

GMCG's 25th Anniversary Celebration, August 16, 2022

The Preserve at Chocorua

Contents:

- 1. Tara Schroeder presents 2022 High Watch Award to Mark Longley**
- 2. Mark Longley remarks**
- 3. Peter Zack presents 25th Anniversary Service Award to Tara Schroeder**
- 4. Tara Schroeder, recipient of 25th Anniversary Service Award, remarks**
- 5. Moselle Spiller presents 25th Anniversary Award to Dave & Noreen Downs**
- 6. Dave and Noreen Downs, recipient of 25th Anniversary Service Award, remarks**
- 7. GMCG Executive Director Matt Howe, opening remarks**

2022 High Watch Award Presentation to Mark Longley, Remarks by Tara Schroeder, GMCG Education Coordinator

The High Watch Staff Community Award has been awarded every year since GMCG's first annual meeting in 1999 when Charlie Watts donated \$50 to start this award. Each year the award is given to a community member who has gone above and beyond to make a difference to the conservation of shared resources in the Ossipee Watershed. This year it is my honor to present the award to Mark Longley of Sandwich for his dedication to groundwater monitoring and protection, and his participation on several committees as well as the GMCG Board.

Mark served on the GMCG BOD for three years, beginning in 2017, during which time he helped form the group's Nominating Committee and Governance Committee. More recently, Mark has been representing the town of Sandwich on GMCG's Aquifer Protection Committee, and even took initiative to establish the Sandwich Well Water Quality Testing Program, an ongoing program that, with Mark's help, has sampled and analyzed water for over 160 wells to date.

Over the last few years, Mark, with the help of his wife Peggy, advocated for well water testing in their town, and took it upon themselves to increase access to well water testing for residents. They took it a step further by offering free arsenic testing to any family in town with children since children are most at risk from the harmful effects of arsenic. Arsenic occurs naturally in rocks and soils around the world, including the granite deposits and bedrock of New Hampshire. Arsenic dissolves into groundwater, becoming a health hazard for those who get their drinking water from wells (80% of people in our area).

In children, there is a link between low levels of arsenic exposure and impaired brain development, growth problems, breathing problems, and health problems, such as cancer, as an adult. In adults, long-term exposure to arsenic is one of the leading causes of bladder cancer and diabetes. There is a 25% chance that a well in New Hampshire is over the limit. Arsenic has no taste, color, or odor in water, which can make it difficult to detect. The only way to know if your well contains arsenic is to get it tested. The take home message: get your water tested!

Mark and Peggy helped get this grassroots effort off the ground in their town and created a great model for others to emulate. Not only that, but Mark, who has a background working as a polymer chemist for 38 years, also offers his assistance to help interpret their test results for anyone

interested. Thank you Mark, and Peggy, for your big hearts and vision. I can only imagine if everyone took initiative like this to help their community how much better the world would be!

2022 High Watch Award Recipient, remarks by Mark Longley

I don't often get a chance to speak to so many people in one place, so I thought I'd like to use this opportunity to advocate for advocacy – but with this group I'm sure it would be like preaching to the choir – so I'd like to give a shout out in favor of my favorite ways to volunteer.

When Peggy and I retired and moved back to New England from the West Coast 12 years ago, we thought, like so many other folks, that we should dedicate part of our lives to giving back to this society, this country that has been so generous to us. And after almost a lifetime of not thinking much beyond raising a family and making ends meet, we hadn't put much effort into volunteer work – so we had a lot of catching up to do. So after getting settled, we went through a sort of informal Venn Diagram process where you look at what interests you, what your skills are and what needs to be done. Peggy chose work in public gardens, recycling, and the library. As for me, coming from a professional background in water quality and water quality testing, I was interested in protecting our drinking water and luckily found a perfect home for this interest at Green Mountain Conservation Group. I also had and have a passion for helping to reverse the loss of our historic barns in NH (which, by the way, we are losing at a rate of a barn a day) and providing, through an organization called Woodshare, free firewood to those local folks who would otherwise go cold. Peggy and I share a deep concern for the effects of global warming and helped start a group called Sandwich Climate Action Coalition.

So I'm going to give three plugs - or maybe four if I include asking for firewood donations for Sandwich Woodshare:

CLIMATE: If you would like to join local efforts to lower carbon emissions and fight climate change, please join our information sharing google group. It's easy and we don't send out too many notes to our members. Please join us and sign up on the sheet in the back of the room.

