



# **Upper Delaware Council 35th Annual River Valley Awards**

**September 10, 2023**

**Central House Family Resort,  
Beach Lake, Pennsylvania**

Upper Delaware Council, Inc.  
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## PROGRAM ITINERARY

3:00 p.m. - Reception with hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar

4:00 p.m. - Welcome by UDC Chairperson Aaron Robinson and dinner buffet served

5:00 p.m. - Keynote Address: U.S. Congressman Marcus J. Molinaro (NY-19th)

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.*

*Full profiles follow for our 2023 slate of honorees:*

**Oaken Gavel Award ~ Andy Boyar, 2022 UDC Chairperson**

**Special Recognition Award ~ Nathaniel Pereira-Mendoza**

**Special Recognition Award ~ Rosie Starr**

**Volunteer Award ~ Cathy Daboul**

**Community Service Award ~ Tom, Sr. and Cecilia Coacci**

**Community Service Award ~ Richard H. Lowe III**

**Recreation Achievement Award ~ Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee**

**Cultural Achievement Award ~ Ramona Jan and the Yarnslingers**

**Partnership Award ~ Highland River Access Upgrade**

**Outstanding Community Achievement Award ~ Damascus Township Parks and Recreation Committee**

**Robin M. Daniels Memorial Lifesaving Award ~ Nancy Lauby and Tom Zibinski**

**Distinguished Service Award ~ James A. "Jim" Greier**



# Keynote Speaker: Representative Marcus J. Molinaro

U.S. Congressman Marcus J. Molinaro was elected to serve New York's 19th Congressional District in November 2022. The District includes Broome, Columbia, Cortland, Delaware, Greene, Sullivan, Tioga, and Tompkins counties as well as part of Otsego and Ulster counties.

A native New Yorker, former Mayor, State Assemblyman, and County Executive, Marc is a career problem solver who ran for Congress to make Upstate New York a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

In Congress, Marc serves on the House Committee on Agriculture, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, and the House Committee on Small Business.

Marc began his career in public service in 1994 at the age of 18, when he was first elected to serve on the Village of Tivoli Board of Trustees.

In 1995, he was elected Mayor of Tivoli, becoming the youngest mayor in America. Helping to revitalize his community, Marc was re-elected to this position five times. Concurrently, he served as a Dutchess County Legislator for four terms where he led efforts to strengthen his community's response to child abuse and domestic violence.



From 2006 to 2011, Marc continued his service in Albany, representing the 103rd District in the New York State Assembly. In 2011, Marc was elected to serve as Dutchess County Executive. Marc served three terms as County Executive, held a leadership role in the NYS Association of Counties, and served as President of the NYS County Executives Association. Marc resigned as Dutchess County Executive in 2023 to serve in Congress.

Throughout his career, Marc has taken bold action to deliver results for Upstate New York. After identifying



shortcomings in the Dutchess County criminal justice system, Marc revamped its programming and reprioritized prevention, intervention, diversion, and enforcement. As a lifelong champion for conservation, Marc advanced preservation efforts of farmlands, waterways, and local environmental treasures.

Marc has also been known for developing innovative solutions to local issues. In 2015, Marc established "ThinkDIFFERENTLY". The program challenged Dutchess County residents, businesses, and municipalities to break down barriers for those with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities. Additionally, Marc implemented a comprehensive approach to healthcare in Dutchess County, notably spearheading initiatives that expanded access to mental health services.

Marc resides in Upstate New York with his wife Corrine and children Abigail, Jack, Elias, and Theo.

Marc remains active in the Upstate New York community and has received numerous awards from community and civic organizations for his service.

Congressman Molinaro expressed support for the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program at the Day on the Delaware event held at the Highland River Access on August 2. (UDC Photo by Laurie Ramie; top-contributed)



# Oaken Gavel Award ~ Andy Boyar

The Upper Delaware Council recognizes leadership of the board through the Oaken Gavel Award.

Andy Boyar was appointed as the Town of Highland's first UDC representative when the town joined the organization on March 15, 1990 during the first of his two tenures as Highland Town Supervisor from 1981-1994, then from 2010-2015.

He has served as the town's UDC alternate or representative for 19 non-consecutive years from 1990-1994 and 2010 to the present day.

In addition to representing his town's interests at the full Council monthly meetings, he is a member of all three standing committees - Water Use/Resource Management, Operations, and Project Review - as well as the Telecommunications Subcommittee.

2022 marked the Eldred resident's second stint as UDC chairperson, having served in that leadership role in 2014 after being elected as vice-chair in 2013.

Originally from Long Island, Andy earned a degree from Brooklyn Law School in 1969. He served as Town Justice and Town Attorney in Highland, and was a practicing attorney for over 50 years.

In addition to his local and county government roles which included chairing the Town of Highland's 9/11 Memorial Task Force and the



former Sullivan County Board of Supervisors for two years, Andy's love of nature, the outdoors, river activities, and fishing have inspired him to be active in environmental conservation issues.

He was an early architect of Sullivan County's recycling program, has long advocated for cleaner energy and more thoughtful water releases on the Delaware River, serves as president of the Upper Delaware Chapter of Trout Unlimited with its numerous youth engagement and coldwater fisheries protection programs, and was Highland's first "Litter Leader" for the UDC's 15-municipality Upper Delaware Litter Sweep which debuted in 2021 based on Andy's proposal for a bi-state clean-up focusing on the lands surrounding the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River to coincide with Earth Day.

A former angler columnist for the River Reporter, Andy's additional memberships include the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Inc., Beaverbrook Rod and Gun Club, and Trout Unlimited.

