

Tennessee Living PEOPLE & PLACES[®]

Volunteer gardener
Carlotta Paulsen
tends the lush
landscapes along
the Kingsport
Greenbelt.



Hit the Trail in Kingsport

Discover the many ways to enjoy the Kingsport Greenbelt. BY JOE RADA

Runners and bicyclists zip by in both directions. Skaters weave among pedestrians and stroller-pushing moms. Some gravitate toward meadows and parks. Others explore trailside shops and historic sites. It's a sunny summer afternoon in East Tennessee, and plenty of people find ways to appreciate the popular Kingsport Greenbelt.

Down by the Water Stretching along 9 miles of scenic Reedy Creek and the Holston River—in three sections backers hope someday to connect—this linear park is a Kingsport treasure. “It all started when a handful of volunteers met 20 years ago to see what could be done with some unused land down in the floodplain,” says Kitty Frazier, a founding member of the Greenbelt Advisory Committee. As Kingsport’s parks and recreation manager, Kitty oversees much of what happens with the city-owned trail and also walks her collie, Sebastian, there.

“We thought it’d be a simple five-year plan,” she says. “We acquired land, cleared a trail, paved most of it, and built footbridges as needed. It goes under all but one road crossing, so there was no need for expensive engineering. Two decades later, we realize that a project like this is never technically finished. The Greenbelt keeps getting better. More and more people love it.”

Something for Everyone One devoted trail fan is Carlotta Paulsen, a Master Gardener whose green-thumbed efforts show in various volunteer-tended landscapes. She regularly digs soil, sews seeds, prunes plants, and pulls weeds, mostly in the heart of a 17-acre meadow along the Greenbelt.

“I like things that reseed on their own, and I try to have something in bloom year-round,” Carlotta says. “Once I



Jennifer Feathers and daughters Rebecca (center) and Lauren (right) ride or run the Kingsport Greenbelt nearly every weekend.

In a way, the Greenbelt has become **Kingsport’s front yard.**

planted broomcorn and saw that the goldfinches love it, so now I have feathered friends flying around.”

Species that enjoy full sun and endure drought well crowd a series of raised beds: rose of Sharon, hollyhock, ox-eye daisy, bachelor’s button, larkspur, peony, bronze fennel, and a delicate flower called love-in-a-mist. “People wander off the Greenbelt to ask what I’m planting or what’s blooming,” she says. “Retirees on weekdays, runners and dog-walkers after work, whole families on weekends—they all poke around in this garden.”

Trail walker Zellie Earnest often glimpses wild turkeys and foxes as he checks on his bluebird houses. “This is a project I got into by opening my big mouth,” he says good-naturedly, listening to hatchlings chirp inside a pine box on a post. “At a Greenbelt meeting 15 years ago I mentioned that certain places might make good bluebird habitats. The group said, ‘Okay then, go do something about it,’ and I’ve been at it ever since.”

He maintains 10 birdhouses on the trail and 30 at a nearby golf course, plus he and friends constantly build more in his garage. “We’ve sold another 700 or so at fund-raisers,” he says.

“It’s amazing how many different kinds of people use the Greenbelt,” says Kitty. “It’s a cross section of the community, and in a few miles they find flat land and hills, urban areas and forests, busy zones and quiet ones. This used to be a wasteland, and now it’s a playground with something for everyone.” ●

For more information about the Kingsport Greenbelt, visit www.kingsportgreenbelt.com, or call (423) 229-9457.

Along the Trail

The Kingsport Greenbelt links parks, shops, schools, historic sites, and local landmarks including the following.

- Boatyard Riverfront Park
- Netherland Inn, a preserved early-1800s stagecoach stop
- Long Island of the Holston, considered sacred by the Cherokee
- Cloud Park, including a skateboarding area
- Holston Valley Medical Center
- Chestnut Ridge, where buffalo once roamed
- Exchange Place, a preserved 19th-century farm
- Bay’s Mountain, the area’s most prominent physical feature