat called Mister Tuxedo, Tux for short.

But if you thought that being a partner in a small business, doing construction and maintenance on the MST, and being an involved husband and father would keep anyone more than busy, you'd be wrong. Jeff is intrigued with Native American culture. He dances in Indian Powwows, doing contemporary Indian dancing. "I love the culture but I'm not Indian."

Jeff was the quintessential Boy Scout. He started doing bead work with Scouts. Now his workroom has a sewing machine and lots of beads. He's beaded slippers, purses for his wife, and his Indian Dancing costume.

Jeff loves the outdoors.

"Not having showers is the pain you endure to see things," Jeff says.

"I want to finish the A.T. from Harpers Ferry to Georgia in sections. Then when I retire, I'll go from Harpers Ferry north to Maine. I'd like to ride the Blue Ridge Parkway and do the Foothills Trail. Amy and I went to Glacier for their 10th year anniversary."

Jeff says, "I like working on the trail and working with people. I spend about 8 to 10 hours a week on MST work now. When I was President of FMST, I was spending more time on the MST than on my work. Kate Dixon, the Executive Director, has taken the stress off the board. Under her watch, Friends of the MST became part of Earthshare and the MST license plate was approved. I'll always be doing something on the MST. The MST is in good hands."