

## 2010 Report to Park Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Friends of the Smokies continued its mission to help preserve and protect Great Smoky Mountains National Park by raising funds and awareness and providing volunteers for needed projects. Somehow the 76th anniversary year didn't attract quite as much attention and as many donors as the 75<sup>th</sup>! However, positive notes included the Trails Forever program, the purchase of twenty acres of land adjacent to the Soak Ash Creek wetlands (often referred to as the Hoffman property), and the continued engagement of our supporters in our special events and fundraising activities. We feel optimistic for 2011. Friends of the Smokies thanks the park staff for their hard work and dedication!

### Highlights from 2010-

- The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Evergreen Ball raised more than \$350,000. The ball was a bright kickoff to a year of economic uncertainty. Inclement weather forced the postponement of the event by two weeks, with only hours' notice. David and Nancy Gray did a wonderful job of notifying volunteers and garnering recommitments for the new date. The Friends staff alerted the media and attendees. Everyone involved was tremendously understanding and supportive of the decision. The postponement did not dull the grandeur of the Evergreen Ball or diminish returns, as it raised \$40,000 more than the previous year.
- Without Dolly Parton backing everything Friends did throughout 2010 (as she did as the Park's Official 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ambassador in 2009), it was a bit more difficult to find the "Wow!" factor for the year. The Park staff stepped up to the plate and offered Friends an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity in the form of a footrace in Cades Cove on April 25<sup>th</sup>. For many years, individual runners and track clubs had vied for the chance to host just such an event. Two courses (a three-mile and a ten-mile) attracted runners of all ages and skill levels. With only five weeks to plan the event, and with participation limited by parking availability, the eventual total of \$18,000+ raised made it all worth it.



*Photographer Bruce McCamish captured this shot from the starting line using a camera mounted on a 40' boom.*

- There are so many positives from the 2010 Trails Forever program that it's hard to limit our enthusiasm. Christine Hoyer, the Volunteer Coordinator for Trails & Facilities, remains a vital reason why the program is so successful. Her technical abilities, public relations savvy and endless patience are all credits to Trails Forever. Throughout 2010, Christine updated the Trails Forever website with information about volunteer opportunities and progress reports (visit [www.smokiestrailsforever.org](http://www.smokiestrailsforever.org) for more info).

On the fundraising side of things, Sarah Weeks and Jim Hart enlisted Friends board member Natalie Haslam to recruit prominent Knoxvilleians Ann Furrow and Sherri Lee to serve as co-chairs for a new memorial fund within Trails Forever. Their combined hard work and dedication has resulted in over \$459,000 in gifts and pledges for the Tom Cronan Pathfinder Fund- so far. Wellness advocate Tom Cronan's favorite stress reliever was hiking Alum Cave Trail to Mt. LeConte. He thrilled at the opportunity to introduce people to his favorite destination. The generosity of Tom's friends, family, and associates of his wife Joan Cronan (UT's Women's Athletics Director) have brought the fund balance near its goal of \$500,000.

Many who love the Smokies already know Margaret Stevenson. Like Tom Cronan, she hiked Mt. LeConte religiously until her passing in 2006 (read her hiking journal online at <http://www.mtleconte.com/msleconte.htm>). In fact, Margaret's last hike to Mt. LeConte was with Tom Cronan! For many years Margaret Stevenson's Wednesday Hikers made holiday gifts in her honor to Friends of the Smokies, establishing a fund totaling \$42,000. When the Wednesday Hikers heard of the matching component of the Trails Forever endowment, they voted unanimously to make the Margaret Stevenson Fund part of Trails Forever, thereby doubling the balance.

Trails Forever, the most ambitious fundraising campaign in Friends of the Smokies' 17-year history, is creating a legacy not only for the Friends organization but also for three very special people who loved Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Trails Forever started as the dream of the Aslan Foundation of Knoxville and Lindsay Young's family. The foundation pledged a \$2 million matching grant to establish an endowment for hiking trail improvements in the Smokies. As Friends of the Smokies raises \$2 million, the Aslan Foundation matches it dollar-for-dollar. Lindsay Young's family felt that ensuring the conservation of the Park's trail system in perpetuity would be a fitting tribute to Lindsay's memory. He loved the Smokies, and as a founding board member of Friends of the Smokies was passionate about Park preservation.

In 2010, the Aslan Foundation's match portion was \$400,000.

On a gorgeous fall day, Friends President Jim Hart, Board Chair Mark Williams, and Board Advisor Jack Williams joined Superintendent Dale Ditmanson and Deputy Superintendent Kevin FitzGerald on a hike out to Andrew's Bald on the Forney Ridge Trail with Christine Hoyer (the park's Trails Forever supervisor) and Tobias Miller. They were able to see firsthand the work that has been done, and they got to meet some of the Trails Forever volunteers.

At the Friends of the Smokies November 2010 board meeting, Mark Williams commented that the scope of work performed by the Trails Forever crew is amazing, especially considering that it has all been accomplished without the use of heavy equipment. However, the trails do not look manmade. It's all done with manual labor. He said the volunteers they met on the trip that day are "the happiest bunch you'd ever wanna meet." Mark also complimented the hard work of Tobias Miller and

Christine Hoyer. They are constantly on the trails interacting; making sure people are doing what they are supposed to be doing.

One of the aims of the Trails Forever program was to provide an opportunity for volunteers and youth to get involved in the park. In 2010, eight separate groups of college students did alternate spring break work trips in the Smokies performing Trails Forever projects.



*Representatives of the leadership of Friends of the Smokies and Great Smoky Mountains National Park thanked Trails Forever volunteers for their hard work.*

- The year closed strong with more than 350 donors giving \$51,000+ to Friends of the Smokies' year end appeal. The generosity of those who are passionate about the preservation and protection of the Smokies is simply amazing. Donors had the option to contribute directly to fund the purchase of the Hoffman property- 20 acres of land in Pittman Center, Tennessee surrounded on three sides by Great Smoky Mountains National Park adjacent to the Soak Ash Creek Wetlands.

Friends of the Smokies is working to transfer the 9.51-acre undeveloped parcel to park ownership as soon as possible. Friends and the park are still assessing potential uses for the other tract, which includes 10.32 acres and a substantial house. Possibilities include using the facility to host park staff and visiting researchers and/or to support the operations of Friends or other park partner groups.

The park's beauty and biodiversity remain constant with Friends of the Smokies' help. The Soak Ash Creek Wetlands (which at 27 acres is one of the largest wetland areas in our national park) are foraging grounds for black bears and are a rich habitat for birds (including 5 species on the US Fish & Wildlife Service's 2008 list of Birds of Conservation Concern: Peregrine falcon, Kentucky warbler, cerulean warbler, wood thrush, and worm-eating warbler) and native plant species.

See map of property and photos on next page.

