Upper Delaware Council
37th Annual
River Valley Awards

September 14, 2025

Central House Family Resort,
Beach Lake, Pennsylvania

Upper Delaware Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 192, 211 Bridge St.
Narrowsburg, NY 12764
Tel. (845) 252-3022; info@upperdelawarecouncil.org
www.upperdelawarecouncil.org

PROGRAM ITINERARY

3:00 p.m. - Reception with exhibits, appetizers, and a cash bar option

4:00 p.m. - Welcome by UDC Chairperson Jim Rodgers; Dinner (tables to be called)

5:00 p.m. - Keynote Address: New York State Assembly Member Paula Elaine Kay

5:15 p.m. - Presentation of Awards by UDC Executive Director Laurie Ramie

6:30 p.m. - Closing Remarks and Group Photograph of Award Recipients

Thank you for joining the Upper Delaware Council to pay tribute to those who have acted to enhance the quality of life and protect the resources of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Valley for the 37th consecutive year. Full profiles follow for our 2025 slate of honorees:

Oaken Gavel Award ~ Virginia S. "Ginny" Dudko

Special Recognition Award ~ Upper Delaware Scavenger Hunt

Recreation Achievement Award ~ Annie D'Arcy

Cultural Achievement Award ~ Farm Arts Collective

Cultural Achievement Award ~ Nancy Wells

Volunteer Award ~ Avery Ohliger

Community Service Award ~ Linda Dexter

Partnership Award ~ Tusten Social

Robin M. Daniels Memorial Lifesaving Award ~ Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River 2025 Seasonal Interpretive River Roving Team: Sara-Jo Fegley, Cris Forelli, Jeremy Jukus, Jayden Meyer, Timothy O'Neill, Reece Arbizu, Annie D'Arcy, Joe DeMaria, Nick Marcino, and Elizabeth Wasylyk

Distinguished Service Award ~ Larry H. Richardson

❖❖❖

New York State Assembly Member Paula Elaine Kay

The Upper Delaware Council welcomes New York State Assembly Member Paula Elaine Kay (D-Rock Hill) as its keynote speaker for the 37th Annual River Valley Awards.

Paula was elected in 2024 to represent the 100th District in the NYS Assembly, which includes the Towns of Delaware, Cochecton, Tusten, Highland, and Lumberland within the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Valley.

She has offices in Monticello, Middletown, and Albany.

Memberships include the Committees on Agriculture; Economic Development, Job Creation, Commerce and Industry; Insurance; Racing and Wagering; and Veterans' Affairs; as well as serving on the Commission on Solid Waste and the Legislative Women's Caucus.

Paula has been part of the 100th Assembly District for over 28 years. She and her husband, Jonathan, raised their two children in Rock Hill.

Paula graduated with a bachelor's degree in government from Wesleyan University (as the Captain of the Women's Ice Hockey Team) and a Juris Doctorate from Brooklyn Law School.

She began her legal career working as counsel at the New York City Council to the Housing and Buildings Committee, General Welfare Committee, and Speaker Peter Vallone's Special Commission on the Homeless. She wrote legislation and staffed hearings on the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, conditions in city-owned housing, and incentives for private developers to produce affordable housing.

After moving to Sullivan County, Paula became Director of Special Projects for Assembly Member Jake Gunther, where she championed the one-of-a-kind Adopt an Exit Program in the State of New York on Route 17 (I-86). In 2004, when she was first elected, Paula became Legislative Director for Assembly Member Aileen Gunther. In that position, she wrote proposed legislation, reviewed bills, and worked to advance them. She also provided direct services to constituents in Orange and Sullivan Counties.

Assembly Member Paula Elaine Kay (100th District) arranged a May 6, 2025 meeting in Albany with New York State Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation Chairperson, Assembly Member Deborah J. Glick (66th District), pictured seond in front, and an Upper Delaware Council delegation of Immediate Past UDC Chairperson Ginny Dudko, UDC Executive Director Laurie Ramie, and Administrative Support Stephanie Driscoll to discuss the non-profit organization"s mission and funding.

In 2008, Paula formed the Law Office of Paula Elaine Kay, specializing in municipal law, land use and zoning, corporate law and estate planning, including providing legal services to volunteer fire departments and not-for-profit corporations.

For the last 20 years, she has represented the Planning and Zoning Boards of the Town of Thompson, first as Deputy Town Attorney and later as a Consulting Attorney. Projects she reviewed include Resorts World Catskills, The Kartrite Resort and Indoor Water Park, and YO1, as well as numerous housing developments and improvements to the Thompson Square Mall. In addition, she represented the Town of Fallsburg as the Town Attorney.

Paula performs pro bono work for local community organizations and not-for-profits. She is a member and past President of the Rock Hill Business & Community Organization and Rock Hill's Sullivan Renaissance Committee. She also volunteered for her children's public schools and extracurricular activities, and is a former President of a local homeowner's association.

Oaken Gavel Award ~ Virginia “Ginny” Dudko

The Upper Delaware Council recognizes the extra dedication required to lead the non-profit organization’s board through presentation of the Oaken Gavel Award.

Ginny Dudko was schooled in the history of the Upper Delaware by personal experience and a four-generation family legacy.

Ginny was a famiiar presence at Upper Delaware Council meetings before she ever had an official seat at the table.

She would frequently accompany her father, Lew Schmalzle, who served as the Town of Highland’s UDC representative for 12 years, chaired the board twice, and worked with the Conference of Upper Delaware Townships in the 1980s to help draft the River Management Plan for the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River.

Ginny led the Town of Deerpark team in the 2022 Upper Delaware Litter Sweep for a NYS Route 97 Mongaup area pick-up.

