



STONYCREEK-CONEMAUGH RIVER IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

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Save the Date

January 8- SCRIP board meeting, Windber Hotel, 3:30 pm.

March 14- NatureWorks at BottleWorks, 411 3rd Avenue, Johnstown 15906, 10 am- 2 pm. This is a free family-friendly event that celebrates the great outdoor opportunities in our region while educating the community on all the amazing resources available.

LARRY HUTCHINSON WINS MAYFLY AWARD

On October 15, 2025, Larry Hutchinson, the founding president of the Shade Creek Watershed Association (SCWA) in Somerset County, was recognized with the Mayfly Award, a statewide remediation honor, at the 27th annual Pennsylvania Abandoned Mine Reclamation Conference. The Mayfly Award recognizes individuals who have dedicated a lifetime of knowledge, expertise, and passion to reclamation of abandoned mines in the state. When Larry helped start SCWA in 1999, volunteer groups were forming to identify, strategize and implement projects to restore life to waterways degraded by pollution.

Melissa Reckner, a SCWA member, said, "No one has spent as many years as Larry, championing Shade Creek watershed and its amenities. I first met Larry more than two decades ago. Larry had big ideas and more hope than most of the recovery of Dark Shade Creek and its tributaries. Always a dreamer, Larry's 'pie-in-the-sky' ideas put off nay-sayers, but his enthusiasm was and continues to be infectious and it is impossible not to want to help Larry bring his vision of a healthy watershed to fruition." *(continued on page 2)*



Larry receives his award at the 27th annual Pennsylvania Abandoned Mine Reclamation Conference.

Pictured left to right: Jeff Sarver, Melissa Reckner, Larry Hutchinson, Lori Wagner (Larry's daughter), and Matt Wagner (Larry's son-in-law).

Photo by Tom Grote

Mayfly Award *(continued from page one)*

Jeff Sarver, current SCWA president, said, "What got me involved is a few years ago, Larry spoke at Shade-Central City Middle School about restoring Dark Shade Creek, and my son came home and said, 'Some guy came to school today and said they're going to restore Dark Shade to a fishable stream,' and I thought 'that's nuts.' Two days later I was meeting with Larry and we spoke for hours talking about all this stuff, and he asked me to get involved." Sarver said he is grateful for Hutchinson's guidance and vision over the past 25 years--"We are excited for the active treatment system in development and the future community outreach projects we have coming in the near future."

Andy McAllister, Regional Coordinator of the Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation and who serves on the Conference committee said, "It's amazing what Larry has done. I've known Larry for almost 20 years. Larry has always had this aplomb---the way he deals with things, the way he has laughed at things, the way he finds interesting tidbits of information. He is a thinking man, and he finds a way to get projects done and this is what the Mayfly Award is about."

Larry was speechless at the award presentation, noting it was a total surprise. Hutchinson said, "I am very proud of what the volunteers of the watershed have done and we're still doing! We're not done yet."

Congratulations, Larry. It's very well-deserved recognition for all your hard work over the years. You are a role model for all of us!



Allen Berkey installs one of 8 benches along the Interpretive Trail at the Boswell Passive Treatment System.

Photo by Len Lichvar

WOODEN BENCHES ADDED TO BOSWELL TRAIL

by Len Lichvar

A useful addition has been made to the interpretive trail at the Boswell Passive Treatment System, also known as Mallards Rest, owned by the Bottomlands Conservancy along Quemahoning Creek in Somerset County. A total of 8 wooden benches has been constructed and placed along the trail at various locations providing visitors, who often walk the trail for exercise and wildlife and waterfowl viewing, a place to rest and further enjoy their experience. *(continued on page 3)*

Allen Berkey, of Jennerstown, purchased and donated the materials and volunteered to construct the benches at no cost to the Conservancy. Berkey grew up along Quemahoning Creek and is personally familiar with the efforts to restore the watershed from its long-term AMD pollution impacts. For many years he served as the manager of the Jenner Community Sportsmen Club's Cooperative Trout Nursery and was instrumental, along with the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Somerset Conservation District, in enabling the first ever trout stocking in Quemahoning Creek in 2005. Although Quemahoning Creek, thanks to the Boswell and Jenners AMD treatment systems, can now support a year-round trout fishery, the PA Fish and Boat Commission does not stock trout in the main stem of Quemahoning Creek upstream of the Quemahoning Reservoir. In recent years, Berkey has led the effort to raise funds each year to purchase trout for the continued stocking of Quemahoning Creek in order that the trout fishery continues to prosper, which provides year-round angling opportunities that otherwise would not exist.

