



A Nature Trail now for the Verde Campus!

INTRODUCTION

This booklet relates the story of two walking trails on Yavapai Community College property and how their development has been so different. One trail has a 24-year history of failure in its development. That trail is on the Verde Campus on the East side of the county. The second trail has a 13-year history of success in its development and is located on the Prescott Campus on the West side of the County.

This booklet argues that there has been extraordinary development favoritism given to the West County trail when compared to development of the East County trail. It also argues that serious development of a trail system on the Verde Campus should begin.

VERDE CAMPUS ACREAGE

The Verde Campus in Clarkdale is located on about 120 acres. At least 85 acres of that property is vacant and covered with brush, rocks, grass, mesquite and other small trees and bushes. By the end of 2017 there will be a total of 13 acres planted as a vineyard.¹ The remaining land of about 22 acres is occupied by Campus facilities.

A 1993 VERDE CAMPUS TRAIL VISION

The vacant land sits on a gentle sloping mountain side containing a handful of small washes. Most believe that it is an excellent site for a nature trail that could serve many purposes.² Most also believe that such a trail would be a “win-win” for the College and the citizens living in the Verde Valley.

A 1993 VERDE CAMPUS TRAIL VISION

The faculty on the Verde Campus envisioned a nature trail on the vacant land in 1993. They perceived that a nature trail could promote the conservation of the natural area for the edification and enjoyment of the Verde Valley. They also perceived that a nature trail could promote community education about the biological and cultural aspects of the Verde Valley. When they looked over the vacant 85 plus acres on the Verde Campus, they saw the property as providing a natural environment that incorporated clearly marked trails where community members could walk and possibly ride bicycles. They also saw the possibility that a Verde Campus nature trail could be linked to other planned and existing trails in the immediate area. Moreover, a well-developed trail could provide insight into the cultural heritage of the Native Americans who once lived and worshiped in the area.

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1. The College will have planted a total of 13 acres of vines through Spring 2016 on Yavapai College’s Verde Valley campus. <http://southwestwinecenter.org/student-run-vineyard/> (last visited November 2016).
 2. Three of these communities, Clarksdale, Cottonwood, and the Verde Villages, abut the college property. Jerome is about five miles from the property.

FACULTY AND CITIZENS BUILD A TRAIL

Two Yavapai College instructors, Professors Jon Freriks and Jim Bostwick, were moved by the 1993 faculty vision to do something about a nature trail on the vacant 85 plus acres. They decided to take it upon themselves to build a primitive trail system.³ It meant moving rocks, pulling weeds, and a lot of hard work. After an enormous amount of effort on their part and assistance from students, fellow instructors, and members of the community, they were successful. The result was a series of short primitive walking trails on a significant portion of the vacant land. Although primitive, from 1993 to 2004 the trails created by the professors were used by the residents of the local communities, students, and faculty.⁴

THE 2005 VERDE TRAIL GRANT

In 2005 Yavapai faculty member Professor Chris Breitmeyer applied for and received a grant to further enhance and develop the existing short primitive nature walking trails. The purposes of the Verde Campus trail system were described by Professor Breitmeyer as follows:⁵

Preservation: To promote the conservation of a natural area with the city of Clarkdale

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3. The trail would not be paved or contain steps or other walking accoutrements.
 4. The Community College never publicized the existence of the trail to the Community.
 5. Language found in Professor Breitmeyer's grant application.

THE 2005 VERDE TRAIL GRANT

for the edification and enjoyment of the community.

Education: To promote community education about the biological and cultural aspects of the Valley.

Recreation: To provide a natural environment with clearly marked trails where community member can enjoy opportunities via foot, bicycle.

Community Connectivity: To provide safe and convenient access to, from and through the Verde Valley campus and link the trail to other planned and existing trails.

Professor Breitmeyer received help from his fellow instructors, students and community members for the project. Records show Professor Breitmeyer used the grant revenue to purchase and plant 52 varieties of trees and plants along the primitive trails. The grant also provided funds for construction of sturdy outdoor placards that contained interpretative signage that highlighted the unique landscape. He and his helpers erected the placards along the trails.

The trees and plants set out by Professor Breitmeyer required a great deal of attention including regular watering. During monsoon season, a portion of a walking trail might wash out because of a sudden downpour and had to be repaired. Professor Breiteyer saw to it that the plants were watered and the trails repaired.

PRESCOTT IGNORES THE TRAIL

Unfortunately, Professor Breitmeyer left the College around 2007/08. When he left, the Administration in Prescott was asked to ensure the nature trails developed by him were maintained. The Administration refused. The Administration allowed the trails to be washed out and the plants to die. When asked to explain why the College was allowing this to happen, one Vice President replied that the trails were potentially dangerous and not ADA compliant.