When the Deerpark Town Board asked the Sparrowbush resident to serve as its UDC alternate representative, she accepted the Oct. 17, 2011 appointment without hesitation. “My father always used to say, if we don’t do it, who’s going to? If you’re not willing to stand up, somebody is going to do it for us or maybe to us! So our voice needs to be heard,” Ginny said.

Ginny grew up in Minisink Ford, NY. The river was an important aspect of the Schmalzle family’s life. They enjoyed boating and helped tend to an eel rack. Ginny’s grandfather, a sawmill owner, maintained the timber on the 1848 Roebling Bridge, while his sister collected the 25-cent toll when the wire cable suspension aqueduct was privately owned.

Ginny graduated from Eldred Central School in 1968, obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from SUNY Oneonta in 1972, and went on to earn her Master’s in that same field from SUNY Cortland.

She returned to her alma mater district as a kindergarten teacher from 1972 to 2002, only stopping then to care for her and her husband’s aging parents before coming back as a substitute teacher and volunteer for Eldred’s pre-kindergarten to sixth grade students.

Ginny wed Bill Dudko in 1972. They are partners in marriage as well as numerous activities including the Upper Delaware Council, where Ginny took over as Deerpark’s voting representative in 2022 and Bill serves as the alternate, with trade-offs on committee assignments; the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Committee, which Ginny joined in 2011 and was that board’s 2021 vice-chair before taking an alternate seat to Bill since 2022; serving as Litter Leaders to organize roadside garbage clean-ups in the Town of Deerpark since the 2021 inception of the UDC’s Upper Delaware Litter Sweep; and jointly helping out with programs offered by the Pond Eddy United Methodist Church.

Ginny Dudko swore her oath of office to serve as the 2024 Upper Delaware Council chairperson, administered by Town of Deerpark Town Justice and Historian Michael J. Worden. (UDC Feb. 1, 2024 Photo by Laurie Ramie)

Her UDC peers elected Ginny to serve as a first-time chairperson on January 4, 2024 to succeed Shohola Representative Aaron Robinson. She stepped up from her 2023 vice-chair role and three terms chairing the Water Use/Resource Management Committee. Ginny also continues to participate on the UDC’s Project Review and Operations Committees and Personnel Subcommittee.

Additionally to her UDC and Scenic Byway responsibilities, Ginny serves on the Town of Deerpark Board of Assessment Review, the Bon Secours Hospital Ethics Board, and belongs to the women’s educational society, Delta Kappa Gamma, for which she is a former president of the regional chapter and its New York State Educational Foundation which awards grants for literacy-based projects in classrooms and communities.

Residing on a 30-acre property behind the Hawk’s Nest, Ginny enjoys reading, hiking, fishing, hunting, and traveling.

Special Recognition Award ~ Upper Delaware Scavenger Hunt

The reviews are in for an ambitious initiative to highlight the natural splendor, historic sites, local businesses, and charming communities along the New York State Route 97 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway through a Summer 2025 scavenger hunt.

"First of all I want to say how much fun this is. We say a special thank you to the team that laid out this course. We are sure it took many hours of planning and a lot of leg work to make this happen. You pushed our old bodies (75 and almost 80), taught us a history lesson, and gave us hours of pleasant driving on the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway. Thank you for a great adventure!" ~ *Caroline and Don Harrow, Livingston Manor*

"The Scavenger Hunt is a great way to get out and explore history, communities, and the beauty that can be found all around us." ~ *Orange County Legislator Thomas J. Faggione, Cuddebackville*

"Both of my sons, Averill (13) and Samuel (11), were born in Sullivan County and I have lived in Callicoon for 15 years. We love to get out and explore and see things. And yet this scavenger hunt has taken us places we'd never been before! Some of our favorites have been the Cochecton train station, the Bridge St. overlook in Hancock, and the Ten Mile River Baptist Church Cemetery. We hiked the Tusten Trail in the rain and look forward to returning on a clear day. The facts and games are such fun and we can't wait to play again next year!" ~ *Leila McCullough, Callicoon*

The Upper Delaware Scenic Byway (UDSB) nonprofit organization sponsored this playful game as

a way to motivate participants to explore, learn, share their experiences, and compete by earning points tracked on a free phone app. Delaware County provided support through a $1,200 Tourism Promotion matching grant and numerous businesses contributed prizes.

UDSB Program Manager David Krantz - a visual artist, graphic designer, and branding expert - conceived and solicited 34 challenges within the eight byway member communities (Village of Hancock, Towns of Delaware, Cochecton, Tusten, Highland, Lumberland, Deerpark, and City of Port Jervis) that traverse 70+ miles in three counties, created marketing materials, secured three outdoor-oriented grand prize packages, collected the data, and engaged with contestants throughout the June 1-August 31 leisurely timeframe.

The family-friendly challenges took the form of riddles, selfie photos, and multiple choice questions.

A challenge example was this rhyming verse at the Town of Highland Eagle Observation Area #2: "Monarchs travel from here to Mexico in order to breed./Their steep decline is tied to the destruction of milkweed./The Delaware River serves as a major flyway/Including areas like this along the Byway." Q: What is the artist's name carved into the wooden pollinator sculpture located in the gravel parking lot? (10 points for the correct answer: T. Lantz).

Visit www.UDSB.net for Upper Delaware Scavenger Hunt results.