2026 MASTER NATURALIST TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

by Melissa Reckner

[Pennsylvania Master Naturalist](#) is an organization that trains adults in natural history so that they may apply that knowledge and their skills to provide community service, locally. It's a great way for people with a passion for the outdoors to expand their familiarity with Nature, connect with like-minded individuals, and support organizations doing conservation and education work. These groups greatly appreciate the trained volunteer help, and they offer fabulous ways to implement meaningful projects and give back to your community.

The training consists of a weekly evening class for 12 weeks with four Saturday field trips sprinkled throughout. Classes are taught by experts in their fields. After this core training, participants have close to a year to complete 30 hours of approved community service and 8 hours of advanced training in order to be certified as a Master Naturalist in November. Then, Master Naturalists must complete 20 hours of service and 12 hours of advanced training in subsequent years in order to maintain their certification.

Since 2019, I have coordinated a Master Naturalist training at Brandywine Conservancy's Penguin Court in Westmoreland County, while in 2024, Jackie Ritko spearheaded a training at the Cambria County Conservation District's Disaster's Edge Environmental Center. Jackie will host the training again in Fall 2026. *(continued on page 4)*



Rachel Brady examines a fossil during the Cambria County training course.

Photo by Melissa Reckner

If you can't wait that long or if the dates don't work for you, the Indiana County Conservation District will host a training this spring at their office in Indiana and the International Conservation Center will host one at their facility in Fairhope, Somerset County. You do not have to be a resident of a particular county to participate in that county's training; however, you should live within 30 miles of the training site as you'll be learning about local resources.

If you have any questions about Master Naturalist, please reach out to me or Jackie or read more about it at www.pamasternaturalist.org. Applications for spring trainings are due January 2 in order to receive the early-bird discount. There is a one-time fee to participate of \$350 if your application is received by January 2 or \$425 if you wait until the final deadline of January 16. Scholarships from PA Master Naturalist are available, and you might be able to find a group to sponsor your training if the fee is a limitation.

Personally, I've really enjoyed the program. There's always something new to learn or a different way of seeing the world around us, and I've met dozens of amazing people. From instructors who are generous with their time and expertise to trainees turned Master Naturalists who love the environment and want to make a difference as much as I do. It's fuel for the soul as much as your brain. You won't regret participating.

H2O WATER NETWORK FALL 2025 CONFLUENCE

The H2O Fall 2025 Confluence was held on Saturday, September 27, at the Mennonite Retreat in Laurelville, Pennsylvania (Westmoreland County). It was a unique experience to connect with fellow water stewards, learn hands-on skills to protect our local watersheds and hear from keynote speaker, Kara Holsopple, an environmental reporter with *The Allegheny Front*.

SCRIP board members, Jackie Ritko and Karlise Makuchan, along with Dennis Ritko, Jackie's husband, set up a table at the "Boatload of Knowledge" showcase to highlight SCRIP's work. A presentation was given on the use of the iNaturalist app to document the flora and fauna that play a role in the health of our watersheds. *(continued on page 6)*

REMEMBERING RICHARD H. (DICK) MAYER

by Brad Clemenson

The passing of Richard H. Mayer marks the end of an era for the Johnstown region.

Dick, as he was known to friends, was a true philanthropist who led by example. Always soft-spoken, he quietly worked with Johnstown's leaders for the betterment of the region and advocated for worthy causes as publisher of the Tribune-Democrat.

In the 1970s, he kept a low profile while working with Charles Kunkle Jr., Frank Pasquerilla, Congressman John Murtha and other since-passed leaders to keep Bethlehem Steel in town and create Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI).

It was impossible to replace the 18,000 direct jobs that disappeared when steel retrenched and finally closed in 1992. But without their leadership, Johnstown would be far worse off even today because companies such as JWF, CTC, Lockheed Martin and Kongsberg are still here and providing a significant base of jobs. While Congressman Murtha was instrumental in attracting and growing those companies, they would not be here without the support of JARI.

With a low profile, Dick played a lead role in creating two of the most vital organizations that continue doing amazing things to make our region better.

Dick was singularly responsible for creating the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, which has grown beyond Dick's biggest dreams. CFA now has \$165 million in assets and distributes more than \$25 million each year for a wide variety of causes ranging from health care and food banks to community development, education, and the environment.