He has been recognized for his river valley contributions with the UDC's 2021 Community Service Award, a 2015 Oaken Gavel Award, and earned a 2003 Life-saving Award with his son, Matt, for rescuing two 18-year-old men from drowning.

Whether advocating for UDC funding, conserving and protecting the river valley that he holds dear, or inspiring stewardship, Andy Boyar cares and contributes.



Above, Andy shares a joke with 2022 River Valley Awards keynote speaker U.S. Congressman Matt Cartwright (PA-8) Sept. 18. Left, Litter Leader Andy rallies the troops ahead of their April 22 Highland area clean-ups for the Upper Delaware Litter Sweep. At right, Town of Highland Supervisor Jeff Haas administered the oath of office to Andy following his election as 2022 chairperson of the Upper Delaware Council. (Top photo by William Hinton; left & right by Laurie Ramie, UDC)



# Special Recognition ~ Nathaniel Pereira-Mendoza

Sullivan West High School Class of 2023 student Nathaniel Pereira-Mendoza accomplished an “out-standing and refreshing take” on the National Park Service’s traditional Junior Ranger program, earning a nomination submitted by Ingrid Peterec and Jamie Myers from the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River’s Interpretation Division.

The Junior Ranger activity booklet helps young visitors and residents learn more about the natural and cultural history that make the Upper Delaware River Valley special and unique.

However, the NPS staff felt it was important to get a new perspective on the booklet that was developed back in 1995.

They reached out to their creative partners at ENGN Civic Creative Center, based in Callicoon, for help in finding a student with graphic design skills who would be willing to tackle this project.

NPS had first collaborated with Thomas Bosket to create new posters for the Upper Delaware’s Water Safety Campaign in 2012 through Beautiful Traditions, co-founded by Laura Moran, before Thomas formed ENGN with Isaac Green Diebboll.

This recent endeavor was to update the information and appeal of the Junior Ranger book to serve today’s youth. The project was presented to a youth coalition and Nathaniel stepped up, committing to work with Jamie as the project leader responsible for the content while he handled research, drawing, and designing, with input from other youth.

The whole project took over a year to complete before 16,000 copies of the final, pocket-sized booklet were printed in October of 2022 to begin world-wide distribution.

In a recommendation letter, Thomas wrote, “I have had the pleasure of working with Nathaniel as a student for over two years and it has been a great joy. His attention to detail and concern for ‘getting it right’ is rare in youth his age. He would work and rework many components of the project until they were singing. Also, his wry humor was most welcome when the project passed through phases of approval or adjustment as the National Park Service clients requested very specific edits. Nathaniel proved to be a diligent student and was determined to get the most out of these exploratory, observational and drawing design sessions. He took his studies seriously, working as persistently on his own as he did in session in order to learn as much as possible - and always improving his eloquent line in his drawings.”



*(Contributed Photo by Susan Mendoza)*

Nathaniel himself explains, “I worked with SALT (Sullivan Allies Leading Together) and with the National Park Service with a goal to redesign the prior Junior Ranger handbook which was large and not quite child (or all ages) friendly, as well as hard to carry around and use. I approached it with the goal in mind to make a portable, colorful, and fun booklet. I hope that those who use the booklet are able to learn and be educated from it, and also have fun and enjoy doing so,” he says.

Jamie and Ingrid are thrilled with the results and applaud Nathaniel for his “outside-the-box” approach.

“Nathaniel’s unique design of the book has transformed the way the National Park Service’s Junior Ranger program will go in the future. His illustrations are beautiful and reflective of the river. In addition, Nathaniel’s eagle graphic made its way to the wooden Junior Ranger patch that those completing the book can receive,” they say.

Nathaniel is the son of Brian and Susan Pereira-Mendoza of Narrowsburg, NY.

He plans on studying economics at the University of Toronto “and hopefully take a career in business or become an entrepreneur.”



# Special Recognition Award ~ Rosie Starr

Born in Brooklyn and raised in New Jersey, Rosie Starr grew up so enthralled by listening to the radio that she made it her career, working behind the scenes in operations.

She fell in love with the Upper Delaware River Valley through visits, bought a property in Wayne County, PA, and traveled back and forth from the city for 20 years before settling here permanently.

Since 1981, she and husband Norman Starr had listened to and supported WJFF's hydro-powered public radio broadcasts from Jeffersonville. She was charmed by a show called "Farm and Country" that began in 2011, produced by the late John Nordstrom. Four years later, she was asked to take it over and continues to helm the weekly 30-minute show that airs Saturdays at 11 a.m.



"On behalf of WJFF Radio Catskill, congratulations to the indomitable Rosie Starr on her Special Recognition Award from the Upper Delaware Council. A champion for local farms, farmers, and rural life in the Upper Delaware Valley, through her weekly program 'Farm and Country', Rosie is dedicated to spotlighting the stories that aren't often told about the people behind the farms, the benefits of supporting local agriculture, and a rural life well-lived. Beyond that, Rosie is a beloved member of the community and Radio Catskill's #1 cheerleader and advocate, the first to raise her hand to help, always providing encouragement and advice with her infectious humor and warmth. We at Radio Catskill are beyond grateful for Rosie's friendship, support, and unparalleled contributions to the community, and we thank the Upper Delaware Council for this well-deserved recognition of her work."

~ Tim Bruno, General Manager

"As a radio listener all my life, I appreciate being able to present something positive that is happening in our community. There's so much negativity in the news but this is a source of good," she says of the diverse topics chronicling rural life.

