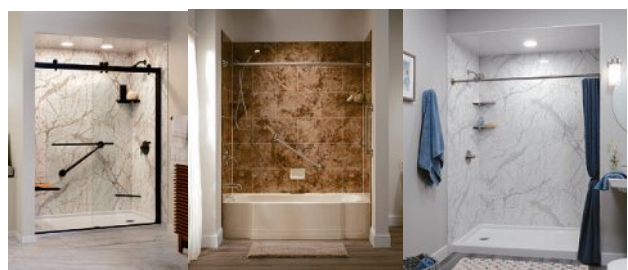


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ASHEVILLE PUBLIC HOUSING

Greater police presence planned

Sarah Honosky
Asheville Citizen Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

ASHEVILLE - A new agreement between the housing authority and Asheville Police Department will provide supplemental officers in public housing neighborhoods to enhance safety, security and “community stability,” according to city documents.

An April 20 news release from the Housing Authority of the city of Asheville said the “memorandum of agreement,” or MOU, is structured as a one-year pilot program funded by the housing authority, with regular coordination meetings, a formal 90-day review to assess progress to date, evaluate outcomes and make changes as needed.

Housing Authority CEO Ella Santos

said the partnership is a “direct response” to what the authority has heard from residents.

“They have told us they want to feel safe where they live — to be able to walk outside, spend time with neighbors, and let their kids play freely. That peace of mind matters, and it’s something every one of our residents deserves,” she said in the news release.

The authority will fund the initiative

through a reimbursement program for approved police department overtime, to not exceed \$200,000 over the next year.

The city will not provide any funding as part of the agreement. Santos told the Citizen Times in an April 21 phone call that additional enforcement will likely begin this week.

See **AGREEMENT, Page 6A**



The tallest point in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Kuwohi is full of majestic views. PROVIDED BY STEVEN REINHOLD

New marker proclaims start of cross-state trail at Kuwohi

Word from the Smokies Holly Kays | Guest columnist

In 2009, Danny Bernstein was looking for a new hiking challenge. • Having just finished all 850 miles of trails in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Asheville-based hiker and outdoor writer set her sights on completing the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, which stretches across the state of North Carolina from the Great Smoky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. • “Of course, we had hiked parts of the MST in the mountains, but where exactly was the western end of the trail?” said Bernstein, who completed it with her friend Sharon McCarthy. “It took us a while to find.”

In recent years, Bernstein has made it a personal mission to ensure that future hikers won’t have that problem. These efforts culminated in a ceremony atop Kuwohi on Thursday, April 9. Bernstein was one of several speakers addressing the more than 100 people gathered there for the unveiling of a new stone marker signifying the western terminus of the cross-state trail.

“First and foremost,” said Smokies Superintendent Charles Sellars, who opened the ceremony, “Kuwohi is a sacred place to the Cherokee people. . . . Kuwohi is also the highest point in the Smokies, rising to 6,643 feet, and is a beloved destination for visitors seeking views, recreation, and wonder. And beginning today, Kuwohi takes on another layer of meaning. It is now formally marked as the western terminus of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail.”



A backpacker pauses in front of the new terminus marker.

PROVIDED BY JIM MATHENY, COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES

See **MARKER, Page 4A**

Tensions escalate in Strait of Hormuz

Iran ceasefire holds with talks expected to resume soon

Bart Jansen, Michael Loria, Francesca Chambers and Andrea Riquier
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump’s ceasefire with Iran remained in place April 23 as tensions in the Strait of Hormuz continued and negotiations between Lebanon and Israel were expected to resume in Washington.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio and U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee were scheduled to participate in the talks, according to the State Department. At a previous meeting, the nations agreed to a 10-day truce between Israel and Hezbollah, an Iranian-backed group that operates out of Lebanon. It is set to expire April 26.

Meanwhile, talks to end the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran have stalled. Vice President JD Vance scrapped a planned trip to Pakistan for negotiations. Trump says he’s waiting for a “unified proposal” for peace, though the White House has declined to set a timeline for Iran’s response.

Trump on April 23 said he ordered the Navy “to shoot and kill any boat” putting mines in the Strait of Hormuz, as he blockades all shipping with Iran while trying to allow ships from other countries to pass safely through the key waterway.

“There is to be no hesitation,” Trump said on social media. “Additionally, our mine ‘sweepers’ are clearing the Strait right now. I am hereby ordering that activity to continue, but at a tripled up level!”