Sammy McCullough learned that Major League baseball player "Honest Eddie" Murphy is a Hancock native son when he visited the Hancock Town Square, while Don & Caroline Harrow, aka Team Don's Corvettes, celebrated completing their Callicoon challenge during the Upper Delaware Scavenger Hunt. (Photos contributed by Leila McCullough and Caroline Harrow)

Recreation Achievement Award ~ Annie D'Arcy

National Park Service Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Chief of Interpretation Ingrid Peterec nominated Annie D'Arcy, 24, of Flower Mound, TX, for the 2025 Recreation Achievement Award:

"This summer, Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River was selected to host a Fish and Feathers Intern through the Environment for the Americas.

The focus of the internship was to develop a strong birding and fishing program at Upper Delaware S&RR that can be used for future programming as well as working with the Natural Resources Division on various research projects.

Annie D'Arcy was selected for the 14-week position starting in May and running into September.

Her experience the summer before as a volunteer intern made her an exceptional candidate for the position as she was already familiar with the park unit, the natural resources, and educational outreach programs the Upper Delaware has established with community groups in the river valley and surrounding areas.

Annie received her Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Science with a concentration in Natural Rsources and Wildlife Management in December 2024, which gave her the educational foundation the position needed.

Upon her arrival, Annie hit the ground running. She developed connections with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Project Healing Waters, New York Audubon Society, Trout Unlimited, and local schools.

She immediately began to work with the Interpretation Division to develop program ideas for the summer that would enhance and complement existing programs. It was important to Annie to develop strong relationships with partners such as NYS DEC and PA F&BC and their missions on behalf of the river.

Annie was responsible for developing, scheduling, and promoting these programs. The programs were presented to the Sage Sessions senior programming, camps and youth groups, and the public. They ranged from guided bird hikes, fishing clinics, tabletop events, and educational programs for both children and adults.

(Photos contributed by Jasmine Leung, National Park Service Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, and from Annie D'Arcy's blog posts at https://environmentamericas.org/efta-internships-landing-page/fish-and-feathers-internship-landing-page/)

Through the end of September, Annie will have educated over 500 people at 11 different events.

Annie has increased recreational awareness of bird watching and fishing to local communities and to those coming from outside looking to learn more about the park unit and the Upper Delaware River. She has built a foundation for staff to build on and grow these programs for years to come. Annie has made a wonderful contribution to the Upper Delaware and to those she has educated this summer."

Funded by the National Park Service and administered by Environment for the Americas, Fish & Feathers provides national park partners with talented interns, ages 18-30, ready to engage with local communities through fishing, birding, and other outdoor recreational activities.

"What truly made this season unforgettable are the people I've worked with and the landscape I've grown to love. The Upper Delaware and the community surrounding it have shaped my experience in the most meaningful ways," Annie reflected.

Cultural Achievement Award ~ Farm Arts Collective

Cross-pollinating the life-sustaining practices of farming, art, food, and ecology, Farm Arts Collective based in Damascus Township, PA is the organizational recipient of the Cultural Achievement Award.

Internationally acclaimed theater artist Tannis Kowalchuk founded the "Agri-Cultural" professional theater company in 2018 with a mission to build a healthy and creative community. In June 2024, with a blessing acknowledging their location on the ancestral lands of the Munsee Lenape First Nation People, they cut the ribbon on their new, state-of-the-art, 40 x 40-foot barn on the Willow Wisp Organic Farm to replace the plastic greenhouse that had served as a makeshift space for their events held in residence at the working farm co-owned by Tannis's husband Greg Swartz.

Heather Jacksy nominated the organization for recognition, stating, "Farm Arts Collective's programming highlights the environment and resources of the river, including a recent play about Lucy Ann Lobdell, farm tours, and the Dream on the Farm series of productions around climate change."

They also go out into the river valley communities and beyond to provide site-specific performances with their talented troupe of trained thespians, musicians, and stiltwalkers; offer workshops centered on social justice, healthy food (particularly soups!), cut flower design, cultural exchanges, and other topics; explore the nexus of art and science; and provide an encouraging outlet for creatives of all ages to honor their imaginations and hone their skills.

As artistic director, Tannis embarked on a decade-long commitment in 2020 to produce one new climate change-themed play per year. This year's sixth experiential foray across the 25-acre farm property titled "Paradise Lost: Scavenger Hunt" with original music by Doug Rogers sold out six of its eight shows from July 24 to August 3.

Another recent triumph was the world premiere of "Lucy Joseph" on June 5-8 following a Dec. 7, 2024 staged reading of writer/director Mimi McGurl's adaptation of novelist William Klaber's "The Rebellion of Miss Lucy Ann Lobdell", telling the real story and struggles of the mid-1800s gender non-conforming pioneer known as the 'female hunter of Delaware and Sullivan Counties'. Tannis's original solo work "Decompositions", offering a personal metaphor for her life as a theater practioner and farmer, will return to the Farm Arts Collective stage on Nov. 2.

Visit farmartscollective.org to see the full calendar of upcoming events and learn how you can support them in the wake of challenging federal funding cuts to arts programming.

Scenes top and left from "Paradise Lost: Scavenger Hunt", with Farm Arts Collective Artistic Director Tannis Kowalchuk, above; cast members James Sullivan (Adam), Oliver King (God), and Tannis Kowalchuk (Eve); and at right, the Collective's community performance at Dickens on the Delaware held Dec. 14, 2024 in Callicoon, NY. *(Photos contributed by Farm Arts Collective)*

Cultural Achievement Award ~ Nancy Wells

The people have spoken!

"Nancy Wells is a multi-talented free spirit who has been a pillar of the Upper Delaware creative community for 20 years. As a young woman, she rejected conformity and crafted a life for herself that many artists and writers only dream of. It's only fitting that having her work featured on the Great Wall of Honesdale, a successful art show at the DVAA Gallery (*Nancy Wells - Works on Paper*, Aug. 9-Sept. 14), and the presentation of this Cultural Achievement Award highlight her 90th year. Nancy's determination, bold spirit and infectious laugh have inspired and entertained her countless NY and PA friends," author Dawn McIntyre shares.

