

Meet Jim Ariail

By Bobbi Powers



The very first question I posed to Jim Ariail was, “Are you a hiker who does trail maintenance or a maintainer who hikes?”

His answer surprised me. Jim replied, “I’m a skier first, a hiker second, and a maintainer third.”

It turns out that when Jim and his wife of 43 years, Carolyn, moved to East Asheville after his retirement from 33 years of federal government service, his top requirement was a home close to snow skiing. Carolyn vetoed the Rockies as being too far from the family – daughter Lisa, son James III, and 3 grandkids in Virginia – so they headed to WNC where Jim skis almost daily during the season at Wolf Ridge Ski Resort.

Jim began hiking on his own after settling here, but Carolyn worried about him out on the trail alone.

So, he Googled “hiking clubs” and came up with the CMC. His Googling has been the club’s gain.

Jim started hiking and then read an article in the *Let’s Go* about a new Wilderness Crew which meets twice monthly. He joined it, and he also joined the Monday Crew. He later joined the Friday Crew. This was too much, and since the latter group allowed him a weekly instead of bi-monthly workout, he dropped the Wilderness group in favor of the Friday Crew where he gets his upper body workout (more work building and less walking) and the Monday Crew where they walk a lot to do basic maintenance on the AT, MST, and other access trails north of Asheville.

His favorite part of his work is building new trails because it gives him a “sense of accomplishment to see a trail where there was nothing.” As if this were not enough, he also is a Section Maintainer on the MST. Note: Jim takes a sabbatical from trail maintaining during ski season. (Remember his priorities!)

His favorite hikes are those in wilderness areas and any hikes where he has done maintenance. A favorite is hiking Haywood Gap and Buckeye trails because he has done a lot of work in the area.

When asked about vacations, he immediately mentioned a cross-country driving trip to Sedona and the Grand Canyon to celebrate his and Carolyn's 40th wedding anniversary.

I told Jim the words earnest, hard-working, and even-tempered come to my mind in describing him. He agreed. This Piedmont College (Demorest, GA) graduate in accounting with a minor in math has always held serious jobs. Jim completed the Harvard Senior Executive Fellows Program and was also a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) and a Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM). While working at the Pentagon, his titles were Assistant Director for Finance Policy and later, Assistant Director for Financial Improvement and Audit Readiness.

Jim was at work in his Pentagon office the morning of 9-11. On his computer monitor he saw the airplanes hit NYC and was on his way to find a television when the plane hit the Pentagon.

He said, "I didn't hear it, but I felt the building shake and saw flames out the office window. When he returned to work the following week, he had to wear a surgical mask over his nose; smoke had saturated everything. He put cheesecloth over AC vents, and the cloth turned black in a short time.

Even in retirement Jim has a serious job. He is treasurer of the CMC. I asked him about the club's fiscal health. He replied, "We have large cash reserves, so we have not had to increase dues to cover expenses." Jim spreadsheets every online transaction so he can watch the paper trail. He is a careful man.

Jim also has a less-serious side. He's quite an extrovert as he was quick to point out to me – and which I already knew from hiking with him. He puts a positive spin on most things. He chuckled, "I once had a friend tell me I could tell someone to go to Hell and convince him he would enjoy it!"

Jim intends to hike and maintain trails as long as he is able both physically and fiscally (he referenced high gas prices and a gas-guzzling truck). Let's hope he's out on the trails a long, long time.