CFA has blossomed into a rock for our region supporting too many initiatives to try to list.

The other rock that Dick created, Conemaugh Valley Conservancy (CVC), was created in 1990 to support restoring our streams and rivers while developing recreation to take advantage of the region's beauty.

CVC's Stream Team has enlisted volunteers to draw water samples from waterways polluted by abandoned mine drainage (AMD), an effort that provided hard data that led to the building of numerous AMD treatment systems that have brought many of our streams back to life.

At the same time, CVC developed the West Penn Trail across Conemaugh Dam near Blairsville. The West Penn Trail now connects to the Ghost Town and Hoodlebug Trails, making a rail-trail from Ebensburg to Indiana and a big section of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal Greenway.

Dick stayed well behind the scenes when he reached out to get state funds to develop the bicycle- pedestrian bridge over Route 22, which is in construction and will extend the trail network into Blairsville.

He also was a catalyst for the Jim Mayer Riverswalk Trail in Johnstown.

(continued on page 6)

Jim Mayer was Dick's brother, who championed cleaning up our rivers back when Bethlehem Steel and the coal mines profited by having no environmental costs, instead allowing the community to pay the costs through lost quality of life with no fishing, no boating and ugly, stinky waterways.

Dick also quietly triggered the explosion of heritage attractions when he connected Murtha with the National Park Service to put together major commemorative activity for the 100th anniversary of the 1889 Johnstown Flood, serving as the chair of the Johnstown Flood

Centennial Committee in developing a series of events that drew national attention to our community.

The centennial was the catalyst for Johnstown Area Heritage Association, now Heritage Johnstown, to renovate Johnstown Flood Museum; develop the Heritage Discovery Center to tell the world how

Johnstown once was the center of our nation's steelmaking that developed this great nation; and host the National Folk Festival, which evolved into the ongoing AmeriServ Flood City Music Festival.

Today, Johnstown is embarking on a branding initiative, "Johnstown—Simply Amazing." The new brand focuses on the area's industrial history and natural resources—the rivers that attract boaters, the trails that attract bicyclists, the history buffs who are heritage tourists, etc.

All of this is happening as a direct result of Dick Mayer's vision, his soft-spoken leadership and his generosity. There will never be another regional champion like Dick Mayer.

(Brad Clemenson was a reporter and editor for The Tribune-Democrat and district director for the late Congressman John Murtha and continues to shepherd outdoor recreation projects through CVC and other organizations.)

2025 Confluence *(continued from page 4)*

In the afternoon, participants could choose from a variety of field work opportunities, like tree, amphibian/reptile or macroinvertebrate identification, to expand their knowledge of the outdoors.

The keynote speaker, Kara Holsopple, is a life-long Western Pennsylvania resident, whose award-winning work with *The Allegheny Front*, earned her a Golden Quill for a well-crafted feature on Pittsburgh's "DumpBuster," and helped the organization win a Murrow award for the "East Palestine: One Year Later" series. In her talk, she highlighted a few of their stories: "Why Big Industry is Paying Small Farmers to Cut Pollution in the Ohio River," "Why the Lower Youghiogheny River Landed on Most Endangered Rivers List," "Why Dragonflies found in the Ohio River Could Mean Good News for the Industrial Waterway," and "Bringing Life Back to Dunkard Creek, One Mussel at a Time." There are many ways to listen to the episodes. *(continued on page 7)*



Listen on FM Radio, Friday 7:30 pm, Saturday 3 pm.

90.5 Pittsburgh
100.5 Johnstown
104.1 Somerset

For more information, including podcasts, visit their website:

<https://www.alleghenyfront.org/>

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Do you wish to volunteer? _____

To renew or become a member, please complete Parts 1 and 2 below.

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_____ B. I would like to receive a mailed copy of the newsletter. Add \$5 to membership cost listed above.

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Make your check payable to SCRIP, or for a tax-deductible contribution, make the check to Southern Alleghenies Conservancy/ SCRIP. * If you are not sure of your membership status contact SCRIP's secretary at info@scripPA.org. Send donations to: SCRIP, P.O. Box 164, Windber, PA 15963



SCRIP
P.O. Box 164
Windber, PA 15963

WWW.SCRIPPA.ORG

Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP), a coalition of grass roots groups and local resource agencies, is working to restore and promote the Upper Conemaugh watershed.

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