Jane Cyphers reflects, "Nancy Wells, a great friend and neighbor, is a prolific producer of art and poetry. Her artwork takes on a multitude of forms and styles. A walk through her studio is a testament to how great an artist she is. Every square foot is filled with sketches, watercolors, models, prints, paintings, or poems. Her work adorns the walls of many homes in the community. She's donated work for every fundraiser I've been involved with over the past 25 years. Nancy is a natural and dedicated teacher that makes a mark. As a fellow teacher, I love collaborating on projects with Nancy. She's full of wonderful ideas and knows exactly how to execute them. Even at 90 she's always on to the next creative endeavor. She is inspired and inspiring. Living in the moment is what I find most wonderful about her. She has often told me, 'It's the attention put to small moments in life that makes life full.' This is most evident when she's working with both adults and children. And the only thing larger than my granddaughter's eyes when she and Nancy get together are Nancy's eyes, so full of love and the anticipation that something magical is about to happen."

Nominator Cynthia Nash of Milanville says, "Nancy continues to produce beautiful work that inspires and brings pleasure to our community whenever it is exhibited at our many galleries. She is generously contributing proceeds from her DVAA exhibit sales to benefit Growing Older Together and has continued the work she did with underprivileged children in New York City by volunteering for DCS to show that upcycling crafting can be fun."

"Knitted Together by Many Lifetimes", created by Nancy Wells, will be exhibited on the Wayne County Arts Alliance's Great Wall of Honesdale through June 2026, representing the 10th annual theme of Connection. (Photo by Barbara Carpenito)

Nancy is pictured at home drawing with Fynn Spielberg, photos contributor Jane Cyphers' granddaughter; at the Damascus Citizens for Sustainability office in Narrowsburg; and Cass Collins' granddaughter Rosie sits in front of the "Earth Is Where Our Heart Is" quilt that Nancy donated to DCS.

Volunteer Award ~ Avery Ohliger

Avery Ohliger, a 2024 Honesdale High School graduate currently in his sophomore year at Tufts University double-majoring in U.S. History and Political Science, is also a double-winner when it comes to recognition of his volunteerism.

This summer, Avery completed his second internship through the Wayne County Workforce Alliance as the Cultural Resources Division Assistant at the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River.

His primary responsibilities have been transcribing and converting oral histories to a web-accessible format, in addition to doing research and other tasks.

The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River has an oral history collection that spans more than 40 years of regional and river-oriented history, as narrated by local residents, former park unit employees, and influential figures who have helped shape the 1978 federally-designated park unit that encompasses 55,574.5 acres in two states (NY and PA), five counties, and 15 towns and townships.

The archival program was conceived in 1983 when former Cultural Resources Specialist Mary Curtis proposed capturing stories to preserve the river valley's cultural history. The NPS received funding for staff to begin collecting interviews in 1986. Among the first topics covered were Roebling's Delaware Aqueduct, western author and Lackawaxen resident Zane Grey, and the Erie Railroad.

The scope then expanded to focus on places, activities, and artifacts.

The process of getting these 150+ surviving tape recordings and transcriptions available for publication for educational and research purposes has been intermittent over the years.

When Alejandro "Alex" Garcia-Maldonado began as Cultural Resources Management Program manager for the Upper Delaware on May 13, 2022, he recommitted to the arduous project.

Finding Avery has been a critical component.

"The transcription of oral history interviews is a time-consuming, detail oriented, and tedious process

Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Cultural Resource Specialist Alejandro Garcia-Maldonado presents Avery Ohliger with the 2025 National Park Service's Region 1 Excellence in Volunteer Service Impact Award for the Youth & Young Adult Category, while pictured below, "Alex" and Avery collaborated on a public presentation to the Upper Delaware Council on Sept. 5, 2024 on the park unit's oral history project. (Photos contributed by the National Park Service)

that requires careful listening, where one minute of audio takes 10 minutes of transcribing. Avery used audio recording software to recover, mix and enhance the audio quality and clarity of 18+ hour long oral history interviews. By integrating AI, Avery was able to streamline the transcription process to complete 11 oral histories in eight weeks. He also developed a PowerPoint presentation and instructional video, and coordinated biweekly meetings to help train and support a growing team of volunteers across the country," Alex says..

In addition to the Upper Delaware Council, Avery's program advancements and innovative use of technology caught the attention of the National Park Service Region 1 (Northeast) this summer as well. He was competitively selected to receive their Excellence in Volunteer Service Impact Award in the Youth & Young Adult Category for exemplifying how volunteerism connects individuals to their local national park site, while also helping to advance the National Park Service mission.

Indeed, when Avery was interviewed in the Scranton Times-Tribune as a "Scholastic Superstar" in May 2024, his response to what was his most rewarding school or community activities was, "interning with the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River (National Park Service), where I transcribed oral histories and converted them to a web-accessible, researcher-friendly format. This also included researching locations in the Upper Delaware area to find the provenance of a collection of Native American artifacts. This opportunity has allowed me to explore historical research, archival audio preservation, and work with the federal government while also strengthening my knowledge of Northeast Pennsylvania history."

Avery is the son of Lisa Macchia-Ohliger and Jason Ohliger. He aspires to work in archival preservation or to become a professor of American history or politics.

