

Short bio of Craig Della Penna

What an interesting life-journey I've had. Early in my adult life I worked in the railroad industry for Pinsky Railroad

Company marketing rail freight and planned the start-up and managed the operations of large-scale, contemporary, railroad transloading facilities. In April of 1994, 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). Linear parks. The books were pretty detailed in terms of RR history, why it was there, why it went away and by way of a detailed, odometer-based mileage, it showed all the bits of RR infrastructure that was out there, where it was, and what it did etc.

The books were well-received and 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. I know is so foreign to 21st century people, the people were opposed to this idea.

In the late 1990s, I was hired by the national organization, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, [RTC] as a political organizer 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 of my house. In fact, within this circle lies the densest network of former steam RR corridor in North America and the vast majority is becoming trails.

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, village of Florence. We began a far-reaching renovation and had contractors there for 14 months.



Then, in the spring of 2003, we opened as a bed & breakfast called [Sugar Maple Trailside Inn](#). We won a Historic Preservation award from the city and the renovation was even featured on [HGTV's Restore America](#) television program.

In 2004, I left RTC, became a Realtor and focused on developing a unique niche—listing and selling houses near trails and greenways (and antique or historic houses). This was in direct response to all the antis I knew who said their houses would never be saleable if the dead RR behind their house became a trail. I have proved them all wrong.

I am the 1st Realtor in the U.S. with this niche, and I have been featured twice in National Realtor Association trade 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



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getting trails built all over the Northeast.

I also hold the Certified Residential Specialist designation—CRS. Only 3% of Realtors in the U.S. have this designation.



In 2005, I also set up two entities. One was the [Northeast Greenways Solutions](#) (NEGS) to teach local groups and communities how to get their projects to “YES”.

NEGS was usually the vehicle I would use for 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 late 2016 and early 2017, I was invited by [American Trails](#) to do a series of national webinars on these topics. And in the spring of 2022, I did another one with over 500 people from all over the U.S.



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

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



Using CHC, we purchased 3.2 miles of former railroad right of way. This included three, large former RR bridges of the developing 104+ mile trail called [Mass Central Rail Trail](#). This is the longest developing rail trail in Northeast it directly connects with [17 others](#). We gave the local land trust 2 years to buy us out—for our costs,

no mark-up. After purchasing it from us, the land trust then received grants to build out the trail and rehab the bridges to be safe and proper. We have also used CHC to teach other land trusts how to do this. There are now about 6 land trusts in the northeast that have a significant role in reassembling former RRs into linear parks. [Here’s an infographic](#) about the 40+ year journey to create a 104± mile long rail trail.

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.

Also in early 2017, I launched a free, basically monthly e-newsletter that now goes out to between 12K and 15K readers. In fact, in the spring of 2019, Constant Contact, the company that hosts the e-newsletter, told us that we won an award because 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 7 years, 5 books have been written that feature me in them as a case study in creative marketing or 21st century branding, and even a book about only working at things you love—and not things you don’t. The most recent one came out in April, 2021 and featured my RE practice. Amazing.

In the summer of 2019, I came onboard the 20 year old [Norwottuck Network](#) as their Executive Director. This is a 501c3 organization set up to help buildout the 104± mile long. Mass Central Rail Trail and as it develops provide funding for historic kiosks and even QR coded displays along the entire corridor. We have recently enlarged the board of directors and the mission. In the spring of 2022, we let out a request for proposals to find a consultant to [develop a report](#) that would define just what a completed Mass Central Rail Trail would mean to the Commonwealth and the communities along the way. This will be a very profile report which should be out in early 2023. On July 30, 2022 we are hosting our 8th Golden Spike conference. [GS2022.org](#). This update will have national speakers and will be held in Gilbertville.

