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Firefly Trail exceeds Model Miles project fundraising goal; announces 'thank you' celebration

MAXEYS, Ga. – June 6 2017 – Thanks to the generosity of more than 300 donors, Firefly Trail Inc., exceeded its Model Miles Project fundraising goal, receiving nearly \$62,300 in donations to augment trail segments to be built in Maxeys, Union Point and Athens-Clarke County.

To celebrate, Firefly Trail Inc., will hold a "thank-you" party for donors, friends and the general public on Thursday, June 15, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Terrapin Beer Co., 265 Newton Bridge Road, Athens. Everyone is welcome.

"Our Board is amazed, humbled, proud and grateful," said Ivette Bledsoe, fundraising committee chair. "We knew there was a huge amount of support for the trail, but to exceed our extremely ambitious goal shows how much people want a safe, level place for exercise and active transportation in our communities."

The funds will be used to help the three cities extend, enhance and promote their soon-to-be-built sections of the trail. When completed, the Firefly Trail will extend about 39 miles from downtown Athens to downtown Union Point, following the historic route of the Georgia Railroad Athens Branch through a number of charming Georgia towns, including Winterville, Crawford and Woodville in addition to Union Point, Maxeys and Athens.

By using the abandoned railroad corridor wherever possible, the trail will provide an off-road path through Northeast Georgia's hills and valleys. Wide and level, it will be suitable for walkers, runners and cyclists of all ages and abilities. Trails provide a safe place where people can exercise for better health and engage in active transportation separated from busy roads. Rail-trails in hundreds of other communities across the U.S. have also become engines for economic development, attracting tourism and creating opportunities for business growth, historic preservation and environmental protection.

The goal for the campaign, which began with the Firefly Trail 6th Annual Ticket to Ride on March 25, was \$61,835, a figure that included \$60,000 for the trail and \$1,835 in administrative and consulting fees for IOBY (In Our Backyards), the fundraising service that hosted the crowdsource site and provided guidance and other resources. As of Monday afternoon, \$62,295 had been received, with additional donations still in progress.

The funds will be used as follows:

- \$25,000 will go to the City of Maxeys to match a \$100,000 federal Recreational Trails Program grant awarded by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The city will be able to use the

donated funds to pay initial costs of trail development and begin drawing down the grant, which is paid as reimbursements. The city intends to build a mile or more of paved path with unpaved side path for running, mountain biking and even horseback riding.

- \$30,000 will go to the City of Union Point, also to match a \$100,000 Recreational Trails Program grant that was announced earlier this year by Georgia Rep. Trey Rhodes. Union Point intends to build its first segment of trail from North Rhodes Street to the Union Point STEAM Academy, giving students and families a safe route to walk or bike to school, located just north of the intersection of Georgia Highways 77 and 44.
- \$5,000 will be used to assist with promoting the completion of the Firefly Trail from Old Winterville Road through the city of Winterville to the Oglethorpe County line. This project is being considered by the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government for inclusion in the 2017 Transportation Special Local Option Sales Tax referendum to be held in November. Athens-Clarke County is currently building the first segment of the trail from East Broad Street, over the North Oconee River and Peter Street, and just east of Oak Street to Old Winterville Road.

Additional funds raised by the campaign will be allocated by the Board to these and other Model Miles as needed.

"The Model Miles campaign was a tremendous challenge for our young Board," said Mark Ralston, 2017 Board Chair. "The success of this campaign is a result of the dedication and commitment of our entire Board, led by fundraising committee chair Ivette Bledsoe. Everyone gave generously of their time, talent and treasure to make this happen. We are three huge steps closer to making the Firefly Trail a reality."

The Model Miles Project fundraising campaign was highlighted by two major challenge matches. At the start of the campaign, Make Mine Home and Athens Physical Therapy paired up to pledge a dollar-for-dollar match up to \$5,000. Their funds were matched within days. Later in the campaign, Riverview Foundation pledged \$15,000 for a dollar-for-dollar matching campaign that also succeeded, generating momentum that carried the campaign over the goal.

Planning is underway for the June 15 celebration, Ralston said. Terrapin's tasting room will be open and normal charges will apply. For more information about the Terrapin event or progress on the Model Miles project, follow Firefly Trail's Facebook page or visit www.fireflytrail.com. You can also get updates on the progress of the first mile in Athens at www.athensclarkecounty.com/7136/Firefly-trail.