Community Service Award ~ Linda Dexter

Having grown up in the Chicago suburb of Elgin, IL with time spent in Oregon and Arizona, Linda Dexter was excited to move to the Upper Delaware River Valley in 2003 with her husband Jeff after they'd spent years visiting his family here that dates back four generations to 1756. The couple had married in 1991 and built their dream log home in Damascus, PA after retiring from their respective Arizona State Parks jobs.

"I loved the countryside and would read in the local papers all that was going on, like the crafts and history events I enjoy," she recalls.

Linda immediately joined the Woodland Weavers' and Spinners' Guild and began working at Fort Delaware Museum of Colonial History as a seasonal docent, then in a new Assistant Director position created by Sullivan County in 2004, before being promoted to Director from 2007-2012. She then worked for Highlghts for Children and its foundation from 2013-2019.

It was then that she became active with the Damascus Manor Community Center (DMCC), which had incorporated in 1983 but when Linda took on the board presidency in 2019, she focused on revitalizing it as she also served on Damascus Township's Parks & Recreation Committee responsible for the playgrounds, pavilion, sports fields, amphitheater and trails behind the municipal offices and Community Center at 60 Conklin Hill Road.

DMCC is committed to fostering a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable rural center that aims to preserve our multi-cultural heritage, protect our natural resources, and support the health and well-being of the community through service, collaboration, and shared values.

David Landis reflects, "My friend Linda never hesitates to step up and take on as much as she can. She gives her time and energy tirelessly for the good of the community, putting in the hard work that often goes unnoticed."

The center combines potluck suppers with its meetings to build community connections. Linda genuinely welcomes everyone's input on how to improve the township's quality of life and ideas for activities to add to their schedule of ongoing groups and new events (search their website and Facebook).

Monthly pancake breakfasts from May to September draw residents, newcomers, and visitors. As members of the Northeast Pennsylvania Maple Syrup Producers who maintain around 50 tree taps on their 19-acre property, the Dexters have been known to supply the sweet topping! The breakfasts are conveniently held during the 2nd Saturday citizen recycling hours and proceeds fund worthy causes in the community.

Linda is also active in the Grace Ridge Church of Honesdale and has gone on numerous missions to provide emergency relief through the Damascus United Methodist Church.

Helping any neighbors or strangers in need comes from a spiritual place for Linda, who simply says, "If you can do it, you do it."

Damascus Township Supervisor Steven Adams offers his respect and congratulations, saying, "Linda is a great asset to the Township and the overall community. She is always trying to do her best to make everything run smoothly. It's not easy to be involved with volunteer organizations as there are many people with different ideas and goals. Pulling everyone together is a challenge. Organizing committees within an organization and keeping them on point is nothing short of miraculous. She wants nothing more than to be a positive voice in the collective goal of the organization that she is supporting."

Linda Dexter participates in the 2025 Upper Delaware Litter Sweep and in a pancake breakfast at the Damascus Manor Community Center. (Photos at top and left by Laurie Ramie, right from the DMCC website)

Partnership Award ~ Tusten Social

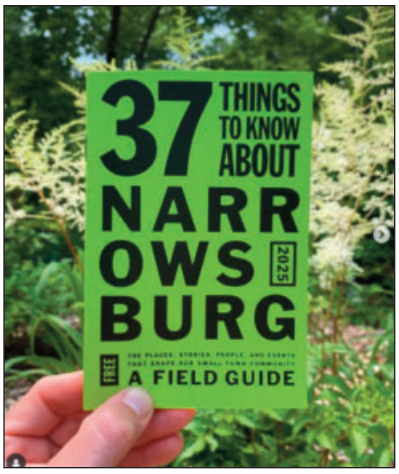
An expression of loneliness during Covid pandemic times, coupled with public calls in the Town of Tusten's 2021 updated Comprehensive Plan and during the River Reporter's "Let's Talk" series to increase activities and resources for youth and seniors, spurred the idea to form Tusten Social.

The 501(c)3 non-profit organization creates and supports opportunities for community engagement and connection within the Town of Tusten and surrounding areas.

Greta Knutzen, a producer of documentary films, TV, and large-scale public art events, had immersed herself in community projects when she moved to Cochecton permanently in Nov. 2020. Out of those associations, she and Greg Triggs co-founded Tusten Social to coordinate with local entities to develop robust year-round health, wellness, and socialization programming with a particular focus on families, seniors and youth.

Through forging partnerships, they have grown exponentially to expand their free offerings, produce the short film by Tina Spangler "The Lift" showcasing intergenerational interactions in the town, and open up a new home base called The Commons at 90 Main St. in Narrowsburg in November 2024.

Their drop-in Sage Sessions, which partner with Growing Older Together to provide social mixer lunches and enriching programs for adults age 60+ on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays at DVAA in Narrowsburg, recently teamed up with The Cooperage Project to hold Senior Gatherings on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays in Honesdale, PA, all supported by generous contributors and donors.



As bubbles float, Tusten Social's Afterschool Youth Club celebrates completing their public art mural project in partnership with the Tusten Youth Commission, Town of Tusten, and Bethel Woods Center for the Arts. At left, Tusten Social partners with the Narrowsburg Chamber of Commerce, local artists, writers, and volunteers to produce an annual, pocket-sized Narrowsburg Field Guide to strengthen local identity, attract and educate visitors, and support the local economy.

The Sage Sessions is a twice-monthly gathering for local seniors 60+ with lunch and a program offered, such as by Laura Silverman from The Outside Institute. (Photos contributed by Tusten Social)

Tusten Social's Youth Club offers a wide diversity of free afterschool programs focusing on creative arts, fostered by partnerships with the Tusten Youth Commission, Western Sullivan Public Library, Bethel Woods Education Outreach, Delaware Valley Arts Alliance, local businesses, and still more volunteers.

