



The Princeville, NC, Heritage Trail

Jim Evans, the Transportation Manager for the Washington Office (WASO) (see related Profile on the nps.gov/transportation/ web site) reports that the NPS project he is proudest of is the construction of the Heritage Trail and facilities in Princeville, N.C.



The historic marker showing that the town of Princeville, North Carolina, was established in 1865 by freed slaves.



The Princeville City Hall following the Tar River flooding in the fall of 1999, caused by Hurricane Floyd. (Photos by John Jenkins, Tarboro, NC)

“Princeville is a town of about 2,100 inhabitants, founded at the end of the Civil War by freed slaves,” Evans said. “It was chartered in 1885, and is one of the oldest towns in the United States chartered by African Americans.”

The legacy of Princeville is one of survivorship. In the 135 years since the town was founded, the residents of Princeville have struggled to maintain their community identity in the face of racial discrimination, abject poverty, and constant flooding that has formed a swampy, mosquito-infected floodplain.

In September 1999 the town was devastated by floods caused by Hurricane Floyd. The waters of the Tar River overtopped the Princeville Dike and floodwaters covered the entire town. “The floods destroyed most of the housing, public facilities, and businesses,” Evans said. “The town’s leaders, who struggled to respond, were themselves victims who had lost their dwellings, their personal possessions and heirlooms, and whose own safety was endangered.”

In response to the damage, the Secretaries of DOD, USDA, DOC, DOL, HHS, HUD, and DOT, the Administrators of EPA and SBA, the Director of OMB, the Commander of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Director



The Princeville Town Hall after reconstruction. (Photos by John Jenkins, Tarboro, NC)

of FEMA, the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, and the Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs were called into action.

One of the most controversial post-flood decisions made by the town was to stay and rebuild Princeville in its current location. “My task with the National Park Service was to provide technical assistance to complete a design for a Princeville Heritage Trail,” Evans said. “The proposed design was a combination walking, biking, and driving trail around Princeville that would

connect the town's historical, cultural, and recreational resources.

“Working with the Southeast region, we developed the concept plan, technical drawings and project estimates as part of a joint partnership effort to leverage \$1.8 million in the DOT Enhancement Program funds to implement the project,” Evans said.

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After successfully securing the enhancement grant from the state, the NPS and Army Corp reconstructed the dike and built the Princeville Heritage Trail. It was later designated as a Community Trail under the Millennium Trails Program, receiving a certificate of recognition signed by the First Lady, a commemorative millennium marker, and a listing on the Millennium Trails web database.

“I also worked closely with FEMA and the State’s historic preservation office to identify grant funding and technical assistance for the Town,” Evans said. “Some parcels of land needed to be purchased, both commercial sites to establish the park, and wetlands to preserve the environmental integrity of the historic land.”

Subsequently the FHWA committed support for a \$500,000 grant application to restore the Old Town Hall as part of the Princeville Heritage Trail, and negotiated state highway funding that was left over for this effort.

“We made the cover of *Preservation*, the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation that year,” said Evans. “A final report on our successful efforts was delivered to President Clinton on his birthday.”