BARNS: If you have an old barn in need of repair, or would like to learn more about a state program that provides tax forgiveness in exchange for preserving and maintaining your barn, we can help you. Are there any Moultonborough residents here? See Cristina. Otherwise, call me.

RECYCLING: And in assisting Peggy and her recycling committee, I'm looking into the possibility of recycling marine plastics, that is the shrink wrap that is put over boats in the winter. If you have an interested in that, let's talk.

WATER: Finally, I should say something about our well water quality assessment program. The risk of finding arsenic in your well water above the safe drinking standard is over 27% in Carroll County. The testing we've done confirms this. There are additional hazardous health threats in our water, like radon, bacteria, lead, and fluoride. And there are no governmental laws or oversight that protect your well water. It's up to you to initiate your own testing for the safety of your family – and it's not expensive. If you live in Sandwich, contact me for a test kit. If you live in any other town in the watershed, contact Tara for a test kit. I should also mention that this year we plan to look into the effects of incompetent septic systems in contributing to some of our water quality problems. I hope we can develop a testing system that homeowners can do themselves to assess the health of their septic system.

There are great people doing great work in our watershed, but there is so much more work to do, from saving our water, our barns, or climate – and right now saving our country (although I don't exactly know what to do about that). Be good to Green Mountain when it comes time for your gifting. And join a GMCG committee or sign up to be a volunteer in the Rivers/Lakes programs.

Thank you, Tara, Matt, the Green Mountain Staff and Board for this recognition - and especially for leading the efforts to protect our aquifer. Thank you also for this opportunity to reach out. There are so many other committed volunteers associated with Green Mountain, I'm not sure I deserve this award – but I'll take it!

Remarks by GMCG Board Member Peter Zack, Presenting 25th Anniversary Exemplary Service Award to Tara Schroeder

Tara Schroeder has been the Green Mountain Conservation Group's (GMCG) education coordinator for almost half of the organization's quarter century, serving two terms---from 2003-2011 and from 2018 to the present.

I'd like to double down here on the word "education", which, of course, means different things to different people. My favorite definition is ascribed to Socrates, by way of Plato. It goes like this: "Education is an individual process of discovery, leading to a just society." To repeat: "...an individual process of discovery leading to a just society."

I have observed Tara as educator organizing and directing classes of school children as they waded into our watershed streams in the early fall to collect, categorize and quantify bugs---macroinvertebrates--to determine water quality. This is VBAP (Volunteer Biological Assessment Program), a marvelous example of experiential discovery---real citizen science. No less impressive is GET WET!, another Tara orchestrated school program in which kids test their tap water for a variety of parameters including, recently, microplastics, an issue that Tara has tackled as a mini crusade. Patience, kid comfort, supreme command of content and, above all, genuine passion for protecting the watershed are all at play in her work.

That passion, finally, has made Tara an exemplary advocate for biocentric justice, demonstrated generally by her leadership on the Aquifer Advisory Council and, in recent months particularly, by her indefatigable efforts around the Meena gas station issue in Effingham.

How gifted we are to have Tara Schroeder as GMCG's "real education" coordinator.

Tara Schroeder Remarks, Recipient of 25th Anniversary Exemplary Service Award

I am humbled and honored to be receiving this award today. I share this award with the many staff, AmeriCorps members, volunteers and teachers, as well as the partner organizations, town officials, funders and members of GMCG who have made all of our work possible over the years. Thank you to our stellar Team Green of Matt, Jill and Moselle, our AmeriCorps members, and all the volunteers here today.

Frankly, I never would have been able to carry out all of the programs we have done over the years without these amazing people. And these people truly are the cream of the crop, the best of the best – I have always felt so grateful to be surrounded by such good people with big, kind hearts and passion to leave this world a better place. I have met some incredible volunteers over the years, some who are no longer with us, and I'd like to take a moment to remember them for their contributions to our water monitoring, educational programs and protecting important natural resources through land conservation: Ned Hatfield, Jim Clemons, Roger Thurrell, Fred Van Corr, Steve Timchak, Herb Cooper, Jennifer Mullen, Stephanie Barnes, and I'm sure there are many more who I have not mentioned, but these are folks who I had the privilege of working with directly over the years. Let's continue their great work!

