

VENANGO COUNTY CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME

The intent of the Conservation Hall of Fame is to both honor inductees and to ensure that their names and stories will be remembered to inspire future generations.



The Venango County Conservation Hall of Fame was created in 2011 by the Oil City Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. The program honors local men and women who have made significant and lasting contributions to conservation and the environment.

In partnership with the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism, managers of the Oil Region National Heritage Area, the Conservation Hall of Fame is housed in the Suhr Library on the Oil Region Venango Campus.

Eligibility requirements are that a nominated individual be:

- A native of Venango County, a graduate of a Venango County school, or a long-time resident who went on to do great things in conservation and environmental fields.
- A Venango County resident whose environmental or conservation efforts had a significant local impact.
- An individual who may not reside in the county, but their conservation efforts were largely centered in Venango County.

Nominations are sought for both living and posthumous inductees each fall by the Conservation Hall of Fame, Oil City Chapter IWLA, P.O. Box 551, Seneca, PA 16346.

Inductees are selected by a panel of judges that includes representatives of the Oil City Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America and local community and conservation leaders.

The annual induction ceremony is typically held in December each year in the Robert W. Rhoades Auditorium at the Oil Region Venango Campus in Oil City, PA.

Founded in 1922, the Izaak Walton League of America is one of the nation's oldest and most respected conservation organizations. The Oil City Chapter was chartered in 1926, making it the oldest chapter in Pennsylvania and among the oldest operating chapters in the nation.

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HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

2023 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Lance Bowes

1965 - 2022

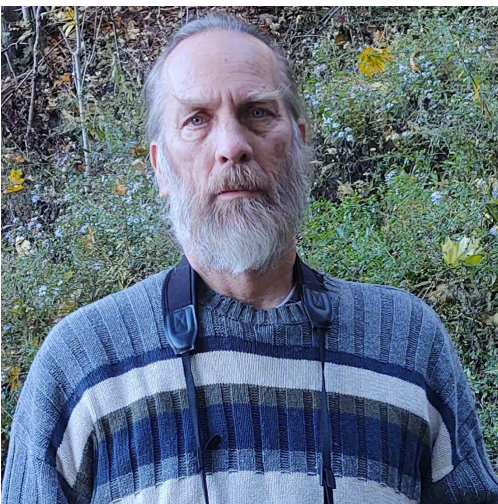
Lance Bowes grew up in rural Crawford County where he developed a love and appreciation for the natural world that led him to a career with the Venango County Conservation District. He joined the District in 2002 as its watershed specialist. He spent the next 10 years assisting numerous Venango County watershed groups, writing countless grants, and helping design and implement streambank stabilization projects. He also developed and led numerous educational programs. He is credited with bringing the Trout in the Classroom program to not just local schools, but introducing the idea state-wide. He was promoted to District Manager in 2012, overseeing all programs and staff. From 1988 till his death he served on the Allegheny Valley Conservancy Board (the last years as vice president), providing key leadership and technical assistance.

2022 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Michael "Mike" Ohler
1957 -

Mike Ohler has spent his entire life on the family farm working the land. His understanding of the land and commitment to a land ethic led him to promote and educate on-farm practices that better protect the land, our waterways, and our communities. He was one of the first farmers to adopt no-till farming, to significantly reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides, to adopt riparian buffers, and undertake streambank restoration projects. He organized and hosted state-wide no-till conferences, programs on streambank restoration, and other practices that benefit the land. He became a volunteer with the Venango County Conservation District in 1995, was named a Director in 1999, and became chairman in 2000, a role he continued to his induction in 2022.



Russell "Russ" States
1954 -

Russell States' avocation is ornithology. He is a citizen scientist helping gain knowledge and understanding of the region's birds. A native of Erie, he arrived in Venango County in 1977 to accept a teaching position. By 1990 he became a compiler for the ongoing Pleasantville Christmas Bird Count and in 2000 the Venango County Compiler for Pennsylvania Birds magazine. That same year he initiated the annual Common Nighthawk Migration Count at the Oil City Marina and set up the Winter Raptor Survey south of Route 322. In 2006 he extended the raptor survey north of Route 322. From 2002 through 2009, he was a county compiler for the second Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. He has been an officer of the Bartramian Audubon Society for 30 years.