Her fellow volunteers conduct interviews, report on activities, and attend local lectures to record audio. Local poets and writers read from their works. There are seasonal reports on subjects such as star gazing, birdwatching, animal births, and Upper Delaware River angling by Evan Padua from Sweetwater Fishing Guides.

Evan, who is also the Town of Tusten's Upper Delaware Council representative, observes, "Rosie Starr is a woman in our community who is caring and helpful. She puts her great attitude and skills into her work on Farm and Country with Radio Catskill. As a contributor, she helps me produce my 'Hooked on Fishing' report. Without her help, reminders, and constant support, Farm and Country would not be as great as it is today. She loves interviewing people who do great things, and capturing quality events and topics relative to our area's farms and countryside. I am very proud of Rosie, and happy she is receiving this award. Congratulations, Rosie!"

While she humbly states that "it's a group effort", Rosie is responsible for the planning, coverage decisions, recording, editing, and attending activities and meetings to educate herself on subjects in order to report on them thoroughly.

"When I open up that microphone and start a project, I'm really very shy. I wasn't used to being out in front. I am proud that I'm able to keep up with it. As a volunteer, this is what I can bring to the station and it makes me happy that people are listening," she says. "Radio Catskill [now in Liberty, NY] has been blossoming. The Internet has given radio a renaissance. You can listen to it from all over the world and open yourself up globally to other cultures and issues."

Farm and Country has featured reports on Upper Delaware river management, eel harvesting, native flora and fauna, our culture and history, and topics of general interest. Each episode is archived at [wjffradio.org/farm-and-country](http://wjffradio.org/farm-and-country).

Last October, Rosie collaborated on an acclaimed multi-media exhibit called "Why EYE [I] Farm" curated by Pat Carullo at the Narrowsburg Union Digital Gallery and conceived by Woody Goldberg of Eldred/New York City, whose 300 photographs "came alive" as they morphed across a 16-foot HD media wall and screens while Rosie's nine, five-minute conversations recorded with diverse members of the agricultural community played in an intimate, immersive experience.

Though the exhibit took over a year to prepare, Woody says, "Rosie's deep connection to the Upper Delaware area and her respect and incredibly close relationship to the farmers, plus her skill at getting people to talk, made the Why EYE [I] Farm project easy."

Ever one to challenge herself personally, Rosie enrolled last October in a virtual course on the Lenape language. "I am honoring the place and history where I live and trying to absorb more of the culture," she says. Don't be surprised if a new interview on Farm and Country results!

# Volunteer Award ~ Cathy Daboul

Cathy Daboul's volunteerism started with the PTA and Booster Club at her children's schools and never stopped since her family moved from South Jersey to Barryville in 1986 to address a health care shortage here.

Cathy worked alongside her husband of 45 years, Dr. Richard J. Daboul, Jr., as an assistant office manager and care coordinator at the River Valley Family Medical Services, affiliated since 2015 with Middletown Medical.

While the Barryville practice closed following Dr. Daboul's passing in June 2021, Cathy continues to schedule appointments for the Port Jervis office and remains active in medical circles.

She assists with the AMBA Wellness Program on behalf of St. Ann's Church and the Catholic Daughters of America to provide cross-diagnostic testing services to those without insurance and spearheaded the 2019 Community Health Fair held at Eldred Central School.

Cathy serves on the Board of Directors for the New Hope Manor substance abuse rehabilitation facility in Barryville and is treasurer of their Friends group.

She's a past president and current secretary of the Town of Highland Lions Club, a service group with around 30 members in the local chapter dedicated to raising funds for identified needs such as emergency relief and student scholarships.

Involved with the Greater Barryville Chamber of Commerce since its inception, Cathy is currently a vice-president of the Greater Barryville Chamber of Commerce. She pitches in with their beautification projects and events including the annual Pumpkinfest, holiday tree lighting ceremony, and the Love Where You Live fundraising dinner.

She's also been a volunteer for nine years at Bethel Woods Center for the Arts for their guest services and educational programs.

In addition to her membership at St. Ann's Church, she provided religious education to youth for years.

Why and how does she do it all?

"I just love being out there and helping out when there



"Cathy Daboul is the glue in the Barryville community and beyond. Always a peacemaker with a devilish grin, she'll cut a rug and get the dance party started while also making sure everyone is going to get home safe and has a ride. She'll raise a fortune selling 50/50s for the chamber, the Lions, her church, the farmers' market, or whomever needs a bright light and a self-described 'worker bee'. I can't think of anyone more deserving than my colleague and neighbor Cathy Daboul." ~ Best regards, John Pizzolato

is a need. I like being involved with my community and have met people who have become good friends. I have fun and it brings me satisfaction," she says.

"One thing with volunteering is that you have to like what you do. I always say I'm a good server and not a leader, but I guess I can learn when they need me to! I also hope that seeing volunteers at work inspires kids to help their community too," Cathy says.

She is the mother of four adult children - Jennifer Critelli, Richard Daboul III, Brian Daboul, and Michele Daboul - and six grandchildren.

Town of Highland native and Upper Delaware Council Administrative Support Stephanie Driscoll notes, "Cathy Daboul is a well known and truly remarkable member of the community. Everyone is familiar with Cathy and she lends a helping hand to anyone in need of one. If you're at a local event, you'll be sure to find Cathy somewhere with her sleeves rolled up!"