When I came back to GMCG in 2018, I came back with even more incentive and drive to protect the environment, to educate others about our connections to the natural world, and empower them to take action. In 2012 I had my daughter, Eden, and many of you may not know that Eden was anemic for the first two and a half years of her life. It wasn't until Bob Newton's groundwater study with GMCG in 2016 that I discovered that our well was contaminated with lead. Bob called immediately to tell us to stop drinking our water. Shortly after, Eden's iron levels rose to normal levels, and we are very grateful. Thank you Bob!

Scientific research is important. Understanding the health and safety of our water is important. Protecting our water for these kids and their children, for wildlife, is important. It's one of the most important things we can do. We need to think long-term and wide-scale to be effective at this, working with our neighboring towns, with our entire watershed, to ensure the aquifer has a voice, and that the very water we all depend upon and share is never compromised. We have a long way to go, but I am hopeful. Ever hopeful. We have people rising to the challenge all over the place, from Tamworth and Sandwich to Ossipee, Freedom, Madison, Effingham, Porter and Parsonsfield, and even farther afield, stepping up to make sure people are aware of this invisible resource, how it connects us all, and how we should never take it for granted.

Blair Folts, the former ED and one of the founders of this organization, and my mentor, initiated me back in 2003 into what was then a very small nonprofit organization with only 1.5 staff. She called me a fellow dragon-slayer then, although I did not feel worthy. That's just not my thing. She proceeded to throw me in front of a gymnasium full of hundreds of people to protest a racetrack in order to protect the Ossipee Aquifer. I think I nearly died. I am proud to say that I've come a long way, thanks to Blair, and the support and teachings of so many others like this incredible staff. I am no longer the shy kid who wouldn't raise her hand in class, and hopefully have put most of those fears of speaking in public aside. There's a lot of work to do and no time to worry about all that anyways – it's time to get down to business and protect our aquifer. Our kids are depending on it.

Presentation of 25th Anniversary Exemplary Service Award to Dave & Noreen Downs, Moselle Spiller, GMCG Outreach Coordinator

It is my honor to announce Dave and Noreen Downs as recipients of GMCG's special 25th anniversary Award. Dave and Noreen first became acquainted with GMCG around 2002 (soon after they retired to Madison), and became water quality volunteers around 2004 (maybe earlier). Over the years their involvement expanded to include administrative and technology support, as well as serving on multiple committees. For 8 years Dave Downs was one of only TWO winter water quality monitors along with Rich Dandeneau braving the frigid ice and winds of Ossipee Lake. Dave was on the Building Committee back when the Huntress House was still the GMCG headquarters. He has supported GMCG staff through evolving eras of technology, making sure we always have fully functional computers, printers, and wireless internet. Noreen is just as tech savvy and is credited with making sure GMCG has a sophisticated donor database, website, and email list. When I first came onboard with GMCG as Outreach Coordinator I 2018 Noreen trained me in the administration of these aspects, and I can tell you she is also an amazing teacher and mentor!

Noreen served as GMCG Board Chair from 2009 to 2013. She was on the Hiring Committee who helped identify and secure our current Executive Director. She is currently on the Governance

Committee and Development Committee. She is also on the Board of Directors as the Town of Madison Representative.

Dave and Noreen have both already had full successful careers in IT, and now after 20 years of volunteering with GMCG one could say they have had a whole second career in conservation. Volunteerism elevates our organization and keeps us flying high. To dedicate one's time, professional expertise, and physical presence is a priceless gift. GMCG is forever grateful to Dave and Noreen for their countless hours of dedication to protecting natural resources and the health of the watershed.

Thank you Dave and Noreen!

Remarks 25th Anniversary Award Recipients Dave and Noreen Downs

We are honored to receive this recognition. It has been a pleasure to volunteer in many different ways over the 20 years we have lived in New Hampshire and been a part of helping with this mission. Being a part of the various facets and achievements of GMCG has enriched our lives through the relationships we have developed, thru the learning about the local ecology and ways to protect it, and by observing all of the community accomplishments of this small organization. We continue to be amazed at the strength of the staff and appreciate all their contributions. They are dedicated and passionate, and are always looking for innovative ways to improve program delivery each year.

I echo everything that Noreen said. It has been quite a learning experience with GMCG and has educated us in the environment and what we can do to protect it. But it is the people we have worked with over the years that has been particularly enjoyable – both staff and volunteers. And the AmeriCorps Volunteer program and the people we have seen in that capacity have been a real asset for GMCG being very professional and a pleasure to work with.