CHAPTER SUPPORTS NATURE TRAIL

In 2008-09 the newly formed Greater Verde Valley Chapter of the Yavapai College Foundation attempted to come to the aid of the dying trees and plants, crumbling trails, and cracked and broken hoses. When the College refused to replace a culvert so pedestrians could safely cross from a street to a walking trail, the Greater Verde Valley Chapter stepped in. Chapter member Randy Garrison arranged to use his own equipment to install a culvert to make access safe.⁶ In the fall of 2008 the Chapter asked communities in the surrounding area to help save the primitive trail system. In 2009, the Chapter ran the following request asking for help to save the trail system in the local newspaper.⁷

“The second annual Yavapai College Trail Improvement Party is scheduled for 9-11 a.m. Come see the improvements on this lovely trail south of the campus. Bring your

6. Mr. Garrison was elected in 2016 as the District 3 County Supervisor.

7. Taken from minutes of Greater Verde Valley Chapter.

WILLS BECOMES PRESIDENT

own tools such as clippers, shovels, loppers and rakes. Also please bring or wear protective clothing for shrubs and sun protection. Light refreshments will be served. Please meet in the south parking lot. For questions please call Greater Verde Valley Chapter of Yavapai Foundation at (928) 634-8507.”

Despite the Chapter’s efforts, the trail system continued to deteriorate. Because of continued opposition from the College Administration in Prescott, the efforts to save the trail system were abandoned in 2010. The College administration had won.

It should be noted that the Verde Valley Chapter of the Yavapai College Foundation wrote a document entitled, *Principles of Land Use* in 2008. Development of a serious nature trail was included in that document. The document was presented to the Yavapai Governing Board and endorsed by the communities surrounding the Verde Campus.⁸

WILLS BECOMES PRESIDENT

Dr. Penelope Wills became president of Yavapai College in August, 2011. She ignored the *Principles of Land Use* document. By 2011, the primitive trails continued to wash out; the plants were mostly dead.

8. The presentation to the Governing Board was made in August 15, 2008. It can be viewed at <https://www.yc.edu/v5content/district-governing-board/sub/2008/08/Governing%20Board%20presentation.pdf> (last visited April, 2017).

ARCHITECT'S OFFER REJECTED

In the spring of 2013 a Clarkdale architect, Renee Radocia, was contacted by the author. He was asked to volunteer his time and effort to draft a possible nature trail on the vacant land on the Verde Campus. He agreed to do so. However, he needed a scale drawing of the Verde Campus before he could begin his work. When College President Penelope Wills was contacted by the author and asked to provide such a drawing, she refused. She also rejected the offer of free architectural support for the project saying it was not time for it.

UPDATEDTEN-YEAR PLAN

In December 2013 the College announced an ambitious 10-year capital development plan. That plan estimated spending \$103.5 million in new capital development with less than 5% coming to the Verde Valley.⁹

Initially, prior to revision, the development plan gave the nature trail on the Verde Campus only passing acknowledgement observing that it is “poorly defined” and has “safety concerns.” However, an updated version of the plan is more positive. It states the following:

An unmaintained nature trail begins at the southern edge of the developed portion of the Verde Valley Campus and extends to the

9. The plan was modified several times and by March, 2017 the total capital spending had been reduced to about \$76 million with about 13% of that revenue going to the Verde Campus.

A TRAIL FOR THE PRESCOTT CAMPUS

west. An opportunity exists to upgrade the quality of this trail system to provide an additional recreational feature on Campus.¹⁰

It goes on to state that:

Improvements to upgrade the existing trail system will enhance the recreational offerings on Campus and serve as an extension of Campus open spaces. It will also help strengthen community connections.¹¹

A TRAIL FOR THE PRESCOTT CAMPUS

The story of a nature trail on the Prescott Campus on the West side of the County is as different as night and day when compared to the East side. Planning for such a trail on the Prescott Campus began around 2004. Prescott administrators, working with the College Foundation, quickly moved ahead with plans for its development. It took about two years before a basic nature trail was fully developed on that Campus.

The Prescott Campus nature trail encircles the Campus and is 1.5 miles long. It is a non-motorized trail for pedestrians and bicycles. The College describes the trail as “built to preserve our natural areas, provide recreational opportuni-

10. Yavapai College Master Plan, page 45 as updated. https://masterplan.yc.edu/files/2014/01/Final-Report-RPT-2014-0218-WEB_UPDATED.pdf (last visited April, 2017).

11. *Ibid.*

A TRAIL FOR THE PRESCOTT CAMPUS

ties, and encourage biological, and cultural opportunities for all. It is an official Arizona State Trail, carefully designed and built to be natural and sustainable with the help of a Heritage Fund Grant and local contributors.”¹²

The College also says that “although the college board approved development of the trail, the trail was funded with grants and donations independent of general college funds. As part the Arizona state trail system, Yavapai College's 25-year commitment includes providing ongoing maintenance to keep the trail accessible for all users as a community resource.”¹³

In early 2016 the College Foundation sought and obtained financial support to repair the trail from the damage created by the historic 2014 monsoon season. The College also created a list of future projects for the trail that included informational kiosks and interpretive signage to highlight the unique landscape.