2021 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Raymond L. Cramer
1932 - 2006

Raymond L. Cramer, a life-long conservationist, had a knack for organizing and consensus building. He put it to use on behalf of Pennsylvania's wildlife, its forests, waters, hunters, and anglers. He was a long-time president of the Venango County Federation of Sportsmen and a board member/director of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs. As such, he worked tirelessly to have sportsmen speak loudly and unified on a range of conservation issues. He was masterful at getting clubs on board and more importantly individuals. As an example, he was credited with getting upwards of 1,000 individuals to write letters to their state representatives on a land conservation issue in the 1990s. An Armstrong County native, Venango County became his home in 1967.



Leonard "Lenny" Hribar
1951 -

Lenny Hribar, a native of Allegheny County, served as a Wildlife Conservation Officer/Game Warden in Venango County from 1976 until his retirement in 2010. He embodied the best of what one would want in a conservation officer: knowledgeable, friendly, fair, firm when needed, and foremost committed to the resource: Pennsylvania's wildlife and habitat. Lennie was an ambassador for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, the state's wildlife, and conservation in general. He took every opportunity to talk about wildlife and habit and the ecological linkages that support our natural world. Over the course of his career and continuing in retirement he has served as an inspiration to all those interested in conservation, hunting and nature.

2020 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Charles A. Babcock
1847-1922

Charles A. Babcock, superintendent of Oil City Schools from 1883 to 1907, created Bird Day in 1894, the first holiday celebrating birds. It began in Pennsylvania, quickly spread to other states, became a national event, and took root in other countries. It continues in many forms to this day. Babcock's intent was to advance bird conservation as a moral value. A curriculum he wrote for Bird Day and avian conservation was widely distributed and generations of Americans were introduced to conservation and birding through its use. Babcock was also involved in creation of the Pennsylvania Audubon Society in 1896 and the National Audubon Society in 1905. His contributions to conservation, birding, and education have an everlasting impact.

2019 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Ann M. Lynch
1955 -

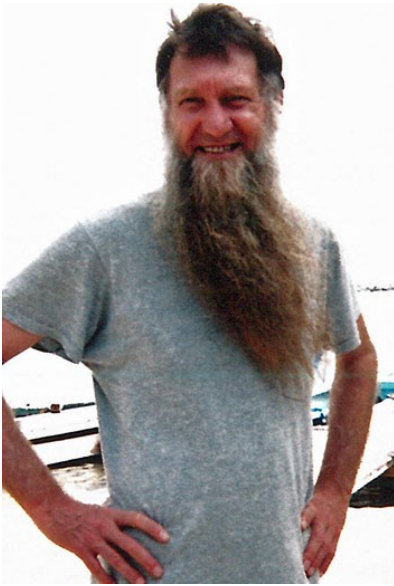
Ann M. Lynch, a renowned U.S. Forest Service researcher/scientist, traces her passion to a fascination with and time spent in the woods surrounding her childhood home in Cranberry Township. She has written or co-written dozens of scientific papers and received numerous commendations for her work, much of it based on understanding insect disturbance ecology. Among her overarching goals are understanding climate and human impacts on ecosystem stability. She was early in raising concerns about the potential impacts of climate change on our forests. Her work has improved forest management and conservation. Ann was among the first women to earn a B.S. in Forestry from Penn State University (1977). She earned her M.S. and Ph.D. in entomology from the University of Michigan.



Debra M. Frawley
1967 -

Debra M. Frawley has spent much of her professional and personal life planning, coordinating, and advocating for the region's greenways, trails, and natural areas. As a Venango County planner she oversaw the county's Natural Heritage Inventory, Greenways, and Open Space Study, and Recreation and Parks and Open Space Plan. From 2008 to 2015 she was regional Council on Greenways and Trails coordinator and then joined the Pennsylvania Environmental Council in a similar role. She has also served as a director and president of the Allegheny Valley Conservancy. A Rockland native, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Parks and Recreation/Natural Resources Management from Slippery Rock University and a Master's in Public Lands Management from Indiana University – Bloomington.

2018 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



William "Bill" Belzer
1943 - 2016

Bill Belzer's conservation legacy is vast, but perhaps none is greater than his efforts to protect and conserve the eastern box turtle, a species in decline throughout its range. He undertook seminal work on the translocation and reintroduction of the species to areas of its historical range; he published several research papers on the subject and was a tireless advocate for the species. In 1993 he created the Eastern Box Turtle Conservation Trust to ensure the long-term continuation of those efforts. Bill, a native of inner-city Philadelphia, settled in Venango County upon becoming a professor at Clarion University's Venango Campus in 1982 where he taught for more than 20 years. Throughout his life Bill was involved in nature programming for children, lived by a conservation ethic, and led by example.