Activities have included an environmental placemaking project, Young Adults Yarnslingers storytelling at Narrowsburg Riverfest, a Lego Derby and Car Show, Cozy Movie Club, culinary, 'zine making, and art workshops.

Tusten Social also organizes Happy Hour: Connect the Dots gatherings for informal, interactive conversations between community members at The Tusten Cup.

Currently serving on the Tusten Social Board of Directors are Chairperson Doug Wirth, Vice-chair Greta Knutzen, Treasurer Jean Kogut, members Suzanne Morris, Giniece Noble, Kathleen Johnson, and ex-officio member, Town Councilman Greg Triggs.

Visit Tusten Social's social media pages or email hello@tustensocial.org to find out the latest events.

Robin M. Daniels Memorial Lifesaving Award ~

Members of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River 2025 Seasonal Interpretive River Roving Team, from the left, are: Joe DeMaria, Reece Arbizu, Jeremy Jukus, Elizabeth Wasylyk, Cris Forelli, Timothy O'Neill, Sara-Jo Fegley, Annie D'Arcy, Nick Mancino, and Jayden Meyer. (NPS Photo contributed by Visual Information Specialist Jasmine Leung)

From kayaks and canoes flipping over to swimmers getting caught up in underwater hazards or overtaken by strong currents, the free-flowing Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River can be as dangerous as it is beautiful.

There have been 79 preventable drownings since the National Park Service (NPS) began keeping records in 1980.

Despite having a smaller interpretive team this year, the NPS Upper Delaware's 10-member 2025 River Roving Team consisting of Seasonal Rangers Sara-Jo Fegley, Cris Forelli, Jeremy Jukus, Jayden Meyer, and Timothy O'Neill, along with Interns Reece Arbizu, Annie D'Arcy, Joe DeMaria, Nick Marcino, and Elizabeth Wasylyk, performed 62 river rescues, 11 boat-overs, and made contact with over 11,109 individuals on the river to help prevent them from potentially becoming another statistic through their educational efforts.

This compares to the 2024 summer season through July which had 29 rescues and 7,303 contacts.

Rescue incidents mean providing direct, hands-on assistance vs. helping people to avoid risky situations, such as by wearing properly fitted and fastened life jackets when on or near the water - the absence of which contributed to every single one of those 79 drownings.

Some members of the patrol team shared their standout experiences and stories from this summer.

"You all did a fantastic job this summer making a difference to those that came here to recreate. You may never know the impact that one rescue makes to those you helped, but just knowing they have gone home again safely to their loved ones makes all the difference in the world." ~ *Ingrid Peterec, Chief of Interpretation, NPS Upper Delaware S&RR*

"My partner and I were roving the river above Cedar Rapids when I noticed three men river right clinging to a large rock. I knew this particular location of the river is a dangerous section because visitors underestimate the power, force, and depth of the river. Historically, campers attempt to swim across the river without life jackets and have sadly drowned. Knowing this, I paddled directly to them to see if they were OK. Two of the men were greatly out of breath and one was perched on top of the rock. That man explained that his muscles were badly cramping and he was unsure if he could get himself back to the campground. I also realized that he appeared to be in high anxiety. My roving partner ferried their canoe across to one of the public loaner life jacket stations and brought back three jackets while I stayed with the swimmers. I offered to take

Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River 2025 Seasonal Interpretive River Roving Team

the one who was on the rock back over in my canoe and he gratefully agreed. As we were paddling, we quickly got to know each other. He said that he was a retired Navy service member and was thankful that NPS Park Rangers were there to help. He was scared and unsure how he would have gotten back to his family. I too was thankful that our roving team was there at the right time," said Sara-Jo Fegley, age 35, an Army veteran and Narrowsburg, NY resident.

Misericordia University ecology student Jayden Meyer, 24, of Plymouth, PA, shares, "It has been a season of close calls as we have had very high visitation and a lot of newcomers who were a little unfamiliar with river recreation. One particular situation that stuck out to me took place on the 4th of July. Throughout the day, my partner Annie and I had a total of eight rescues, and we conducted three more the following day. On the 4th in particular, four kids who didn't know any better swam directly into Cedar Rapids headfirst. Annie and I were able to get them out of the water using our throw ropes before they got sucked in too far. When they got out, they seemed confused and thought there was nothing wrong with doing that. It goes to show how important water safety education is, because many visitors new to the river do not have the prior experience."

Honesdale, PA resident and Spanish language translator Timothy O'Neill, 39, was often stationed at the Skinners Falls kiosk.

"We are taught how to give safety talks to the public, many of whom are visiting our river for the first time. One of the biggest components is emphasizing the importance of wearing a properly fitted Personal Flotation Device. Skinners Falls has two public access areas and

therefore two loaner life jacket stations. Many visitors utilizing this service for the first time are surprised to learn that it's offered for free, with the only request being that they return the life jackets when they're finished borrowing them. It's very rewarding to see the grateful reaction of families who are concerned for the safety of their children, and themselves. It's seen in the extremely high return rate we have, which averages around 90%. Having these PFDs has saved countless lives and allows us Rangers to start a conversation about the importance of water safety. Preparation and education are key components in keeping our visitors safe out there. Life jackets are the most important lifesaver on the river," Timothy says.