Cathy joined the Town of Highland Lions Club crew that included Carol Reynolds, Gary Gutekunst, and Richard Parkinson to pick up garbage along the NYS Route 97 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway during the UDC's 2023 Upper Delaware Litter Sweep on April 22. (Top photo contributed; photo at left by Laurie Ramie, UDC)





# Community Service ~ Tom and Cecilia Coacci

Often it's the people laboring daily in their communities with no official titles or expectations of recognition who deserve it the most.

Cut to this tribute by Town of Tusten Councilwoman Jane Luchsinger to Tom Sr. and Cecilia Coacci:

*When I think of Tom and Cecilia and what they do for so many organizations in Narrowsburg, I hear Tom saying (with his finger pointing up into the air), "You got it!"*

*That statement comes after a request for almost anything, i.e. hay bales for the Growing Older Together Lavapalooza event and Logging Days, or trash pick-up for numerous events, etc.*

*Cecilia is the 'back office' that gets things done. When she hears a need of an organization, she will say, "I'll ask Tom" and next time you see her, she will give you confirmation that Tom can fulfill your need. She will remind Tom if his schedule gets busy... which it always is... and make sure he delivers...which he always does.*

*There is hardly an event in Narrowsburg that Tom does not contribute. He has become the 'go-to' person for events such as Logging Days where he supplies those previously mentioned quantities of hay bales, creates a fire pit, contributes sand bags (needed by the loggers), provides hours of set-up and clean-*



Cecilia and Tom at Growing Older Together's "Lavapalooza" benefit held on August 5, 2023 at Blue Hills Farm in Narrowsburg, where as Tusten Social's Greta Knutzen says, "True to form, the Coaccis were a huge help!" (Photo by John Dunrea Riffey)

*up manpower, even dedicating his employees to the effort, all at no charge to the sponsoring organization.*

*Logging Day is sponsored by the Narrowsburg Chamber of Commerce. Pre-Logging Days, when the Chamber was being invigorated, it was Tom that sponsored a 1950s-1960s Sock Hop as a fundraising event for the re-birth of the Chamber. The Coaccis were a two-person committee doing all the work which resulted in a successful event for all attendees, with a substantial donation to the Narrowsburg Chamber of Commerce.*

*Tom didn't miss a beat when a new event came to Narrowsburg this year, Lavapalooza, sponsored by Growing Older Together, a group Tom was not totally familiar with, but upon learning of their mission to help the older members of the community, he was in line to assist with the benefit event. It was Tom that supplied a generator and those hay bales, again at no charge.*

*For years he has taken charge of trash pick-up for events including the Honey Bee Festival and Riverfest, again at no charge.*

*Tom and Cecilia sponsor an "all are welcome" barbecue each July 4th. He is self-employed and believes that a BBQ is a small way to show his gratitude to the community. Tom's philosophy is to support local businesses and local people, even if it costs a few dollars more at times. Keeping our money in town is a way of life he supports. Tom has said over and over that it is important to give back to your community. He believes you should shop locally and give when you can.*

*He says, "This community has been good to me and so I want to be good to it."*

*The rockabilly and Vegas enthusiasts couple lives in Damascus, PA and operate a much-in-demand general contracting business. One prominent legacy construction project is their replacement of the Big Eddy Observation Deck on Main Street. The Coaccis also volunteer at Tusten Repair Cafes, where neighbors share talents to fix rather than dispose of items.*



(Photo Courtesy of Jane Luchsinger)



# Community Service ~ Richard H. Lowe III

"Richard Lowe is everywhere in Hancock. Everyone knows Richard. His boundless generosity and energy for pitching in and helping out have touched nearly every organization and person in town.

There he is checking the ice at the Town Square ice rink to make sure it is safe for skaters.

There he is dressed in a pink, tulle trimmed flamingo suit calling BINGO at a Hancock Partners' fundraiser.

Now he's writing grant applications to bring an animal shelter to Hancock.

Then he's marching through the streets with the afterschool program students guiding a giant Grinch balloon.

He's organizing events for the Upper Delaware Scenic Byway's Festival of the Founding Fish.

There he is pounding in posts for a new dog fence at the Hancock Hounds Dog Park.

He's coordinating the installation of sculptures for Delaware County's River, Road, and Rail Art Trail.

There he is driving the gospel singers, who held a local concert, to the airport for their flight home.

Now he's researching funding for a Village police dog.

There he is passing out pizza to audience members during a concert in the park.

Richard is also the face behind the scenes

updating the notifications on the new Hancock app, writing Facebook posts, and printing flyers.

And he still finds time to help a neighborhood kid record his original songs and help an older resident get to her doctor's appointment.

Nothing is too big or too small.

Your community thanks you, Richard, for your generosity and commitment. Congratulations on receiving the UDC's Community Service Award." ~ Kristin Barron, assistant editor, *The Hancock Herald*

As Director of Regional and Economic Development for Hancock Partners, Inc. since January 2022 and a full-time Hancock resident since Fall 2020, Richard H. Lowe III has already had a remarkable impact with ambitious projects in the works.

His talents as an international creative director and fashion designer with a background in business, marketing, and non profit administration underlie a genuine personal desire to be of service.

He is vice-president of the Hancock Area Chamber of Commerce, chairperson of Upper Delaware Scenic Byway Inc. since 2022, and serves on the boards of the Sullivan Catskills Visitors Association and the Catskills Explorer Excursion Train Line.

Accomplishments besides those mentioned include opening New York State's



2nd largest Electric Vehicle charging stations next to the Hancock Town Hall which has had 7,430+ users since January; working on Junction Pool River Access upgrades; more Town Square activations; youth initiatives with the Hancock Community Education Foundation; community gardens; the Appley Art Walk; rebranding; and establishment of a local Community Service Awards program.

