7 – VIRGIL LEGACY AWARD – Bernie Dahl

Today Indiana enjoys over 4,000 miles of trails bettering the lives of millions of Hoosiers. However, only a fraction of these trails were open to the public when Bernie Dahl began his landmark tenure as an associate professor of Landscape Architecture at Purdue University in 1974.

Bernie was one of a vanguard of visionaries in the 1970’s to recognize the great potential of abandoned rail corridors as future trails. He channeled this passion into his students and in turn shaped the course of trail development history in Indiana.

Over the next 43 years at Purdue, Bernie Dahl and the hundreds of students under his tutelage tackled dozens of projects focused exclusively on the positive impacts of new trails for his client communities and regions. Many trails we enjoy today are directly attributable to Bernie and the vision of his students.

A sample of these successes include the Big 4 Trail from Lafayette to Lebanon, the Pennsy Greenway connecting Northwest Indiana to downtown Chicago, and the Nickel Plate Trail from Kokomo to Rochester. Each of these systems are significantly developed and are on course to be fully completed.

Bernie eventually rose to Chair of the department in 2002 where he helped elevate Purdue to one of the top ten programs in the nation. Not only content with planning, but Bernie was also the principal author on a number of grants that lead to the awarding of millions of dollars for trail construction.

Bernie further advanced the profession by sharing his wisdom in several books and articles he co-authored. He also aided his students in the development of award-winning designs in mined land reclamations. Bernie also lent his significant expertise as President of the Banks of the Wabash and served on the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission.

For his outstanding service towards the advancement of his field, Bernie was elevated as a Fellow of the American Association of Landscape Architects, as well as Purdue’s first Fellow of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture.

On a personal note, Bernie was my professor at Purdue, and continues today as my mentor. Everything I have achieved in my profession is a direct result of Bernie’s guidance and interest in a wild eyed, motormouthed student. I am forever thankful for your inspiration of strength in humility and belief in me Bernie.

In recognition for his many years of dedication, passion and service, the Greenways Foundation is proud to award Bernie Dahl as our inaugural Diana M. Virgil Legacy Awardee for 2022.