

4-1-2019

A Trail Runs Through it

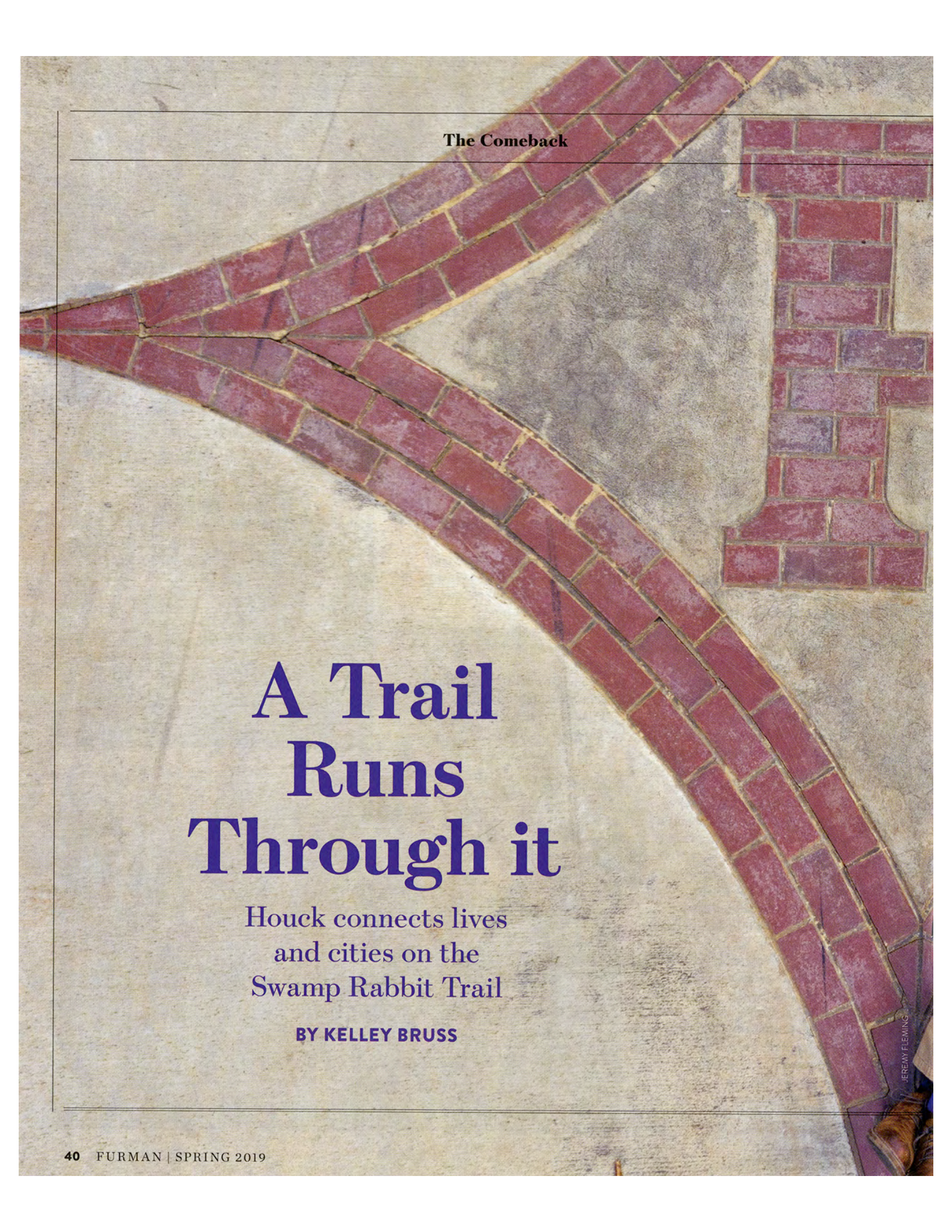
Kelley Bruss

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Bruss, Kelley (2019) "A Trail Runs Through it," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 62 : Iss. 1 , Article 23.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol62/iss1/23>

This Regular Feature is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.



The Comeback

A Trail Runs Through it

Houck connects lives
and cities on the
Swamp Rabbit Trail

BY KELLEY BRUSS

A man with dark hair, wearing a blue polo shirt with a "County Rec" logo and khaki pants, is leaning against a brick wall. He has his arms crossed and is smiling. The wall is made of light-colored concrete with a decorative border of red bricks. The background is a light-colored, textured wall.

The Comeback

Ty Houck '93 would like to make a suggestion: Come have lunch in Daniel Dining Hall.

Let your kids discover the thrill of unlimited soft-serve ice cream. And then ride that sugar rush right onto the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail.