Bruce Dickson
1956 -

Bruce Dickson grew up on a farm in Cranberry Township. The nearby fields and woods were his playground and his inspiration for a career as an educator, researcher, and environmental consultant. His waterways restoration and assessment projects include the Rivers Conservation Plan for the Scrubgrass Creek Watershed and the Pithole Creek Heritage Waters assessment. As a consultant Bruce ensures companies meet their environmental obligations. As a researcher his work increased understanding of the value of riparian forests on non-point-source pollution control, the effects of long-wall mining on streams, and more. He has taught courses at the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University and for the U.S. Forest Service. He has volunteered extensively with Trout Unlimited and other conservation groups.

2017 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Marilyn Ann Wolfe Black
1953 –

Born in Sewickley, growing up in Sharon, and now a long-time resident of Crawford County, much of Marilyn Black's professional career has been in Venango County. Her leadership in conservation and outdoor recreation causes and organizations has greatly benefitted the county, the region, and the state. Her service includes: A decade on the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, including a term as president; long-time director and officer including chair of the Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation, numerous positions and activities with the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association, Trout Unlimited, the Pennsylvania Bass Association, the American Bass Association, the Council on Greenways and Trails, the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance, the Pennsylvania Greenways Partnership Commission that developed the state-wide greenways plan, and more.



Linda Steiner
1950 –

Linda Steiner hails from Bergen County, N.J., but has called Pennsylvania home since 1972 and Venango County since 1984. An outdoor writer, her articles and columns, often co-written with her husband, Bob, have inspired and introduced thousands to the wonders of nature and nature-based outdoor recreation, the value of our natural resources, and the importance of protecting them. Her commitment to the role of the outdoor writer led her to serve terms as president and as executive director of the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association. She has also served on the Governor's Advisory Council on Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation, as a past president of Trout Unlimited's Oil Creek Chapter, as a board member of the Allegheny Valley Conservancy and the Two Mile Run County Park Board, and helped lead the Friends of Two Mile Run County Park program.

2017 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CONTINUED



Robert "Bob" Steiner

1949 –

A native of Westmoreland County, Bob moved to Northwestern Pennsylvania in 1972 to begin a career with the Fish and Boat Commission, first as a fish culturist and then as a Waterways Conservation Officer. He and his wife Linda settled in Cooperstown in 1984 when Bob was assigned to Venango County. Throughout his career Bob was known for his work to improve local fisheries and his commitment to the resource as well as law enforcement duties. However, he is perhaps best known as an outdoor writer whose articles and columns, often co-written with his wife, have inspired and introduced thousands to the wonders of nature and nature-based outdoor recreation, the value of our natural resources, and the importance of protecting them. He is a past president of Trout Unlimited Oil Creek Chapter and long active in numerous local conservation programs.

2016 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Valerie Pettigrew Tarkowski
1959 –

A native of Erie and a long-time resident of Crawford County, much of Valerie Tarkowski's professional and volunteer work on behalf of the environment has been in Venango County. A founding member of the South Sandy Creek Watershed Association, she led the group in extensive mine reclamation and acid-mine-drainage remediation projects throughout the watershed. Field and Stream Magazine named her a "Hero of Conservation" for her watershed work. For four years she was the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regional Environmental Education Specialist, providing programs in Venango and other counties in the northwest. As a freelance outdoors writer and photographer, she has tackled difficult subjects providing fair and accurate information, enabling readers to make informed decisions. She is a past president of the Oil Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited and vice president of the state council.

2016 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CONTINUED



Tom Thomas

1947 -

In 1979 Tom Thomas and his wife moved to Phipps Road, Kennerdell. Within a year, a synthetic fuels plant was proposed near the couple's new home. Tom's careful review of the process and its environmental impact spurred him into action and creation of the Western Pennsylvania Citizens for Clean Communities. Under Tom's leadership the group helped stop the project ushering in an environmentally friendly electric generating plant. An advocate for the Allegheny River and its recreational designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Tom was appointed in 1992 to the river's Southern Advisory Council. He focused the council's attention on acid mine drainage impacts on the river and tributaries. In 1998 he helped form and continues to lead the Scrubgrass Creek Watershed Association, which to date has plugged 40 abandoned oil wells and helped develop a treatment system for the worst point source of acid mine drainage in the watershed.

