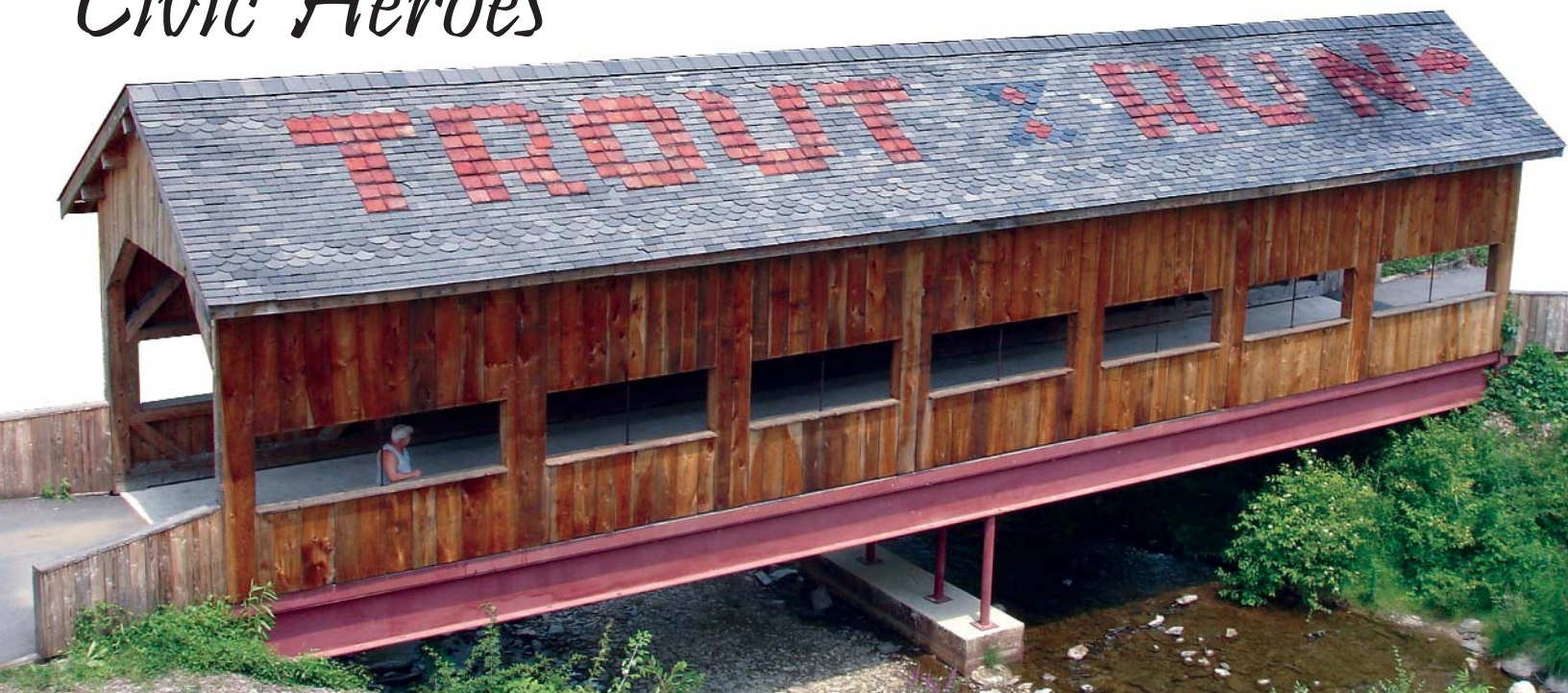


Civic Heroes



Business owners in the slate roofing industry can be among the most generous when donating time and materials for civic projects. There is a long list of such “civic heroes,” including Camara Slate, Williams and Sons, Black Diamond, Sheldon Slate, Greenstone Slate, and many others.

Pete Papay, of Penn Big Bed Slate Company in Slatedale, PA, went above and beyond the call of duty when a rails to trails project required civic leadership — he volunteered to be Chairperson of the Northern Lehigh Historical Society Rails to Trails Committee. The old railroad beds that once served the slate and coal industries have faded into disuse over the past several decades, but are now being revived as trails that are perfect for biking, hiking and horseback riding. Pete’s trail starts in Slatedale and extends 3.3 miles to the Lehigh River where it ends at an old railroad depot in Slatington.

The trail, which parallels Trout Run the entire way, will eventually be black topped, with completion expected in about two years, maybe longer. The Northern Lehigh Historical Society, founded as a non-profit organization around 1996, took on a big project when it decided to build a covered bridge over Trout Creek on the bike trail. Volunteers and donations brought in \$90,000.00; grants exceeded \$200,000.00, and local politicians added their clout to raise even more money for the bridge.

The structure was designed by Mr. Papay, approved by engineers and, starting in 1999, was built by volunteers on original bridge abutments where the old railroad bridge had once sat. The abutments were reconditioned, then five new steel I-beams, each 73’ long and 26” high, spanned across the creek from abutment to abutment. The bridge itself was built of local hemlock, rough sawn and stickered to dry before assembly. Construction continued until 2004. A concrete deck completed the inside of the bridge and a roof was added to keep out the rain.

But not any old roof. Pete designed the roof using 10”X12” Pennsylvania gray slate with Indian silver gray and salvaged New York red slate used in the inscription design. The slate roof was the final crowning jewel of the bridge, with the last slate being nailed into place by Pete himself in 2004 during a dedication ceremony attended by 2,000 people. The ceremony has now become an annual event, taking place the first Saturday in October — a “fall festival” complete with fireworks, food, live music, kids activities, beverages,

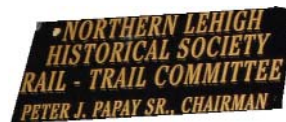
and fundraising.

Crowds that size need facilities with water and toilets, so of course, Pete rose to the task, designing a facility with materials he knew best: slate.

The “slate house,” completed in 2006, is constructed of solid slate walls from the Penn Big Bed slate quarry, eight inches thick. The interior partitions are also solid slate, four inches thick. The building’s primary purpose is to provide toilet facilities for both men and women, including handicap access stalls. Volunteers clean the facility and supply necessities. “We don’t know who supplies the toilet paper, but somebody’s doing it,” Pete explains.

The roof of the slate house is built of local, rough-sawn hemlock lumber, the traditional style of construction that has produced so many area roofs that have lasted a century or more. Again, roof slate graces the building, donated by Penn Big Bed, Camara Slate, Sheldon Slate and Greenstone Slate Company. “The purpose of the roof is to show people there are slates from other parts of the country,” Pete adds. Two different beds of Pennsylvania “hard end” slate from Slatedale were used, plus slate from Pen Argyl, PA, plus slate from Vermont, all 3/8” thick and 12”X18” in size. A second restroom is scheduled to be built at the end of the trail by the Slatedale ballfield when all is said and done.

If you happen to be near Slatedale in October and are working up a thirst for a cold beer, or maybe just want to gaze at the fall foliage or listen to a trout stream gurgle past as kids play nearby, now you know where to go. Take your bike and really get the most out of the experience. And as you glide down the trail, holding onto your handlebars and gazing at the sun streaming through the golden and yellow canopy, you will fully appreciate the contribution of many volunteers, including the slate industry’s civic heroes. ☐



Penn Big Bed Slate Company, Inc., PO Box 184, 8450 Brown St., Slatington PA 18080; Ph: 610-767-4601; Fax: 610-767-9252



Pete Papay, above, below, and on opposite page, displays the results of the hard work of many generous volunteers.