**"Richard Lowe is one of, if not the best, things to have happened to Hancock in recent years. His enthusiasm and work ethic is fantastic. He and I have worked together on numerous projects, most noticeably the Hancock Hounds Dog Park. He wears me out just talking to him. What a wonderful addition he has become." ~ Town of Hancock Supervisor Jerry Vernold**

**"Richard is a highly effective organizer and understands how efforts to protect the river must be tied to broader community-based interests. His work in Hancock and the Upper Delaware region to make creative connections among diverse community leaders and organizations has increased public awareness about the importance of river conservation and generated critically needed resources to help ensure its future protection and restoration. Congratulations, Richard!" ~ Jeff Skelding, Friends of the Upper Delaware River, Inc.**



From left: Richard at the opening of the Hancock Ice Rink located at the Hancock Town Square; an extra donation was promised if Richard would don the Pink Flamingo costume for a Bingo fundraiser for the Summer Saturdays on the Square series, so he obliged!; Rotary Club District Governor Rocky Martinez and Hancock Club President Lori Rae Silvers presented Richard with the prestigious Paul Harris Fellow Award on June 10, 2023. (Photos courtesy of *The Hancock Herald*; top by Laurie Ramie, UDC)

# Recreation Achievement Award ~ Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee



## Steering Committee:

- Mark Zakutansky, Appalachian Mountain Club
- Troy Bystrom, Upper Delaware Preservation Coalition
- Kate Schmidt, Delaware River Basin Commission
- Jacqui Wagner, National Canoe Safety Patrol
- Ingrid Peterec, National Park Service Upper Delaware
- Kerry Engelhardt, Upper Delaware Council
- Sherri Resti Thomas, Friends of the Upper Delaware River
- Rachel Morrow, Delaware Highlands Conservancy
- Sandra Cross, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Dan Corrigan, Northeast Wilderness Experience
- Sherry Acevedo, Northampton County Parks and Recreation
- Alex Jackson, Brodhead Water Association
- John Mauser, Martins Jacoby Watershed Association
- Nate Pritchard, Northampton County Conservation District
- Brad Kunsman, Penn State Extension
- Alan Hunt, Musconetcong Watershed Association
- Art Charleton, Explore Warren County
- Stephanie Fox, New Jersey DEP
- Katie Martens, PA DCNR
- Cindy Kunnas, Delaware River Greenway Partnership
- Individual Volunteers: John Donahue, Lorraine Martinez, Sandy Schultz, Kathy Gill, Lois Burmeister, Andrea Coleman, Cassandra Schiefen



2023 Delaware River Sojourn Steering Committee Chairperson Mark Zakutansky with a Sojourn Admiral Award (*Facebook photo*); 2023 Sojourners on the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River (*Photo by Kerry Engelhardt, UDC*)

Since 1995 the Delaware River Sojourn has combined guided paddling excursions, interpretive programs, and camping along the Delaware River in a week long program open to the public. The purpose of the Sojourn is to heighten awareness of and appreciation for the Delaware River and its watershed.

All along the way, participants learn about the river's ecology and ties to local communities, as well as how to become stewards of this great resource for future generations.

Participants may sign up for the entire trip or for the day(s) of their choice. In a typical year, participants paddle upwards of 70 miles of the river. While the itinerary varies from year to year, the Upper Delaware is a favorite of participants, and one or more days of the Sojourn in every year can be counted on to include portions of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River.

The 2023 Sojourn theme was "Running Free", with educational programming focused on the history and unique habitat of an undammed, free-flowing Delaware River.

A focal point of the Sojourn was paddling through and learning about the Upper Delaware. The day before the start of the Sojourn, participants volunteered for a river cleanup extending from Damascus, PA to Skinners Falls, NY. This was followed by three days of paddling through the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River (from Hancock, NY to Callicoon, PA), and then four more days of paddling from Dingman's Ferry to Bushkill, PA, and from Shawnee on the Delaware, PA to Phillipsburg, NJ.

"The Sojourn is a paddling adventure geared for everyone, a wonderful way to learn about and discover the Delaware River," says Mark Zakutansky, director of Conservation Policy Engagement for the Appalachian Mountain Club and chair of the Sojourn Steering Committee.

"By getting people out on the Delaware River and experiencing it first-hand, the Sojourn helps create stewards of this important natural resource," says Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) Executive Director Steve Tambini. "The Delaware River Sojourn is one of the longest-running programs of its kind, and the DRBC is proud to have been a part of the steering committee since its early years."

The non-profit, annual event is planned by a steering committee with representatives from numerous federal, state, and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and individual volunteers.

The Sojourn was previously recognized by the Upper Delaware Council with the Recreation Achievement Award in its 1995 debut year. Since that time, the Sojourn has continued to grow in participation and impact.



# Cultural Achievement Award ~ Ramona Jan and the Yarnslingers

Ramona Jan of Damascus, PA epitomizes cultural achievement as a multi-media artist, writer, musician, art teacher, Callicoon, NY walking history tour guide, puppeteer, and storyteller.

There's her colorful background as a 1970s New Wave punk rocker (plus the namesake of The Ramones' song, Sweet Little Ramona) and a pioneering, self-taught female audio recording engineer who still performs with her husband Andre Turan as the duo JANTURAN.

The singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist co-founded the Comateens in 1978, and performed in '80s bands Dizzy And The Romilars and the all-girl group that backed Buster Poindexter, Venus Fly Trap.

