

Short bio of Craig Della Penna

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I have had an interesting life journey. Most recently I have formed three companies in the past few years that exist under the umbrella of Trailside Companies.

www.TrailsideCompanies.com

They are **Sugar Maple Trailside Inn, Northeast Greenway Solutions, and Central Highlands Conservancy**. And of course, I continue to expand my real estate practice. Here's a short write-up of my journey.

I worked in the railroad industry for many years, marketing rail freight and planning the start-up and management 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 scores of communities all across New England and eastern New York.

In the late 1990s, I was hired by the national organization, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 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 every rail trail war in the Northeast.

In late 2001, while working for RTC, my wife Kathleen and I bought a badly run-down, 1865 farmhouse next to (eight feet from) the rail trail in Northampton's Florence village center. This is the first muni-built trail in southern New England. 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 featured on [HGTV's Restore America](#) television program and the house won a historic preservation award from the City of Northampton as well.

In 2004, when Rails-to-Trails Conservancy merged the New England office in with the office based in central Pennsylvania, I left RTC and entered the real estate field and quickly became one of the top Realtors at a long respected local firm—the Murphys Realtors.



In addition to my real estate practice and our B&B, in 2005 I also set up, a small consulting firm called Northeast Greenway Solutions—NEGS.

I set this up to teach communities how to get past the sometimes complicated obstacles in their efforts to convert former railroad corridor into linear parks. NEGS partners with other non-profits, engineering companies, communities, or grassroots trails organizations, helping to bring fresh ideas to the difficult questions surrounding trail development. Some of the tasks that NEGS is equipped to perform include:

- > Deed research
- > Rail-w-trail feasibility projects
- > Assessing former steam railroad or electric trolley RoW
- > Industrial archaeology discovery and brownfield potential along a corridor
- > Neighborhood outreach and/or training of grassroots groups

In 2005, I also set up—a land acquisition company—Central Highlands Conservancy to step-in and buy former railroad corridor in certain situations where adjacent landowners might gain control of the corridor.

I've used this vehicle to preserve and later sell (for no mark-up)

to local land trusts over 3.5 miles of corridor—that included three major bridges—that are becoming a part of a 100 + mile long trail being developed across Massachusetts from Northampton to Boston. This trail is called MassCentralRailTrail. www.masscentralrailtrail.org



Additionally, I have taught other land trusts how to use a similar model to save another eight miles of this corridor. The trail should be open, connecting village centers across the state in another eight years.

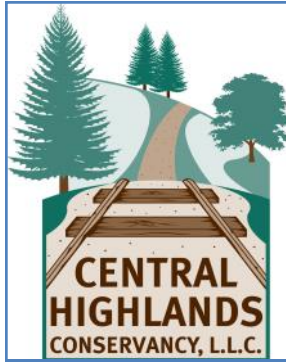
I have a unique niche real estate practice—specializing in houses near to walking or biking pathways and antique or historic houses. This niche was featured in two National Realtor Association magazines, a Massachusetts Association of Realtors magazine, a Boston Globe editorial, an article in the Wall Street Journal, and even in United Airlines in-flight magazine, Hemispheres. I am also one of only a small handful of Realtors in the Northeast to receive Green designations from both the National Association of Realtors and the U.S. Green Building Council. I also hold the Certified Residential Specialist designation—CRS. Only 3% of Realtors in the U.S. have this designation.

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, New York, and New Jersey.

Today, having given over 1,200 lectures in twenty 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, effects on nearby residential real estate values, and other similar topics.

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

In 2015, I was the keynote speaker at NH DOT's annual conference. And in 2016, I was one of the plenary speakers at VT's Bike/Ped conference. Also at that conference, I rolled out a 2 CEU Continuing Ed course for Realtors in VT. And a few weeks later I spoke at a local Realtor Association in VT where their service area takes in a 95 mile long rail trail. Later this year, I'll start taking this presentation to various Realtor associations in southern New England.



Notable Accomplishments:

- Authored five books and have seven others in various stages of completion.
- Four books have been written in the past few years by others that feature me in them as a case study in innovative marketing and other realms.
- Written the forwards to three books.
- Have given over 1,200 lectures in twenty states,—many where I am the keynote speaker at state or national conferences.
- Have helped develop over 1,000 miles of rail trails in the north-east U.S.
- Renovated the worst house in our neighborhood to become an award-winning B&B that was featured on HGTV's *Restore America* program.
- Skills: Innovative Realtor, advocate, author and passionate motivational speaker.



Guests at Sugar Maple Trailside Inn

1 of 3 railroad bridges I have owned in Massachusetts thru my Central Highlands Conservancy, LLC.