2015 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Evelyn Kolojejchick

1943 -

A Venango County native, Evelyn Kolojejchick developed her life-long love for the natural world roaming the fields and woods near her family home in Sugarcreek Borough. As a conservationist she has inspired, led, and been boots on the ground. As a biology teacher at Cranberry High School she supervised the Science Club, organized environmental education field trips, making them available to students at other schools, and coached the Eco Team. She excited and inspired her students to become conservationists. Many went on to careers in the environmental sciences. In retirement Evelyn became deeply involved and took a leadership role with the Venango County Senior Environmental Corps and Friends of Oil Creek State Park. She has worked and led local water quality monitoring programs, efforts to locate abandoned oil wells, and volunteered with conservation programs throughout the county.

2015 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CONTINUED



John Kolojejchick

1944 -

In 2004 John Kolojejchick became chair of the Venango County Senior Volunteer Corps and took on the mission of finding and mapping abandoned oil and gas wells in this the birthplace of the oil industry. To date, more than 800 of the wells, which pose a potential environmental threat, have been located. Under his leadership, the organization has joined with several universities in studying methane releases from the wells, which could contribute to climate change. He is an organizer of the “Chicks in the Sticks” event at Oil Creek State Park, designed to get more women involved in outdoor activities, and volunteers with numerous other conservation and environmental science programs throughout the region. A Luzerne County native, John moved to Venango County upon marrying his wife Evelyn. He spent his teaching career at Franklin High School, where he inspired and led new generations of conservationists.

2014 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Gary Borger

1944 –

Internationally renowned fly-fisherman, fly-fishing educator, and conservation advocate, Gary Borger first cast a line in the streams near Cooperstown, Venango County, his childhood home. A 1962 Rocky Grove High School graduate, he earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Penn State University and a Ph.D. in Forestry and Botany from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He went on to teach for 28 years at the University of Wisconsin, Wausau becoming Professor Emeritus. He has written numerous books and articles and produced numerous videos on fly-fishing in addition to instructing and advocating on fishing and conservation. Gary stated, "I knew when I was a junior in college that I wanted to get a Ph.D. and become a college professor, and I wanted what I would learn to benefit others in gaining a better understanding of, and appreciation for, the world around us."

2014 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CONTINUED



Gary Edwards

1940 –

A native of Oil City and life-long resident of the area, Gary Edwards contributed significantly to our knowledge and appreciation of the region's birds. He served as Venango County Coordinator for the first Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas (1984-89) and as regional coordinator for the second atlas two decades later. Gary was a founding member and first president of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society and since its formation continued in leadership roles. He holds both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Biology from Clarion University and worked for 33 years as an environmental consultant and upon retiring taught at Clarion. He has written extensively on the region's birds, established a Venango County bird sighting website, has taught numerous programs on birding, and has been widely recognized for his contributions to Pennsylvania's ornithology.



John Gannon

1925 - 2013

John Gannon held leadership positions with the Oil City Chapter, IWLA for nearly seven decades, including terms as president, but his most enduring role was that of the chapter's conscience of conservation. John always reminded the chapter of the IWLA pledge and was a tireless advocate for conservation, especially the protection of our waters and lands. His strongly worded letters to elected officials urging environmental protections were legendary. He was the driving force behind many of the chapter's conservation efforts and youth programs, but always shied away from taking public credit. Born in Lucinda, Clarion County, John's family moved to the Oil City area when he was a child and he returned to Oil City in the late 1940s following Naval service in WWII and a brief period in California.

2013 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Edward J. "Ed" Schick

1934 -

Edward Schick has ensured that hundreds of children never suffer from Nature Deficit Disorder, a lack of exposure to the natural world. Schick was a founder and long the guiding force behind Cranberry Conservation Days. The program, started in 1970, provides an in-the-field, hands-on introduction to outdoor skills, activities, and nature. He spent a lifetime in scouting, including leadership of Troop 111 since the 1970s, where outdoor activities are a core commitment. For 24 years he served on the board of the Venango County Conservation District, helping lead efforts to obtain its first full-time director, keep some state land in agricultural production, and protect the county's streams along dirt and gravel roads. Originally from West Mifflin, Schick moved to Venango County in 1969 after accepting a teaching position with the Cranberry Area School District, where he soon became a principal.