She appeared on TV's "Wife Swap" as the art mom, was a 2006 finalist on HGTV's Design Star, has several movie credits, was the subject of multiple Eddie Adams Workshop photo shoots, and numerous articles have been published about her endeavors.

The Montclair State Teachers College graduate has taught art classes at schools, libraries, local camps like French Woods and Blue Ridge, and Bethel Woods Center for the Arts.

Her visual art materials include "vintage bling", collages, sewing, book art, button crafts, puppets, sculpture, wearable art handbags, hats, and jewelry.

Ramona is the published author of two books, a former editor for the *River Reporter's* "Our Country Home" special section, and she has written over 100 weekly Tuesday columns to date for the *Sullivan County Democrat* called "Ramona's Ramblings".

Believing that a great way to hone her own writing skills was to hear how others craft their pieces, Ramona founded Yarnslingers in 2012 as a performing writers' group and she remains its volunteer director.

"Everyone has a story...or two", she has said.

Yarnslingers, as defined, are people who tell fantastic stories. Membership is fluid and open to experienced and novice memoirists, with no meetings, dues, seminars, or critiques.

The only rules are that the stories are written in first-person, relate to the provided theme, have a word count limit... and that they must be true!

The writers gather to present their works on scheduled



(Contributed Photo)

dates throughout the Upper Delaware River Valley and beyond in a variety of free venues. On March 11, for example, they performed for the 2023 Delaware Valley Arts Alliance's (DVAA) Salon Series on the subject of "Female" to celebrate Women's History Month.

Past provocative topics have included Hunger, Passing, Baggage, Rings, Twisted, and Chutzpah, leading to sometimes poignant, humorous, educational, audacious, and vulnerable self-expressions shared in a warmly supportive atmosphere.

To learn of upcoming events, follow yarnslingers on Facebook or subscribe to their YouTube channel.

The community is rallying behind Ramona as she publicly and bravely battles advanced stage cervical cancer, with a GoFundMe campaign established by her daughter, Lucille Jan-Turan, and an August 26 "Still Time for a Miracle" benefit musical retrospective performance emceed by Greg Triggs which took place at DVAA's Tusten Theatre in Narrowsburg.

# Partnership Award ~ Highland River Access Upgrade

What started out as a steep “goat path”, rudimentary dirt parking lot with huge puddles when wet, and vegetation-choked river access has been refurbished into a far more user-friendly site thanks to a partnership of agencies and persistent people.

The Highland River Access, located along the New York State Route 97 Upper Delaware Scenic Byway between Barryville and Minisink Ford, benefited from a \$500,000+ upgrade after a complicated navigation through funding, contracting, and labor issues.

At the Day on the Delaware ceremony held August 2 to renew calls to strengthen the 2018 Delaware River Basin Restoration Program which has provided federal dollars for projects like this, Sullivan County Senior Planner Heather Jacksy, the project's coordinator, described that collaboration.

“I’m here representing the hundreds of people who actually put in their work, their time, and their effort into this project. This site is owned by DOT, it’s leased by DEC, it’s co-managed by NPS, DOT, DEC, and the towns, and we have federal, state and local money - so we leaped every hurdle out there to get this done,” Heather said.

Funding contributors through cash outlays or in-kind services included the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation as administrator of Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund grants, the Friends of the Upper Delaware River, National Park Service, New York State Department of State, NYS Department of Transportation, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Sullivan County (Legislature, Budget, Planning, Purchasing, Public Works, and Parks &



At the August 2 Day on the Delaware event, boaters landed at the Highland River Access as the speeches were underway featuring, from the right, Congressman Marc Molinaro, Friends of the Upper Delaware River Executive Director Jeff Skelding, and New York State Assemblywoman Aileen Gunther. Below, a bicycling fisherman also appreciated the new gradual path to the Upper Delaware River. (Top photo by Laurie Ramie, UDC; bottom photo by Heather Jacksy, Sullivan County Planning)

Recreation departments), and the Town of Highland (Town Board, Planning Board, Highway Department).

Engineering firms guided through the design, permitting, and construction process, and residents with expertise in interpretive signage, native plants, and local history were consulted.

The Highland River Access was identified as a key location for improvement of traffic flow, aesthetics, and amenities in a 2015 River Access Points Study developed by Sullivan County.

Plans were to resurface the parking lot and walkways to address poor drainage, install a median to separate the lot from the highway for safety, provide handicapped accessible parking spots, reduce the grade of the access ramp to the river's edge to a more gentle slope, plant native flora species, remediate invasive Knotweed patches, and improve the signage. The latter two components remain in progress.

The access now offers gravel surfaces on top of metal grid work, designated parking spots for better organization of vehicles, an ADA-compliant path to the river, and a landing pad for easier boat usage. During reconstruction of the pathway, remnants of a Delaware & Hudson Canal historic stone wall were discovered.

“The idea is that, really, our residents need beautiful accesses and that how our area looks from the perspective of infrastructure that supports the beauty of nature really makes a difference,” Heather said.

She added that “We have five more accesses to go!” based on the overall Local Waterfront Revitalization Program for the Upper Delaware River Corridor which strives to develop schematic designs that ensure cross-branding, aesthetics, and better functionality.

The Upper Delaware Council participates on the steering committee for implementation of the LWR Plan and believes that the enhanced features of the Highland River Access serve as a model for similar improvements at public recreational facilities.





