



Speaking with Pete Petersen By Danny Bernstein

Pete Petersen has lived in Hendersonville since 2005 and has been part of a CMC trail crew from the first. Two weeks after he and his wife, Judy, landed in Western North Carolina, he became a trail maintainer.

Pete, whose real name is Richard Oluf Andreas Petersen, is of Danish origin. “My grandfather came from Denmark and worked in shipyards,” Pete says proudly. Pete is a New York/New Jersey fellow through and through.

Because Pete lived in the New York City area, he read the New York Times, of course. He’s still a crossword puzzle addict, doing the NY Times Crossword puzzle. However, “It’s becoming more difficult because I’m no longer current with New York lore.”

So how did Pete get from the Northeast to being so active in trail work?

Pete was born and raised in Summit, New Jersey, a small town close to New York City. He stayed in New Jersey most of his life until he moved to this area. With a BS in mechanical engineering and an MBA, he worked for large companies in logistics and production management. Toward the end of his career, he moved into system analysis, the interface between software designers and the ultimate client of the computer system.

In high school, he played tennis and was on the college swim team. While he worked, he did a little hiking and biking. His son was involved with scouting, which was his introduction to the outdoors. He was also busy with his two children’s sports team and even became a referee.

“I need to exercise a lot to keep fit and keep my weight down.” After the kids were out of the house, he took some long bike trips and climbed Katahdin in Maine, the northern terminus of the A.T.

But like many people (this writer included), Pete and Judy wanted to get out of New Jersey. By then their children were out of the nest, the son in Atlanta and their daughter in Greensboro.



So they drew a 200-mile circle around Atlanta and Greensboro. The intersection included Western North Carolina.

“That’s why we’re here,” Pete says. They vacationed here to validate their decision and moved to Hendersonville in 2005.

“My wife’s cousins had moved here and they introduced me to CMC. I knew I wanted to be a trail maintainer. It was an instant fit. At the time, Bill Newton was the crew leader of the Friday Hendersonville crew.”

To Pete, being on a maintaining crew is a way to get exercise outdoors, and do some good work. “But there’s also the social side. You get to go out with the guys and gals.”

Eleven years later, Pete is head of the maintenance committee and on the CMC council. “This takes a lot of time. I get questions from people who want to become trail maintainers. I also keep CMC abreast of Blue Ridge Parkway and Appalachian Trail Conservancy issues.” Pete’s term ends in December.

He’s been crew leader of the Friday Pisgah crew, with members mostly from Hendersonville and Flat Rock. He also supervises section maintainers on the MST from Pisgah Inn to Old Bald. “My job is to make sure that maintainers get out to look at their section.”

So do you hike at all?

“I hike but not with CMC. I hike with a couple of old guys once a week. We walk about four hours. Sometimes we hike on the trails I maintain. We always make sure that we have a stop at Dolly’s Ice Cream (in Pisgah Forest) afterwards.”

In addition to his leadership on the Friday crew, Pete has decades of managerial experience, which he’s used well on CMC’s behalf.

After all these years, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

“CMC now has maintenance agreements with many governmental bodies. We negotiated an agreement with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to work on Green River Game lands trails. We now have an official crew that maintains those trails. We also have agreements with the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Pisgah District of Pisgah National Forest, and the Nantahala District of Nantahala National Forest. Though CMC has been maintaining sections of the MST and the A.T. for years, formal agreements recognize our work.”

Negotiating agreements with governmental bodies may be work that’s out of limelight. It may not be as fun as building a shelter. But agreements are important and necessary to CMC. These agreements define our responsibilities. It also outlines what we can expect from land managers, like the US Forest Service.

“We’re also getting more grant money and expanding our tool inventory,” Pete adds.

CMC council members can only serve two terms, four years, in any particular capacity. Now that you have to leave the CMC council, what will be your focus?

I’ll hold on to the MST section supervisor spot. I also interact with Friends of the MST on maintenance issues.

I also look forward to our National Trails Day celebration on Saturday June 4. This is when we’ll officially open the Waterrock Knob section of the MST. Superintendent Mark Woods of the Blue Ridge Parkway and NC State Parks representatives will be there, along with Kate Dixon, Executive Director of Friends of the MST.

What do you do when you're not on the trail?

My wife and I bought the lot next door to ours. The previous owners created a little arboretum with azaleas and other flowering plants. So I became a master gardener to keep up with all those plants. I also play golf a couple of times a week.

And there are the five grandchildren. "All jocks," Pete says proudly. "The boys play footballs and girls swim. We visit them regularly and we're in the audience when they compete."

But trail crew work remains his main activity. Thank you, Pete.