

# Charley's Trail

By ADAM LAPIERRE  
News staff writer

On a mossy, fern-covered hillside, sunlight breaks through thick trees, casting a patchwork of light and shadows down on a freshly packed trail that weaves its way through the forest. It's a foggy morning, and between the trickling of Post Canyon Creek below and a few crows hacking from above, the only sound in the area is the thump, thump, thumping of dirt being tamped down by flat-bottomed hand tools.

Little red flags trace the path of the new trail, which, when completed, will be a scenic single-track through the wooded hills outside the west end of Hood River in what is now titled the Northwest Area Trail System.

For those who are not familiar with the area, it's somewhere between Mount Hood and the Columbia River; for those who are, the new trail will be a narrow, weaving loop that connects to upper Seven Streams on the east end and lower Spaghetti Factory on the west.

For longtime Hood River resident Charley LaVenture, biking was one activity he was able to enjoy right up until a month before he passed away; and the Post Canyon area was one he frequented during his many years in town. His death from leukemia earlier this month struck the hearts of many in the community, and as he was spending his final days with family and



**CHARLEY LAVENTURE** (above) was an avid biker. At right, Jaysen Love, Logan Anderson, Nick Graves and Stephen Sanchez are busy building "Charley's Trail."

Photos by Adam Lapierre(right) and Sally LaVenture (above)



*'Charley loved mountainbiking second only to surfing... he would be honored to have a trail with his name on it...'*

SALLY LAVENTURE

friends, a small crew of young men started work on a new trail in the peaceful forest not far from where LaVenture lived.

When completed, the trail will be named "Charley's Trail," in memory of the outdoorsman, artist and friend who shared his positive at-

*Please see CHARLEY, Page A2*

## CHARLEY

*Continued from Page A1*

itude and zest for life with the community he loved.

"Charley would be so honored to have a trail with his name on it in Hood River, the town he called home for 34 years," said Sally LaVenture, Charley's wife. "He loved mountain biking second only to surfing, I'd say. He always wanted to build a trail from start to finish but never got the chance. He helped work on a few in Post Canyon over the years.

"I can't think of a nicer present for him than to have a trail with his name on it. He would be thrilled."

Jim Thornton, a trails manager for the U.S. Forest Service, volunteered his time to help build the trail, and as a friend of LaVenture's, Thornton couldn't think of a better name for it.

"The LaVentures have helped out a lot of people in this community over the years," Thornton said. "They were very much about the community. Something as simple as a little trail doesn't really do justice to a guy like Charley, but it's a nice touch for the community."

With volunteer leadership from Thornton, and funding from a National Park Service Grant — passed down by Hood River County Forestry

— a handful of young men from Hood River's WINGS program have been working on the trail twice a week for the last several weeks. WINGS provides transitional housing and opportunities to learn job and life skills to young adult males, many of whom have been through foster care or homelessness.

"It's a fabulous program," said Henry Buckalew, Hood River County Forestry trails coordinator. "We've been in contact with them (WINGS) for about a year with ideas for future projects; I'm glad to see this come into fruition."

The county received about \$17,000 in National Park Service grant funding to use for improvements to visitor services and sustainable trail systems. Of that money, \$4,000 was set aside to use as wages for the WINGS workers, who were happy to take on a \$12 an hour job in such a scenic setting.

"We are happy to be a part of the program," Buckalew said. "And the young men do great work. We will definitely hire them again if we have the opportunity.

"It's hard work, and it's a little slow, but I enjoy being out here," Jaysen Love said Wednesday, with a flat-ended tool called a McLeod in his hands. "I definitely want to ride this when it's done. I have to get a bike first, but it looks like a lot of fun."

After a bit of chit-chat,

Love and his co-workers, Logan Anderson, Nick Graves and Stephen Sanchez got back to work cleaning, scraping and tamping Charley's Trail into the hillside.

With winter fast on its way, the crew is working to get as much of the trail laid down as possible while weather permits. Thornton said he expects it to be completed sometime next year, but before then he plans on having a work party or two where community members can help with finishing touches.

"We'll have a 'Charley Day' on the trail," Thornton said. "Probably sometime in the spring, once the weather gets better."

After hearing about the trail, Sally LaVenture wrote the following letter from Colorado:

"Charley would be so honored to have a trail with his name on it in Hood River, the town he called home for 34 years. He loved mountain biking second only to surfing I'd say. He loved bikes in general, working on them, teaching people about them, talking about them and practicing new techniques to use on trails. He had his share of bikes over the years, always

wanting to try out a new one, one with more travel, one that was lighter, one with a different geometry.

"He took care of his bikes so well he never had any trouble selling them when he was ready for the next one. Every bike that he passed, whether he was on foot, in a car or on a bike, he had to check out. He knew the brand and noticed the parts, the tires, the seat height. He was a bike man for sure.

"He started mountain biking in the early '80s I think, just tooling around on any dirt road he could find in the Hood River Valley. Post Canyon soon followed and then he traveled to Washington and the upper valley for more rides. He had an epic day on Mount St. Helens with Hood River friends years ago that he still talked about. Many of his biking buddies were quite a bit younger than he was but he was a strong rider and loved being out on a ride with friends.

"He enjoyed a good trail the most; he tried the stunts in Post Canyon for a while but as they got more radical he went back to trail riding. He went to Whistler several times with Hood River friends to go downhill riding

which he loved as well. I am grateful he never hurt himself doing that.

"He always wanted to build a trail from start to finish but never got the chance. He helped on a few in Post Canyon over the years. I can't think of a nicer present for him than to have a trail with his name on it. He would be thrilled. When we moved to Colorado he rode quite a bit, excited by the new terrain. Just a month before he died he was riding near Boulder with our daughter Willow, her boyfriend, Adam, and me. He was always a teacher, getting us to stretch, to try a new section, to push our limits.

"Even when his back hurt, he would always be up for a mountain bike ride. He said the adrenaline was good for his body. He always had a big grin on his face after a ride. When we have a memorial celebration for Charley in Hood River this summer we'll have to have it on the new trail; seems like it will be good place to spread some of his ashes."