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## Somerset eyes train station

Saturday, November 19, 2011  
 By Larry Walsh, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Somerset County is applying for a \$4.5 million grant to design and build an Amtrak station for passenger train service in Rockwood, but it knows it has a lot of competition for the grant.

Commissioners **Pamela Tokar-Ickes**, **Jim Marker** and **John Vatavuk** directed the county's planning commission Tuesday to apply through PennDOT for a "Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery" grant.

"It's a highly competitive grant," said **Brad Zearfoss**, executive director of the planning commission. "More than 1,000 applications have been filed, and only about 50 will be approved.

"If our application is approved, the station could be built in 2013 or 2014," he said Friday.

In addition to bicyclists riding the Great Allegheny Passage just across the Casselman River from Rockwood, a station would serve Somerset and other nearby towns, all the overnight facilities in those communities, Hidden Valley and Seven Springs resorts and Kooser, Laurel Hill and Laurel Ridge state parks.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad maintained a passenger station in Rockwood for its Capitol Limited passenger trains until 1971 when Amtrak took it over. The old weathered one-story wooden station with faded and peeling cream-colored paint now is used by CSX work crews.

Zearfoss said a new station would be built near the Rockwood Mill Shoppes & Opera House, a landmark in the town for more than a century.

"We could provide services for passengers," said **Judy Pletcher**, its owner.

The renovated four-story, yellow-brick building offers limited food service, including made-from-scratch pizza, sandwiches and baked goods. Pletcher also owns The Hostel on Main that provides low-cost lodging for bicyclists and other visitors.

**Michael Baker Jr.** of Moon, which has built train stations, is scheduled to complete a feasibility study of the proposed station within 30 days.

Amtrak, which required train station supporters to pay for the \$55,000 study, conducted its own feasibility study in 2009. It determined that a stop in Rockwood would increase annual ridership on the Capitol Limited by 2,100 persons and earn the railroad about \$56,000.

"I think Amtrak's projections were too low," Zearfoss said. "There's a lot of interest in having a train station in Rockwood."

George S. Cook

**George S. Cook**, 89, chairman emeritus of Somerset Trust Company and a longtime member and director of the Somerset County Rails-to-Trails Association (SCRTA), died of cancer last Saturday.

He was an early and active supporter of the county's 42-mile segment of the Great Allegheny Passage, said SCRTA president **Hank Parke**.

"It was a project he really believed in," Parke said.

Cook and members of his large family -- six sons, 15 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren, were the first bicyclists to pedal through the Big Savage Tunnel after its official opening.

Mountain royalty

**Bob Stumpf**, 24, of Beaver and **Amanda Gannon**, 25, of Evans City, won the King and Queen of the Mountain Challenge of the annual Tour the Montour ride. The challenge, a voluntary 7/10ths of a mile climb up Hassam Road in Moon, was free to all tour participants. The road, which has an average grade of 8 percent, was closed to traffic. Bike-mounted computer chips timed each climb.

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Pitt was a dry run for Graham  
Krenn's disappearance from DVE  
airwaves unexplained  
Stumpf knocked more than a minute off of winning time last year. He and Gannon received a custom-designed cycling jersey courtesy of Aerotech Designs ([www.aerotechdesigns.com](http://www.aerotechdesigns.com)).

Taylor Swift: a 500-parent pop phenom  
who's breaking down the idea that teens  
must rebel  
More than 550 bicyclists participated in the annual tour, which raised \$11,755 for the trail. When completed, it will extend from near Coraopolis to Clairton and connect with the Great Allegheny Passage in McKeesport.

Popular donut and bagel shop damaged  
by fire today  
Larry Walsh writes about recreational bicycling for the Post-Gazette.

One teen dead, others wounded in  
Duquesne birthday gunfire  
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