Howard "Zahnie" Zahniser

1906 - 1964

Howard Zahniser was the principle author of the Wilderness Act and the untiring guiding force that built the grassroots support and Congressional coalition to make it a reality in 1964. Born in Franklin, he spent his formative teenage years in Tionesta, which he called his hometown. A conservationist who worked for the federal Bureau of Biological Survey and the Department of the Interior, he wrote for Nature and other publications. In 1945 he became Executive Secretary/ Director of the Wilderness Society, a position he held until his unexpected death just a few months before the Wilderness Act was signed into law. His eloquent definition of wilderness used in the Act: "An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

2012 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Dick Krear
1951 - 2003

An avid birder, naturalist, outdoorsman, and outdoor educator, Richard “Dick” Krear of Emlenton shared his enthusiasm for the natural world with all. He was instrumental in creation of the Seneca Rocks Audubon Society, was a master falconer who regularly provided programs on falconry and birds of prey and was honored for organizing the building of nesting platforms for osprey and peregrine falcons. He served as a deputy Waterways Conservation Officer and became a designated “river keeper” for the Allegheny River. To further awareness and provide the public with educational opportunities about the river, he bought a custom-built flatboat and opened Red Tail Eco Tours. “If you want to get kids interested in the outdoors, you show him something in his backyard,” Dick said.



Jim Holden
1939 – 2013

James “Jim” Holden’s vision, leadership, and tireless work is daily enjoyed by hundreds of Venango County residents and visitors who enjoy and get close to nature along the region’s bike/hike trail systems. As a founder and long-time president and board member of the Allegheny Valley Trails Association, Jim was a driving force behind the trail system. Jim also is a founding member of the Allegheny Valley Conservancy, a small land trust that focuses on protection and preservation of the Allegheny River landscape corridor. He has led efforts to protect land along French Creek, including a conservation easement on his own property. Retired as a Clarion University professor, Jim continues to farm, serving as an example of the best in sustainable agriculture practices.

2012 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CONTINUED



E. Michael "Mike" Boyle

1941 –

A native of Oil City, E. Michael Boyle developed an early appreciation of Pennsylvania's natural heritage of woods, water, and wildlife, leading to a lifetime personal commitment and decades of volunteer work with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Mike joined the WPC board in 1975 and served as chairman from 2001 to 2012, leading the organization as it accomplished several landscape-scale acquisitions and other projects that will forever benefit all Pennsylvanians. Twice during his tenure as chairman, Mike also served as acting president of the Conservancy as searches were conducted for a president/chief executive officer, devoting his attention to day-to-day organizational management providing uninterrupted leadership and a smooth transition. His conservation legacy can be seen across Pennsylvania's landscape and in the ongoing success of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

2011 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES



Roy Frank
1913 - 1995

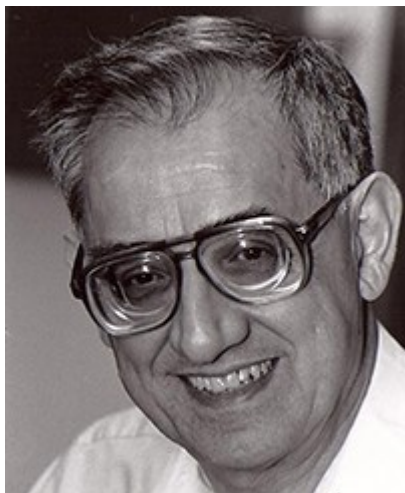
Roy was a leading conservation advocate throughout his lifetime; his accomplishments are remarkable. He was instrumental in passage of the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Act, the Pennsylvania Oil and Gas Act of 1985, and in gaining critical grass-roots support for the federal Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. He helped author the Clean and Green Amendment to the state Constitution and advocated for the Allegheny River and restoration of the state's waterways. He demanded enforcement of the state's pollution and conservation laws, even when it placed him at personal risk.



Steve Szalewicz
1915 - 1989

An outdoor writer whose columns were carried in the Derrick, the News Herald and a number of other newspapers in the region, Steve Szalewicz was a voice for nature and the protection of natural resources. He was instrumental in the battle to end dredging in the Allegheny River and for better regulation of strip mining and control of acid mine drainage. His writing helped gain grass roots support for Project 70 legislation that provide funding for conservation and recreation programs . Steve viewed all of nature as a gift given and the great outdoors as a Cathedral

2011 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES CONTINUED



Joseph Petulla

1932 - 2001

Born and raised in Oil City, Joseph Petulla was a renowned writer, educator, and environmentalist. He founded the Graduate Program in Environmental Management at the University of San Francisco, the first such program of its kind. His books include "American Environmental History," a volume the library of Congress listed as an essential Earth Day reading, and "Edgar Beaver: An Environmental Fable," based on the natural life history of beavers. Its theme is the need for society to work towards sustainability.

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