The 22-mile greenway system celebrates its 10th birthday this year. Houck joined the Greenville County Rec department two years before the trail opened to shepherd it into existence and champion its growth.

"It was probably the role he was meant to play in his life," says Dianna Gracely, former city administrator for Travelers Rest.

"Ty's enthusiasm is contagious," says Julian Reed, professor of health sciences at Furman. "Do I think the trail would be successful without a Ty Houck? Yes, but not at the same level."

The Comeback



Students participating in the Riley Institute's Momentum Bike Clubs program encounter Houck while enjoying the trail, accompanied by volunteers Tedra Sheperd '18, Jose Morales '18, Hope Moore, and Meshelle Hannon.

Even Houck has been surprised. "I knew it would be popular," he says. "But it has exceeded my expectations."

The trail is used more than a half million times each year, for everything from exercise to recreation to transportation.

Reed completed a four-year study of trail use with the help of 150 students. He calls the trail "the largest and most

significant public health intervention" in the county.

A new experience for students

The trail has fundamentally changed the feel of Furman's campus since his days as a student, Houck says. Downtown Greenville and Travelers

Rest used to seem like unreachable outposts. Both are now accessible — and worth accessing.

Alumni rolling into Travelers Rest may find the view unfamiliar, either because they never saw a reason to visit while in school or, more likely, because the community was revitalized by the birth of the trail. Restaurants,

The Comeback



shops and green spaces line the trail through downtown.

Toward Greenville, the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail winds through the historic Textile Crescent.

"It is highly probable students never went to these parts of town," Houck says.

There's no getting lost. Google Maps, including Streetview, has trail users covered.

*"I knew it would be popular.
But it has exceeded my expectations."*

"The trail puts Main Street on a county scale," he says, which allows people to experience a broader sense of community.

That's the perspective that has made Houck such an effective advocate for the trail. "He looks at it universally and not just in this very small realm," Gracely says.

She was city administrator for Travelers Rest for 13 years before taking the same position in Simpsonville in early 2018. In the rush of interest that surrounded the opening of the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail, Gracely and Houck received numerous speaking invitations from other groups interested in creating trails.

No matter how many times she's heard Houck talk about the benefits, she always catches something new.

"It always inspires me to do something else," Gracely says. "He's so passionate about what he's doing."

The trail leads home

Houck followed a high school soccer teammate to Furman, but he didn't play soccer in college. In high school, he was yearbook editor and worked on the school newspaper, but his brief stab at an English major didn't pan out. He took some business classes, but that wasn't for him, either.

Then he took Geology 101.

"The smartest girl I knew was asking me for help, and I thought, 'I might need to stick in this realm,'" he says.

After earning his degree in geology, Houck moved to Colorado for a job at a summer resort accessible only by train or helicopter. Next came a stint as a "snowboard bum," but something inside kept bothering him: "This is not the best return on my investment for college."

Houck came back to South Carolina and became a park ranger with the State Park Service, a path that ultimately led him to Paris Mountain State Park.

When Greenville County created a position to manage trail development on the railroad corridor it had recently purchased, Houck was a natural fit.

Trails have always been part of his experience. His mom worked with the parks and recreation department when his family lived in Palm Beach, Florida. Houck used trails there not just for recreation but as his main way to get around without a car.

He biked and rollerbladed through his years at Furman, including skating the lengths of Plyler Hall. It's fair to say he's an advocate of life on wheels for everyone.

"You can ride on a bike before you can walk and you can ride a bike when you can no longer walk," Houck says.

The Comeback



Cyclists have easy access to local businesses located trail-side.

Personal connections

Houck can't talk very long without using the word "connections." A community connecting around the idea that a trail might be a good fit. Friends finding exercise more enjoyable when they connect on the trail to do it. A trail that connects once-isolated cities. Municipal leaders connecting across jurisdictions for the sake of a broader cause.

Every anecdote Houck collects about trail users seems to fit under that same heading: A legally blind mom who moved from Simpsonville to Travelers Rest so she could walk her children to school. The post-surgery patient who reconnected with the outdoors on the trail and now writes poems about it.

"I always liked that really individual connection ... knowing that the individual

adds up to the bigger picture," Houck says.

He thinks the link between Greenville, Furman and Travelers Rest distinguishes the Prisma Health Swamp Rabbit Trail and has contributed to its success. "That spacing is long enough that you enjoy the journey, but it's not so far that people think they can't do it," he says.

Reed agrees. "Very few trails in this country connect two towns," he says.

Houck's long-term vision is a universally accessible, connected system that reaches out across the county in multiple directions, a vast, carless transportation network. A Travelers Rest-Marietta spur is already in the works, and plans are underway for a Greer spur, too.

For Houck, it's about a simple question: "How can I make your life better?" I know trails do that. ●