GMCG Executive Director Matt Howe remarks, 25th Anniversary Celebration

So much gratitude!

For our talented, professional staff.

For our devoted Board Members and Officers

For all of our dedicated, reliable volunteers.

For all those who came before us, who, since 1997 organized, educated, advocated, researched, and conserved their land or helped conserve the land of others.

And to those who are working with us today to conserve their land.

Beth & Ron Blankenstein of Merrimack, NH are donating to GMCG 20 acres of undeveloped shorefront on Davis Pond in Madison.

Carol Zachor of Wolfeboro is working with us to help us acquire 33 acres from the estate of her late father Richard Thurston - in Effingham – the land abutts the 41-acre GMCG Natural Area and thus expand it to 74 acres.

Anne Packard, who is donating almost the entire value of 28 acres on Berry Bay in an arrangement where Lakes Region Conservation Trust will own the land and GMCG will hold the easement on the land.

In a few moments we will award the 2022 Highwatch Award, an annual tradition of recognizing volunteerism created by our founding executive director Blair Folts.

In your program is a list of those who have received it.

You can call this the GMCG Hall of Fame. I know that leaves scores of volunteers unmentioned, but a perusal of this list helps capture the expanse of our history and the countless stories and all the ways that people working together in common cause have made a difference to this organization and to this watershed.

As we appreciate these heroines and heroes, named and unnamed, let us remember those who are no longer with us:

Don La Chance
Toby Page
Ned Hatfield
Jennifer Molin
Stephanie Barnes
Tom Howe

Something that's been on my mind as we mark this occasion, and as the Board and Staff embark on a strategic planning process this Fall, is this:

At a time when there is so much to worry about, both locally and globally, about the future of our natural resources and our climate, it is exceptionally important for environmental organizations not to promise too much. We need to be honest about what we can achieve and not exploit the public's aspirations for a better planet simply in order to meet our fundraising goals. We can't just be the place where donors deposit their hopes for clean pure water and a solution to climate change.

We must be a place where people invest in real work because that work has been thought through and is based upon real science.

GMCG cannot promise that we will always protect your drinking water from all harm. But we can promise that we're going to work in tangible, proven ways to reduce the chances that will happen. We will keep working for new and improved ordinances. We will keep promoting best practices in land management. We will continue – indeed we are exploring ways we can help do more – to prevent development and human activity from taking place above the most vulnerable sections of the Ossipee Aquifer.

While we continue to believe we have a good chance of winning, we cannot promise we will beat this gas station in Effingham. But we can guarantee you that when this is over the people of Effingham are going to know one heck of a lot more about their groundwater protection ordinance than they knew two years ago, and if this gas station ever operates it's going to be among the safest and MOST CLOSELY MONITORED gas stations in America! (Our special thanks to David Smith of Ossipee Lake

Alliance for his eloquent and thorough chronicle of this campaign through a series of articles that are posted on their website and have appeared regularly in the Carroll County Independent).

We can't tell you how soon salinity readings will reverse their upward trend in our surface waters, but we're going to continue to build a crescendo of Salt Responsibly! We will urge every town in the Ossipee Watershed and across NH to join Madison and acquire brining equipment.

We don't know if or when or to what extent we can reduce the microplastics entering our lakes and streams, but we can promise that we're working on understanding the problem and providing some of the first data from NH's freshwaters that will help the public and the scientific community better understand the problem.

As we look to the next 25 years, we commit this organization to honesty and integrity and to science. And to defending science whenever necessary. When we have to, we shall assert science over nonsense, because sadly we must continue to contend with a small minority who know better but choose to distort, to distract and show disdain for facts because they believe by doing so they will help their cause, as confusing as their cause may seem to the rest of us.

The extraordinary and courageous Greta Thunberg recently stood up in front of the United Nations and said, "I don't want you to hope, I want you to panic."

On a global scale, she is right to say that. But here on a watershed scale, we can dial that back from a sense of panic to a sense of urgency. A sense of urgency is good, constructive thing to have. We don't have to lose our minds, but we do need to stay focused on the daily threats to our groundwater and ecosystem as a whole.

Many of you will recall the 1970's bumper sticker, "Don't panic, organize!"

We won't panic. We will continue to do our research. Our Education. Our Advocacy. Our Land Conservation.

We shall not panic, but we will organize!