The president has said he will not call off the U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports, a move Iranian leaders say is a “flagrant breach of the ceasefire.” Top officials have called the blockade, as well as Trump’s recent threats, the “main obstacles to genuine negotiations.”

Trump said the U.S. military sank 159 ships from Iran’s navy.

See **TENSIONS, Page 8A**





Viewed from behind, the circle cut from the center of the stone marker perfectly frames Kuwohi Tower and, in this photo, the group that journeyed to the summit to install it in March. PROVIDED BY JIM MATHENY, COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF THE SMOKIES

Marker

Continued from Page 1A

Making the marker

The new marker stands to the side of the paved Kuwohi Tower Trail just before the stone circle at the summit and next to the dirt path connecting to the MST, which initially shares a route with the better-known Appalachian Trail. Created by Knoxville sculptor Preston Farabow, the marker contains design elements referencing the much larger, wooden marker at the trail's eastern terminus while also evoking a style authentic to the Smokies.

"I felt that an indigenous stone was an appropriate starting point for this end of the trail," he said, "and after multiple forays through backyard stone fields with Dana [Friends of the Smokies President and CEO Dana Soehn] and anyone else who appreciated the subtle joys found through looking at rocks, I chose Smoky Mountain gray marble, quarried just a few miles from this site."

As with the eastern terminus marker, the monument features a cutout circle with location and elevation information around the circumference. But it also includes a bronze plaque explaining what the MST is and how it came to be. And, at three feet wide and 40 inches tall, it is quite a bit smaller than its 10-by-11.5-foot counterpart in the Outer Banks.



Farabow



Bernstein

Though Friends of the MST had intended to eventually install a marker on the western end, Bernstein's efforts sped up the process considerably. The eastern terminus marker was completed in fall 2023 at Jockey's Ridge State Park in the Outer Banks, and the organization had other projects to attend to before navigating the complexities of installing a similar marker on federal land.

Following Hurricane Helene in September 2024, Friends of the MST faced what Executive Director Brent Laurenz termed the "Herculean task" of reopening hundreds of miles of closed trails. Bernstein was the "driving force" in moving the project forward, coordinating with Friends of the MST, the National Park Service, and Friends of the Smokies to see it through.

"I talked to everyone who had any knowledge on how to get started: retired rangers, friends groups, active Smokies employees," Bernstein said. "Everybody thought it was a great idea in theory. Dana Soehn, with her vast experience, was

my mentor, consultant, and facilitator every step of the way, and helped me with a real action plan, which I followed. All these years working for large companies, I knew hierarchy, and she told me what to do, and I did it."

Friends of the Smokies funded the project and connected Bernstein with Farabow, who had previously completed a project for the park. His monument commemorating NPS employees killed in the line of duty is located in the Sugarlands area near park headquarters.

"It's just amazing for me to think that from right here, we can all start our first steps on this journey that takes us from these ancient mountains to the sea and connects us from parks, to forests, to the rivers, and to the communities along the way," Soehn said. "And I think also a community of people who are disconnecting from their daily walk of life and are now connecting on a walk of a lifetime. The Mountains-to-See Trail is truly a place where countless memories are going to be made."

Inspiration for adventure

The group of trail enthusiasts and Smokies aficionados who applauded the unveiling had a standing familiarity with the trail, but despite being nearly 50 years old, the MST is not yet widely known.

"We joke we're not the Appalachian Trail," Laurenz said. "There's not a thousand-person line every year to try to

tackle the MST. Most people that have a goal of doing the whole thing are going to be section hikers."

Laurenz hopes the new marker will increase the MST's visibility. In 2025 alone, 834 people completed the 2,200-mile AT; in that same year, the MST recorded seven completions. Meanwhile, the Kuwohi area saw nearly 760,000 visits—and many of those people walked right past the spot where the marker now stands.

"The hope is that if you're up here just visiting the park, that [marker] draws your attention over, and then I hope it sparks some curiosity, some inspiration about the MST," Laurenz said.

The MST was built on inspiration. It traces its birth to a speech Howard Lee, then secretary of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Economic Resources (now the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources), gave in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, on September 9, 1977. Lee proposed a state trail that would stretch 450 miles from the mountains to the coast, giving visitors and residents alike "a real feel for the sights, sounds, and people of this state." The proposal came as a surprise to those in attendance—and to his friend then-governor Jim Hunt.

Explaining his preemptive announcement to Hunt "was not a pleasant meeting," as reported by the *Smoky Mountain News*.

See MARKER, Page 5A

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