

# Meet Rich Evans, the Nanny who became a Trail Maintainer

## Extraordinaire

By Bobbi Powers

Rich and I sat at a picnic table at the BRP Visitor Center for this interview, and for 1 ½ hours I listened to his stories. This is a man whose life cannot be summed up in one word or even a few paragraphs. He told me his “life was a blur before joining CMC in 2012.” However, as we talked, he mentioned many diverse aspects of his pre-CMC life which I found fascinating.

In a nutshell, here is his life pre-CMC: He was drafted into the Army and later became a recruiter for the Army Reserve and Army National Guard. He graduated from college with a degree in elementary education; his teaching career lasted one year. He worked in an architectural firm and later in pest control in Tucson, Arizona, for 11 years until his wife died, at which point his step-daughter asked him to come to Charlotte to be nanny for his 6-month-old granddaughter Sarah. He was her full-time nanny until she entered pre-school at 2 ½ years. He was 62 and decided to retire.



In 2007, during his time as a nanny, he had a physical which was a wake-up call. He was diagnosed as “morbidly obese” (his words), borderline diabetic, had high blood pressure, and an EKG determined he had had a heart attack. He started walking, starting with one block and working up to 8 miles. When Sarah started pre-school, he moved to Wisconsin and stayed with his sister and got serious about changing his life. He started walking in the neighborhood in the summer of 2008. He decided to walk the Appalachian Trail. He said, “I had no clue about the A.T. until I read a book about hiking.” He got a backpack and started adding weight to it. While wearing the heavy pack, he was often asked if he were training for something. His standard reply was, “Yes, I’m training for old age; it’s not for sissies.” In March of 2009 he started his hike and met Bob on his first day, a trail buddy who hiked with him the whole trail and quite literally kept Rich from quitting innumerable times, finishing in October 2009. Then Rich (trail name Pacer) hiked it all the next year, cutting a month off his time!

While on the A.T. he learned about Trail Days in Damascus, Virginia, attended three years in a row and was hooked on trail maintaining. He said, “I moved down here in 2012 just to do this.” He read books and learned much from his first volunteer job with the Waynesville Crew under Larry Sobil. Rich admires Larry for his dedication to the trail and for his mentoring. “Larry made me realize I had a home with CMC.” As Rich’s knowledge grew, so did his realization that more crews were needed. He co-created the Remote Overnight Crew and Secondary Trail Maintainer Program. He created the Art Loeb Crew, Wilderness Response Team, and Section Rovers Crew. He does trail maintenance Monday through Friday and often a weekend day. He’s

out there about 30 hours each week and interacts with about 45 – 60 maintainers on the various crews each week. In 2016 he was awarded the BRP Volunteer of the Year, a VERY big deal. He says, “Trail work is my thing. I am happy being a crew member, or mentoring, or leading if needed.”

This admitted introvert and minimalist lives in a one-room apartment with no computer or microwave and recently gave up his big-tube tv in favor of a lightweight flat screen, but he does have a smart phone. He drinks coffee with protein powder for breakfast and eats an apple for lunch on the trail. Dinner is usually a humongous salad, and occasionally a frozen pizza. His one vice: popcorn with ½ stick of butter most evenings.

He does all this while combatting prostate cancer. In 2020 he had surgery and did nothing for 8 weeks during recovery. (This coincided with the pandemic shutdown of all trail work.) When the trails re-opened, Rich was back out there. Last fall while undergoing an 8-week round of radiation, he made sure the appointments were early morning so he could get to his beloved trail maintaining. The radiation and medications he’s on cause fatigue. He says, “I’m starting over again and working hard to build my strength.”

He is much loved by those with whom he maintains trails. They rave about his patience, knowledge, mentoring, and humor.

Rich Evans is a man on a mission. Go, Rich, go!