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## in the green | 'grandma' gatewood documentary



(From left) FilmAffects producer Peter Huston, Eden Valley Enterprises Artistic Director Bette Lou Higgins, and Buckeye Trail Association President Patrick Hayes: "We're through the planning phase, and we're in the process of looking for funding to do the documentary," Higgins says. (Photograph provided by Eden Valley Enterprises)

BY NINA POLIEN LIGHT

**E**mma "Grandma" Gatewood blazed a trail, but to call her a trailblazer is an understatement. After raising 11 children within the confines of an abusive marriage, the then-divorced, 67-year-old grandmother became the first woman to thru-hike the 2,050-mile Appalachian Trail. This was in 1955, when the trail was not clearly defined.

"Today we would label her an environmentalist," says Bette Lou Higgins, the artistic director of Elyria-based Eden Valley Enterprises (EVE), a

nonprofit company that offers a storytelling program and is producing a documentary of Gatewood's life. "She lived on an Appalachian Ohio farm, made due recycling, and lived through the Great Depression."

While hiking, Gatewood reused items found along the trail, including patching her shoes with a man's shoe sole, combing her hair with a fork, cutting and refashioning a man's coat into a vest, and turning cardboard into a bed.

The project was born several years ago while Higgins performed voice-over work for a video and PowerPoint presentation about the Buckeye Trail Association's 50th anniversary. The script referenced Gatewood, a founding member with a trail named after her who also tackled trails in Oregon, Vermont, and Pennsylvania. After Higgins expressed interest in profiling the hiker for EVE's "Remarkable Ohioans" or "What's Her Story?" storytelling programs,



## kes a hike down tree-lined memory lane

the Buckeye Trail Association put Higgins in touch with Lucy Seeds, Gatewood's youngest daughter.

"She has quite a few of Emma's diaries and was interested in getting the diaries published and making them into a movie," Higgins says of Seeds, who is now in her 80s.

Higgins contacted documentarian Peter Huston of FilmAffects, who agreed to serve as producer and videographer. He will co-write the script with Kelly Boyer Sagert.

Funding from the National Storytelling Network, Ohio Humanities Council, and Buckeye Trail Association allowed the project to get off the ground. A 30-minute storytelling program, "Grandma Gatewood: Ohio's Legendary Hiker," is complete and being performed at libraries and organizational functions.

"We're through the planning phase, and we're in the process of looking for funding to do the documentary," Higgins says. "A kickstarter campaign garnered \$3,000 for seed money to do fundraising."

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Higgins needs at least \$50,000. With \$75-\$80,000, she could afford to shoot on location. The documentary will feature experts speaking about surviving abuse, as well as Gatewood's status as a pop-culture icon who was interviewed by Art Linkletter, "The Today Show," and Sports Illustrated. An actress will portray Gatewood, including reading passages from the diaries.

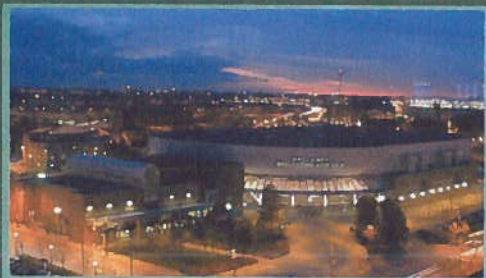
Toledo's local PBS station, WGTE, will air the documentary. The Buckeye Trail Association and Appalachian Trail Association have expressed interest in selling DVDs at their visitor centers. EVE and FilmAffects will offer copies, as well.

"Our company tells stories of people who are not Madame Curies, Thomas Edisons or Henry Fords," Higgins says. "There are millions of people who have done something unusual or contributed to our lives or history. The real takeaway with Gatewood is she didn't let other constraints tie her down."

Storytelling programs on Emma Gatewood will be performed April 27-28 at Buckeye Trail Association's Trailfest in Oregonia and Aug. 7 at Willoughby Public Library. ■

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