



ANDY NIEKAMP IS A TRAILBLAZER ON AND OFF THE TRAIL

White Mountains, New Hampshire

VOLUNTEER HELPS BUILD REGION'S OUTDOOR CULTURE

The chief adventure officer of Outdoor Adventure Connection (OAC) and an avid hiker, Niekamp also has been a Five Rivers MetroParks volunteer and supporter since 2010, when he attended a backcountry leadership development program. Niekamp has helped plan such outdoor events as the Wagner Subaru Outdoor Experience and The Adventure Summit – he even had his own cubicle at MetroParks' headquarters while coordinating the Club Membership Drive for OutdoorX – and has exhibited, presented and volunteered at these events.

Niekamp also is the founder and leader of Dayton Hikers, which has more than 3,300 members and often partners with MetroParks. He's also chair of the volunteer committee for the International Trails Symposium to be held in Dayton this May. OAC partnered with Five Rivers MetroParks last summer to participate in the Google Trekker program, when he led the effort to recruit members from Dayton Hikers who could carry the heavy Google Trekker camera/backpack on all of MetroParks trails.

Going by the trail name "Captain Blue," Niekamp hikes thousands of miles each year. He's hiked the entire Appalachian Trail in sections four times, logging more than 9,000 miles and becoming one of fewer than 12 people who've reported completing the trail four times.

In 2011, Niekamp hiked the 1,444-mile Buckeye Trail – the nation's longest circular trail that loops around the Buckeye State. His journey started at Deeds Point MetroPark and finished there 88 days later. The Buckeye Trail shares more than 800 miles with the 4,600-mile North Country National Scenic Trail, including the miles that run through Taylorsville, Island, Deeds Point, Eastwood and Huffman MetroParks.

Now, Niekamp's volunteerism with MetroParks is coming full circle: He's working with Outdoor Recreation Coordinator Angie Sheldon to present a new hike leadership training program that will teach community members how to manage risk and responsibly use parks and lead guided trips.

"It's the responsibility of all of us in the Dayton area to make this town the Outdoor Adventure Capital of the Midwest, and I want to do my part," Niekamp said. "Volunteering for Five Rivers MetroParks is an important component of keeping the outdoor recreation scene vibrant. I also get to help others lead healthy, active lifestyles and make new friends. It's really all about making our community a better place to live."