

Short bio of Craig Della Penna

What an interesting life journey I've had. Today, I have a unique niche real estate practice, specializing in houses near to walking or biking pathways and antique or historic houses.

I am the 1st REALTOR in the U.S. with this niche, and I have been featured twice in National Realtor Association magazines—twice in the Certified Residential Specialist Magazine, and twice in the Massachusetts Association of Realtors magazine. I was recently featured in a national Wellness oriented Real Estate magazine.

I've also been written about in an editorial for the *Boston Globe*, an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, and even a story for the *United Airlines in-flight magazine*, *Hemispheres*, called [Roads Less Traveled](#).



The National Association of REALTORS recently awarded me the National EverGreen Award at the NAR conference in Chicago, for not only being the 1st REALTOR in the U.S. to have this special niche real estate practice, but also for my accomplishments in getting trails built all over the Northeast U.S. I also hold the Certified Residential Specialist designation—CRS. Only 2% of Realtors in my service area have this designation.



How I got here is quite different from most people in this industry. Early in my adult life I worked in the railroad industry for PInslly Railroad Company marketing rail freight and planning the start-up and managing the operations of large scale, contemporary, transloading facilities. In the mid-1990s, while working for the railroad, I was invited to write a series of books on the history of old railroad lines converted to walking and biking trails (rail trails).



Two years after the first of three books on this subject came out, I got involved in the politics of how these paths did or did not get built and I began to actively organize "friends of the trail" groups in numerous communities all across New England where the idea of a rail trail might not be automatically seen with favor. In fact there were many places where opponents carried the day.

In the late 1990s, I was hired by the national organization, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, [RTC] as a political organizer/lobbyist in the New England region to not only prevent bad policy at the state and local level, but to also "parachute" into some of the most notable rail trail wars in the northeast. I am a "battle-hardened veteran" of nearly every rail trail war within 150 miles. In late 2001, while working for RTC, my wife Kathleen and I bought a badly run-down, circa 1865, farmhouse that sits next to (eight feet from) the rail trail in Northampton's historic Civil War era Industrial village of Florence.



We began a far-reaching renovation and had contractors there for fourteen months. Then, in the spring of 2003, we opened as a bed & breakfast called [Sugar Maple Trailside Inn](#). The renovation was even featured on [HGTV's Restore America](#) television program and the city gave us a Historic Preservation award as well.



In 2004, I left RTC, became a Realtor and focused on developing my

niche—selling houses near trails and greenways. This was of course in spite of what all those anti-path folks said was possible.

In 2005, I also set up two entities. One was the [Northeast Greenways Solutions](#) (NEGS) to teach communities and groups how to get their projects built. This was usually the vehicle I would do my lecture series. Today, having given over 1,200 lectures in twenty one states, I am one of the country's most in-demand public speakers on the subjects of rail-to-trail conversions and their tie-in to the issues surrounding smart-growth, land preservation, brownfield redevelopment, place-making, effects on nearby residential real estate values, sustainability and other similar topics.



In just the past few years, I have been the keynote or plenary speaker at state or regional conferences in New York, California, Virginia, Connecticut, Missouri, Michigan, and Massachusetts.

I also set up [Central Highlands Conservancy LLC \(CHC\)](#), a hybrid land acquisition vehicle to purchase former railroad corridor in Massachusetts to block sales to adjacent landowners.



Using CHC, we purchased 3.2 miles, including 3 large former RR bridges of the developing 100 mile trail called Mass Central Rail Trail. We gave the local land trust 2 years to buy us out, and after purchasing it from us, they then got grants to build out the trail and rehab the bridges to be safe and proper. We have also used CHC to teach others how to do this.

In their 10th anniversary issue, The Ride magazine named me as the most effective advocate for rail-to-trail issues on the Eastern seaboard, and I have helped build over 1,000 miles of rail trails in scores of communities in New England and New York.

And in 2016, I became an accredited teacher of REALTORS in both Massachusetts and Vermont, where I began teaching a course about these issues to scores of Realtors for their Continuing Education requirements.

In late 2016 and early 2017, I was invited to do a series of national webinars by American Trails about trail development tying in the effects on nearby real estate.

Also in early 2017, I launched a free, monthly e-newsletter that now goes out to over 10,000 readers. In fact, in the spring of 2019, Constant Contact, the company that hosts the newsletter, told us that it has won an award in that it is in the top 10% of all the thousands of e-newsletters they host world wide. Top 10% in terms of engagement with the readers, in opens, click-throughs, forwards to friends, or social media. Amazing!

In the past 5 years, 4 books have been written that feature me in them as a case study in creative marketing or 21st century branding. Another is coming out in mid 2021.

In the summer of 2019, I came onboard the [Norwottuck Network](#) as their Exec Dir. This is a 501c3 micro-funding organization set up to provide funding for historic kiosks along the trail as it develops. I am in the process of enlarging the board and we'll start doing some grants in mid-2021..



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