## Outstanding Community Achievement Award ~ Damascus Township Parks and Recreation Committee



Cutting the ribbon for the August 14 Phase 1 dedication of the Damascus Township Park project were: front row: Amos Valenti, Barry Isett Associates (BIA); Paul Macknosky, PA DCED; Bryan Smith, BIA; Christine Dettore, PA DCNR; Dan Rutledge, Parks & Rec Committee chair; Brian Smith and James Shook, Wayne County Commissioners; PA Representative Jonathan Fritz; PA Senator Lisa Baker; PA Representative Joe Adams; and Jerry Chilewski, Chilewski Enterprises contractor. Top row: Maureen and John Tucci, Parks & Rec; Damascus Township Supervisor Scott Rutledge; Upper Delaware Council Executive Director Laurie Ramie; Township Supervisor Joe Canfield; Wayne County Commissioner Jocelyn Cramer; and Township Supervisor Steve Adams. *(Contributed Photo: Playground photo below by Laurie Ramie, UDC)*

After seven years of dreaming, designing, and fundraising, the Damascus Township Park at 60 Conklin Hill Road was officially dedicated on Aug. 14 to commemorate the December 2022 completion of Phase 1, valued at \$570,000.

PA Senator Lisa Baker praised the Damascus Township officials and citizens who made this happen.

"You had the vision to know what was needed in this community. It's a testament to your leadership," she said.

Taking it all in, PA Representative Jonathan Fritz added, "You hear the expression: it takes a village. This is the physical manifestation of the love and community here, that you pulled it off in spades! This is rural living at its best."

The whole undertaking was spurred by a Damascus Township Master Plan Study initiated in 2016 which revealed that the public most coveted trail improvements and a new playground to replace the outdated, basic equipment near the township building. The Damascus Township Parks and Recreation Committee - chaired by Dan Rutledge and comprised of Jeff Dexter, Linda Dexter, John Tucci, Maureen Tucci, Joe Canfield, Steve Adams, Marty Kuntzman, and Rachel Lopez - heard that plea and got to work.

A grant from the PA Department of Community Economic Development (DCED) got the ball rolling, then others followed from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Upper Delaware Council, which contributed \$15,000 in 2021 from its PA DCED grant secured by Sen. Baker, Rep. Fritz, and former Rep. Mike Peifer toward the \$75,226 purchase of two colorful and creative playsets for ages 2-5 and 5-12 that are installed on safety surfaces with undulating concrete walkways, stone benches in memory of Bill Gager and Jack Joyce, and one donated by Calkins Ag 4-H.

Damascus Township Park sits on a 78-acre property, roughly three-quarters of which is covered in native woodlands and includes the municipal facilities.

In addition to the playsets, there is now an amphitheater with stone seating that overlooks the ballfield, joining an improved parking lot, lighted picnic pavilion available for rentals, horse-shoe pits, a volleyball court, and a heritage barn built in 1998.

Phase 2 will include construction of a new ballfield to replace the 30-year-old substandard field there now. They also plan to install a stone surface on the blazed nature trail system to make the walk more accessible to all and to lead up to a new eagle observation area overlooking the Delaware River.

A community grand opening celebration will take place this fall.



# Robin M. Daniels Memorial Lifesaving Award ~ Nancy Lauby and Tom Zibinski

*The Robin M. Daniels Memorial Lifesaving Award has been bestowed when applicable since 1995 to those whose heroic actions result in the direct saving of a life or lives, named in memory of National Park Service Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational Ranger Robin M. Daniels, who died in 1989 while responding to a volunteer ambulance emergency call.*

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Nancy Lauby and Tom Zibinski were sitting outside on August 13 eating breakfast at their Beach Lake, PA home about 100 yards from the river when Nancy spotted two heads bobbing in the water.

"It was odd because there was no obvious boat and they were up to their chins in the water. I thought it was two kids at first. They weren't screaming but I could sense that something was wrong. I ran down to the edge and yelled out, 'Do you need help?'," Nancy recalls.

A youthful voice shouted back, "I don't want to drown; I can't swim!"

Without thinking, Nancy ran into the river as her husband ran to the house and called 911. Fully clothed, Nancy swam out to the pair - who later turned out to be a father named Carlos and his son Damian from New York City whose family was staying at a nearby AirBnB.

"The father was going too fast in the current for me to reach. We all went through the rapids. He was keeping his head above water but every time he bobbed, he stayed under longer. He never said a word," she says. "I was getting very tired. My clothes were weighing me down and I knew that I had to get to the side. I grabbed Damian and put him up on a rock."

After Tom saw that, he took his cell phone and hopped into his vehicle while on the line with dispatchers to direct them to their location. The couple lives in the last house on a wooded road so getting a visual was not easy. The rescue occurred mid-way between Narrowsburg and Ten Mile River access areas.

"I saw the father push himself up to the edge and collapse," Nancy says. She and Damian didn't know his fate and likewise, the man was not aware whether his son had been saved. In making conversation to try to reduce the anxiety, the boy said it was his 9th birthday and he'd asked his dad to take a boat ride with him. He asked if Nancy had a job, which struck her as an odd question. Replying that she was retired, he said, "I think you're my guardian angel."

Tom brought them warm clothes and helped them walk, wet and barefoot except for Damian's one Croc left, through the woods to the waiting emergency vehicles while also hearing the air boat coming up the river. They told the responders where Damian was staying to reunite him with his mother, sister and aunt, who had no idea what had happened.

The National Park Service received a call from Sullivan County 911 at 11:44 a.m. to respond to the water rescue in progress. The river height was at 4.06 feet, higher than usual due to recent rainfall. Pike County and Wayne County EMS providers were involved as well as the NPS, Lumberland, and Highland department launching boats.