Nick Marcino, 21, of Shohola, PA and Saint Francis University, recalls a July 19 patrol from the Cowen Ranger Station to Sparrowbush on a high-traffic day. "In Pond Eddy alone, we counted over 200 visitors. Butler's Rift is one of the more challenging and dangerous rapids on the river. On river left, there are large waves and rough rocks along the shore. The rapid is long, extending more than a quarter mile. Recoveries often take a while, as the fast water carries the boat and boaters a long distance toward the calm eddy at the end. A pool raft with five college-aged people came floating down, hugging the shoreline. The raft was very deflated and kept hitting against the rocky shoreline. They got out and started walking towards me. A rock or other sharp object had ruptured their raft. The group needed another boat to get out of there since on the NY side, the road is far up on a cliff and on the PA side, there is nothing but a state forest and railroad tracks. I remembered that Law Enforcement was out on patrol in the motorboat at Mongaup Rapid so decided to give them a call. Luckily, they were already on their way down to Butler's Rift, maneuvered through the waves and past rocks, were able to pick up the group, and take them to Sparrowbush."

Jeremy Jukus, 32, from Pipersville, PA came upon a large group at Butler's Rift in trouble when three of the men went on shore to relieve themselves, neglected to secure their raft, and attempted to swim after it as the rapids swept it further downstream. Jeremy and Joe DeMaria each ferried one man at a time in their canoes through the rapids to safely reunite them all on shore.

Butler's Rift also claimed a man's cell phone but not the small dog on his lap after he flipped his kayak, with Annie D'Arcy and Cris Forelli coming to his rescue.

Distinguished Service Award ~ Larry H. Richardson

For 36 consecutive years, Larry H. Richardson has been a guiding force, effective leader, and dedicated ambassador for the Upper Delaware Council while also selflessly providing his time and energy to his community, county, and causes.

Larry is the only four-time chairperson in the UDC's history, having been elected to lead the board in 1993, 2001, 2011 (7 month vacancy), and 2020. That's in addition to roles as 1992 vice-chair, 1990 and 2000 secretary-treasurer, long-time chairmanship of the Project Review Committee and the Operations Committee coinciding with his Council chair terms, and a member of most every subcommittee.

He was particularly proud to win the Tom Hill Award for Excellence in Public Service from the Upper Delaware Heritage Alliance in 1998, memorializing the late Town of Lumberland Supervisor who Larry regarded as "one of the Upper Delaware's early visionaries" he had learned from and admired, based on a letter written by his daughter Erin citing his community service along with his "honesty, integrity, and good will."

He faithfully provides monthly reports to the Cochecton Town Board, which appointed him to represent their interests on the UDC in 1989 and he has served as a Town of Cochecton Litter Leader for all five years of the Upper Delaware Litter Sweep as a stalwart trash plucker even before that event began.

Larry logged 20 years as a town councilman (1995-2015) and former deputy supervisor following a 1988-1995 volunteer stint on the Cochecton Planning Board. He was selected by the Town of Cochecton to win the 2002 Pride of Sullivan County Award presented by the Sullivan County Chamber of Commerce to honor leaders and changemakers.

Larry also represented Cochecton in developing the nomination of NYS Route 97 to the New York State Scenic Byways System and has been the town's voting delegate since the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway was incorporated in 2002. He chaired that volunteer board from 2005-2008 and has served as its reliable secretary-treasurer since 2009.

Other community endeavors include serving as a founding member and treasurer since 1992 of the Cochecton Preservation Society and its mission to preserve the heritage of the town environs and offer historic programs at the oldest, restored 1851 Erie train station in New York State; member of the Cochecton Democratic Club; director of the Fosterdale Cemetery Association Board since 2001; former co-chair from 2015-2017 of the Sullivan County Charter Review Commission; and a representative to the Sullivan County Partnership for Economic Development of his former employer from 1991-2019, the Yaun Co. plumbing, heating, and electric distributorship from which he retired (twice) as Vice-President for Sales and Service. Larry also serves on the Garnet Health Foundation - Catskills Board of Trustees and has been treasurer of the Grover Hermann Hospital Auxiliary since 2020.

Larry grew up in Fosterdale, graduated from Liberty High School, earned an associate's degree from Sullivan County Community College in 1968, and held diverse jobs ranging from working on a poultry farm and managing a commercial egg producing facility to serving as a mason's apprentice and selling insurance before entering the plumbing supplies field first with Sullivan County Wholesalers then becoming the only non-family member named to an executive management position at the Yaun Co. with its business offices located in Liberty, New Paltz, and Albany.

Larry drove 12 hours to bring Makwa, the Cochecton Train Station's new bear mascot, to his new home along NYS Rt. 97. From the left are Larry, Frank Kratz, Robert Schaefer, and Keith Krauss. (Photo from Cochecton Preservation Society Facebook)

He and Peggy, married 57 years as of October 2025, settled down in Cochecton to raise their family. Their son, Russell, owns RxDx Productions LLC and lives with his wife Jennifer, sons Oliver, Samuel, Rowan, and stepson Sage in Binghamton, NY. Daughter Erin and her husband, Lewis Shirling Jr., reside in Yorktown Heights with their son Chase. Erin is Global Human Resources Director at Informa Connect, a worldwide events promoting company.

In 2017, Larry and Russell collaborated as author and illustrator of the book, "Poems for Children", after Russell found 25 years' worth of poetry his dad had written about watching his children grow up tucked away in a drawer. Russell surprised him by doing the graphics and publishing it as a birthday gift that now Larry's grandchildren can enjoy.