In October, 2016 the College announced that it was in a partnership with *CrossFit, Inc.* to make significant improvements to the trail. It announced that *CrossFit* had agreed to provide exercise stations at various increments along the trail for trail users interested in adding another level of physical activity when on the trail. The new exercise stations along with a trail head gazebo were installed and ready for use by the end of October, 2016.¹⁴

12. See <https://www.yc.edu/v5content/yavapai-college-trail/>
(Last visited April, 2017).

13. *Ibid.*

VERDE VALLEY COMMITMENT

In November 2016 the College President reported to the Governing Board that because of funding provided by *CrossFit*, the trail would soon be outfitted with a main information kiosk near the College tennis courts and fitness stations installed along the route.¹⁵ She also said that the trail would be included in the next printing of the City of Prescott trail maps.

VERDE VALLEY COMMITMENT

The president also reported to the Governing Board at the November 2016 meeting that in 2015-2016 the College continued planning activities about a trail with the West Mingus Avenue Project partners (City of Cottonwood, U.S. Forest Service, and the town of Clarkdale). As part of ongoing wayfinding and open space improvement, she said the College is exploring enhancement of the trail system south of the Verde Valley Campus, which would connect with the West Mingus Avenue project. This effort, per the president, is described as a partnership to preserve and connect trails systems.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Today, on the Verde Campus, the plants and trees carefully and lovingly planted by Professor Breitmeyer and his helpers about 12 years ago are dead or dying. What is left

14. Although the College anticipated the project to be completed by the end of 2016, it was not until March, 2017 that it was finished.

15. See https://www.yc.edu/v5content/district-governing-board/sub/2016/11/agenda_full.pdf (Last visited April, 2017).

16. *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

of the small nature trails has returned to its more primitive form. Meanwhile, on the Prescott Campus, there is a beautiful well-developed nature trail, which is an attractive and useful asset for the College and the community. What's the difference? Politics, power, and the personal views of the Yavapai Community College administrations and the control of the District Governing Board by the three member West County voting bloc.

Solution: If the communities on the East side of the County are to have a trail on the Verde Campus anything like that on the Prescott Campus, they must politically join together and present an agreed upon comprehensive plan to the Administration and District Governing Board. Annually, the College has millions of dollars at its discretion to spend on capital projects. It can easily spend some of that revenue on building a superior nature trail on the Verde Campus. Furthermore, with the aggressive assistance of the Yavapai College Foundation, thousands of dollars can be collected to support a nature trail on the Verde Campus.

It is now time to begin. Among those to consider including in a plan are: (1) Yavapai College administrators, (2) Yavapai Apache Nation, (3) Yavapai College Foundation, (4) Verde Villages, (5) Jerome, (6) Clarkdale, (7) Cottonwood, (7) Forest Service, (8) (Camp Verde) (9) Sedona.

Table 1: Timeline

1993	Instructors Jon Freriks and Jim Bostwick, with help from students, fellow instructors, and members of community, carve out primitive walking trails.
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CONCLUSION

Table 1: Timeline

1993-2004	Primitive trails used by community, students, faculty.
2004	Professor Chris Breitmeyer applies for grant to enhance nature trail.
2004	Plans begun for Prescott Campus Nature Trail.
2005	Chris Breitmeyer receives grant to further enhance and develop the primitive nature trail. (College did not match the funding.)
2005-06	With help of fellow instructors, students and community members, Breitmeyer plants the trees and small plants he received as a part of the grant.
2006	Breitmeyer places placards/standards describing the history and flora in several spots along the nature trails he is developing
2006-2007	Breitmeyer leaves Verde Campus.
2006/2007	Prescott Campus nature trail in place.
2007-08	Administration refuses to water plants or to otherwise maintain and/or encourage further development of trails on Verde Campus.
2008	The 52 varieties of plants and trees are dying because of lack of water and care. Watering hoses crack and are not replaced.
2008	Cultural walking trail is included in the "Principles of Land Use" document prepared by the Greater Verde Valley Chapter of the Yavapai College Foundation. The cultural trail is endorsed by the communities and their officials adjacent the Verde Campus.
2013	College responds to request for scale drawing for architect to design trails at no cost to College with "it's not time yet."
2013	Ten-year Master Plan says the trail on the Verde Campus "appreciated, but poorly defined and has caused safety problems." Revised version much more positive.
2016	Nature trails return to primitive form.
2016	President says City of Cottonwood, U.S. Forest Service, and the town of Clarkdale working on West Mingus trail project with College.