The father was found with a small band of kayakers by Rangers Bizjak and Schumacher approximately 1/4 mile north of the Ten Mile River Access on the Pennsylvania side.

Ranger Ryan Schumacher reports, "He was weak, disoriented, and pale, but alive. The father relayed the story to us how he had let go of his son and that he was unsure if he had lived."

After leaving Carlos with the Lumberland EMTs for a medical evaluation, the rangers continued searching for the swamped canoe and the boy, before receiving word that Damian had been "saved by bystanders". Tom relayed that happy news to 911 which filtered out among the three responding counties. Carlos recovered as well.

"Tom Zibinski stated he had a set of floats hanging near the river's edge for years for just such a situation; however, during the heat of the moment, Nancy ran directly into the water to swim out to those in distress. While running to the river without a life jacket of her own, Nancy recollected NPS information about the risk of this exact situation, in that a would-be rescuer also falls victim and drowns. She knew she was in peril and would have worn a life jacket if she could have. Nevertheless, she acted selflessly and courageously to save the boy," Ranger Schumacher says.

Nancy said that pure instinct took over and, as relieved as she is for the outcome, the incident still haunts her.

"You don't want to be the hero. It was all so unexpected. It's been tough to get over. You keep replaying all the 'what-ifs'. We're the last stop on that road so if we hadn't seen them... Thankfully it has a good ending," she says.



Nancy Lauby and Tom Zibinski (Contributed Photo)



# Distinguished Service Award ~ Jim Greier

James A. Greier says he doesn't feel worthy of the Upper Delaware Council's Distinguished Service Award.

That's despite serving on the board for 15 non-consecutive years (2000-2004, and 2013 to the present), chairing the UDC in 2017 as the first Town of Fremont representative to ever do so, variously serving on all its committees, and his local municipal government experience.

He is a former town assessor, councilman, and was the Town of Fremont Supervisor from 2000-2012, accomplishments of which included building the Long Eddy Water System at no cost to taxpayers.

Jim also serves on the Sullivan County Farm Bureau Board of Directors and the Town of Fremont Memorial Day Parade Committee; belongs to St. Mary's Church and the Holy Name Society in Obernburg, Knights of Columbus Council 4478, and Holy Cross in Callicoon; chaired the Sullivan County and Town of Fremont Democratic Committees; and served a four-year term on the Board of Education for his alma mater, Delaware Valley Central School in Callicoon, which after graduating in 1951, he earned a Mechanical Engineering degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1955.

The lifelong resident of Obernburg resides on the same property where his grandparents, the Tempels, ran a boarding house. The Greier family ex-

**"Jim has been involved with the Upper Delaware since the initial talks started on the development of the River Management Plan and the National Park Service involvement in the area. He has spent countless hours of volunteer time over the years, with the landowners of the Upper Delaware River always first in mind." ~ Fremont Town Supervisor Brian Brustman**

panded that business into the 200-acre Little Texas Ranch, a hotel and working dude ranch they ran from 1962-1987.

A true Northeastern cowboy, Jim continues to care for a stable of Arabian horses, perform as a guitarist and vocalist with "The Texans" country western band, farm hay and oats, and work for the New York State Gaming Commission as a racing inspector at the Monticello Raceway horsetrack.

Preparing to celebrate his 90th birthday in November, Jim has acquiesced slightly to his family's requests to slow down ... but that doesn't come easy to him.

His family includes wife of 50 years Rita, three children (James, Anthony and Patricia), grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

For his steadfast championship of private property rights, the critical cooperative management of this



**"He's a role model to me. Jim is an amazing guy who has done so much for the Town of Fremont, Sullivan County, and all his organizations, yet he still goes out and works hard every day, finds time to play at square dances, and helps out however he can." ~ Sullivan County Legislator and former Fremont Town Supervisor George Conklin III**

unit of the National Parks System, and upholding the goals of the 1986 River Management Plan for the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, Jim more than deserves the Distinguished Service Award.



*Rita and Jim in 2017; Riding the rails along the river, at right*

*(UDC Photo Archives)*



# 2023 Upper Delaware Council Membership



Gathered at the Upper Delaware Council's February 2, 2023 meeting were, seated officers also below: Vice-chairperson Virginia Dudko (Deerpark); Chairperson Aaron Robinson (Shohola), and Secretary-Treasurer Alan Henry (Berlin).

Standing from left to right: Jeff Dexter (Damascus), Roger Saumure (Shohola), Lindsey Kurnath (National Park Service), Bill Dudko (Deerpark), Tim Dugan (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania), Frank Guzman (Lumberland), Michael Barth (Westfall), Larry Richardson (Cochecton), Harold Roeder, Jr. (Delaware), Doug Case (Lackawaxen), Jim Greier (Fremont), and Andy Boyar (Highland).

Absent from the photo were: Fred Peckham (Hancock), Nadia Rajsz (Lumberland), Evan Padua (Tusten), Ryan Coulter (State of New York) and Kristen Bowman Kavanagh (Delaware River Basin Commission).



The Upper Delaware Council works 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 (New York and Pennsylvania) and 13 local governments that border on the Upper Delaware River. These include the NY Towns of Hancock, Fremont, Delaware, Cochecton, Tusten, Highland, Lumberland, and Deerpark; and the PA Townships of Damascus, Berlin, Lackawaxen, Shohola, and Westfall. The Delaware River Basin Commission is a non-voting member.

*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 250,000 visitors each year and all those fortunate enough to live in the Upper Delaware River Valley.*