From fellow UDC board members:

"I first met Larry when I came onto the UDC in 2000. He was a wealth of knowledge, always even-keeled, like a mentor to me ... and he still is. He has been a steady, stable individual on that board, always the voice of reason, and always striving to do the best that he could, not only for his town but for the entire river valley. His continuity, connection, and history are unique. He is a special resource and we need to do everything we can to keep him on the board!" - *Nadia Rajsz, Lumberland and Sullivan County Legislature Chairperson*

"Larry's experience with Cochecton Planning and the UDC is remarkable. No one else is even close. So when he talks, it's time to listen closely. I hope he continues to be with the UDC for years to come." ~ *Jeff Dexter, Damascus*

"I have known Larry since 1997 when I became the Town of Delaware representative to the UDC. For all these years of my service, I can say that, without a doubt, he is and continues to be a tireless and dedicated member. He could be counted on to present his ideas concerning issues that would come up, and he then would work with other members to see if a consensus could be reached. If there was much disagreement, he did not hold any anger against those who disagreed with him. He was able to move on and did so for the good of the UDC. That's a good thing! Thank you, Larry, and kudos to you!"

~ *Harold Roeder, Jr., Delaware*

"Larry has been on the UDC from almost the beginning. He has been a valuable asset and continues to provide his knowledge and leadership for the success of the organization."

~ *Al Henry, Berlin*

"Because of his long tenure as a representative, Larry brings knowledge to the Council from a historical perspective that most of us currently on the board do not possess. His commitment to the Delaware River Valley and how the River Management Plan needs to work to protect the people and land is outstanding. Personally, I deeply appreciate the friend and mentor he has been to me." ~ *Ginny Dudko, Deerpark*

Larry H. Richardson was first elected to chair the Upper Delaware Council in 1993, pictured with Vice-Chair Ed DeFebo (Lackawaxen), left, and Secretary-Treasurer Al Norris (Town of Highland). (UDC Archival Photo)

Larry's daughter Erin was 15 years old in 1998 when she nominated her father to win the Upper Delaware Heritage Alliance's Tom Hill Award for Excellence in Public Service.(Photo by Laurie Ramie)

Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Committee:

"I met Larry in the 1990s during the founding days of the Cochecton Preservation Society. Soon after, we undertook the task as our towns' representatives to make application to New York State for Route 97, from Hancock to Port Jervis, to become a NYS Scenic Byway. This award says everything about Larry: dedication to his community and our county, and to the institutions that improve the quality of life in this river valley. I could not think of anyone more deserving. Thanks for everything you do, Larry."

~ Rosie DeCristofaro, UDSB chairperson, Town of Delaware

***

"Working alongside Larry these past years has been both a privilege and an inspiration. His quiet leadership, attention to detail, and unwavering commitment to preserving the beauty and vitality of the Upper Delaware have left a lasting mark. Larry doesn't just balance books - he strengthens communities, and we're all the better for his dedication." ~ **Richard H. Lowe III, Village of Hancock**

Garnet Health Foundation - Catskills

"Since joining our Board of Trustees in October 2017, Larry has provided invaluable leadership and support. His active participation, consistent presence, and thoughtful guidance have been instrumental in driving our mission forward through funding. In addition, Larry has been a strong ambassador for our organization within the community, reinforcing the vital role we play. We are grateful for his dedication and service." **~ Jerry Dunlavey, CEO, Garnet Health Medical Center - Catskills**

Cochecton Preservation Society

"Larry Richardson, treasurer for over 30 years, since the beginning of the Cochecton Preservation Society. A man of many talents.

He can balance the budget, pay out lottery winnings, and learn how to collect funds with PayPal, Venmo, and other new formats.

He can repair the train station, patch up Woody the bear with putty and love, and even find a replacement bear, driving 12 hours to bring him home. Larry always knows how to mend the station, not only recognizing a structural problem, but knows how to solve it, and fix it.

He is a good man, miracle maker, a dreamer with a beautiful wife always ready to assist his efforts. Larry, a good friend, a positive helpful person, never heard him utter a bad word about anyone, never complained, no matter how much work he had to get done. A true, dedicated volunteer." **~ Keith and Vicky Krauss**

2025 Upper Delaware Council Membership

Gathered at the Upper Delaware Council's March 6, 2025 meeting were, seated: Secretary-Treasurer Al Henry (Berlin); Chairperson Jim Rodgers (Fremont) and Vice-Chairperson Evan Padua (Tusten). Standing from the left: Larry H. Richardson (Cochecton), Aaron Robinson (Shohola), Jeff Dexter (Damascus), Harold Roeder, Jr. (Delaware), Doug Case (Lackawaxen), Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Superintendent Lindsey Kurnath (National Park Service partner), Ginny Dudko (Deerpark), Ryan Coulter (State of New York), Bill Dudko (Deerpark), Beth Brown (Delaware River Basin Commission ex-officio member), and Cathleen Breen (Tusten). Not present in the room for the photo were the former and current Hancock representatives Fred Peckham and Katt Judd, Christine Martin (Highland), Nadia Rajsz (Lumberland), Michael Barth (Westfall), and Tim Dugan (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania).

The Upper Delaware Council operates under a Cooperative Agreement with the National Park Service to coordinate implementation of the *River Management Plan for the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River*, designated by the U.S. Congress in 1978 as a unit of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Voting members are the two states and 13 out of 15 eligible local governments that border along the river.

The Upper Delaware Council was created and mandated in 1988 by an Act of Congress. It oversees a partnership of Federal, two States, and local governments to manage the 73.4-mile designated Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River.

The UDC fills a vital role in the relationship between the National Park Service and the local communities, protecting home rule authority, safeguarding private property rights, and advising towns/townships on meeting the River Management Plan Land and Water Use Guidelines.

The organization has been funded through a federal allocation, flat since its inception, with neither the State of New York nor the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania contributing their shares.

Despite funding challenges, the UDC has fulfilled its core responsibilities set out in the federal legislation for the benefit of the approximately 377,000 visitors each year and all those fortunate enough to live in the Upper Delaware River Valley.