

Thomas Jefferson MONTICELLO

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The Hike to Monticello

Thomas Jefferson Foundation Launches “Monticello Trailblazer” Program

Monticello’s unrivaled views and natural landscape created a haven for Jefferson’s desired agrarian lifestyle. But the steep grade, deep woods and rough terrain made Monticello a difficult place to visit during Jefferson’s time.

After visiting Monticello in 1815, educator and author George Ticknor wrote about the climb: “It is an abrupt mountain. The fine growth of ancient forest trees conceals its sides and shades part of its summit. The ascent of this steep savage hill was as pensive and slow as Satan’s ascent to Paradise...”

“Always memorable, sometimes scary — getting to Monticello wasn’t easy,” said Peter Hatch, director of gardens and grounds.

A parkway and trail system 40 years in the making was built in 2002, creating a safe and peaceful way for people to walk to Monticello. Each year, 85,000 walkers hike the Saunders-Monticello Trail.

“The trail is a magical design. It’s a Mercedes of trails, so accessible, dramatic, and intimately balanced with what Thomas Jefferson called, ‘the

workhouse of nature,’” said Hatch.

Hillary Dahle and her two young daughters, Claire and Amelia, come by a few times every week. “It’s just so beautiful and shaded. We consider this our backyard; we live in an apartment and come over all the time to get outside and play,” said Dahle.

Retired School teachers Susan Hakala and Sue Weaver routinely walk the trail together. Weaver comes for the exercise and the views: “I love the trees and love to watch the change of seasons.”

“If you’re here on a daily basis, you see many of the same people. I’ve always thought it would be fun for us to get together sometime,” said Hakala.

Now the Saunders-Monticello Trail, made possible by the support of Tom and Jordan Saunders, is a place where bikers, hikers and nature lovers can come together as an organized group. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation recently established the “Monticello Trailblazers” to organize volunteers and raise money for ongoing maintenance.

“We needed a team of people to help us promote,

BECOME A MONTICELLO TRAILBLAZER

Keep up to date on all the latest Saunders-Monticello Trail news. Now you can join the “Monticello Trailblazer” program with a donation of \$25 or more. To sign up, visit us online at www.monticello.org/trailblazer.

YOUR GIFT HELPS SUPPORT:

2.2 miles of Saunders-Monticello Trail
12,000 boards on the surface of the boardwalk

32,000 square feet
of native stone on the
face of Saunders’ Bridge



62 species of native trees and 44 species
of native shrubs planted in the arboretum

97 species of birds
at Secluded Farm

85,000 walkers annually

2 full-time employees and 850
hours of yearly Ranger monitoring

2,100 hours of yearly mowing and bush-hogging



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preserve, interpret and sustain the development and maintenance of this 230-acre linear park and system of trails. The trees are beautiful, but they don't grow money,” said Hatch.

Brian Menard has walked the trail since its opening, and over the past several years, nearly every day. “The trail is a wonderful gift to the community and enriches so many lives,” said Menard. “Whether you walk, run or bike, any time of day, any season, it's a beautiful place to be.”

Menard joined the Monticello Trailblazer program during Monticello's Montalto Challenge this year, and he encourages all who use the trail to do likewise. “Those of us who spend time on this hillside benefit so much, and it's appropriate that we give back some time and resources to this great space. The Monticello Trailblazer program is a fine way to support the trail and those who work so hard, every day, to maintain and enhance it.”

Monticello Trailblazers assist in volunteer efforts like storm trail clean up and fundraising. This summer the group was called upon after 60-mile-per-hour winds tore down trees and damaged a portion of the boardwalk. After ten days of hard work from volunteers alongside Monticello staff, supported by donations from the community, the trail was open again to the public.

“There was \$17,000 in damage — not nearly as much as in 2003, when we had a hurricane tear up the boardwalk. What makes this trail beautiful also makes it vulnerable to the elements. We need all the help we can get to maintain it,” said Hatch.



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