

Soil & Water District honors Reisingers at annual meeting

Highway Department workers Austin, Thorpe also receive awards

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WATKINS GLEN, Feb. 16, 2015 -- The Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) held an Annual Luncheon at the Watkins Glen Elks Lodge #1546 on Friday, Feb. 13, where accomplishments -- made possible with the help of many municipalities, the county, the Chemung County Soil and Water Conservation District, and other local agencies -- were reviewed for an audience of 80.

Three awards were also presented:

--The Conservation Farmer of the Year Award to Karen and Rick Reisinger, owners of Reisinger's Apple Country, in Dix;

--Two Merit Awards, to Art Austin of the County Highway Department and Daniel Thorpe of the Town of Hector Highway Department.

Don Castellucci, field representative for Congressman Tom

Reed, and Sperry Navone, chief of staff for Assemblyman Phil Palmesano and also representing State Senator Tom O'Mara, presented the award winners with special certificates from their offices.



Karen and Rick Reisinger were honored for their skills in raising high-quality, horticultural crops with the conservation of natural resources as an important goal. They have been growing apples and other fruit for over 20 years in Schuyler County, and their u-pick farm attracts thousands of customers every year because they have

created a family-friendly atmosphere that makes picking fruit fun while providing an education on how our fruit is grown.

Besides apples, they raise red raspberries, peaches, plums, blueberries, strawberries, pears, nursery stock, and pumpkins, and they make maple syrup. They were one of the first farms recognized in the state Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) program for their conservation farming practices, which include use of a sophisticated weather station and spray equipment to reduce the use of pesticides; pest scouting; and nutrient management practices to enhance soil quality and reduce the use of fertilizers and prevent soil erosion.

The Reisingers work with the Food Bank of the Southern Tier and its "Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables" program that provides fresh food to those who often cannot afford it. Their daughters Lisa Brower, Tammy Daniels and Amy Wysocki help on the farm, as do many of their grandchildren and their son-in-law, Ward Brower.

“We enjoy providing fresh, healthy food to families in a way that helps maintain a rural quality of life and rural landscape, supports our local economy and safeguards our natural resources. We feel it is important for people to understand how food is grown, and we love that our family is involved with our business,” said Karen Reisinger.

Art Austin has helped the District on many projects over the years, but was especially recognized for his work this past summer when Schuyler County SWCD was asked to assist Yates County with stream restoration after the devastating storm that hit that county. Austin is an equipment operator for the county and worked with Jim Barrett of the SWCD staff to reconnect streams to their floodplains, putting in long hours to implement an emergency stream intervention approach. “His diligence helped make an almost impossible situation work out with amazing efficiency,” said Jerry Verrigni, District Manager.

Daniel Thorpe is also an equipment operator, but with the Town of Hector, and he too has assisted the District on numerous conservation projects over the years. His wealth of experience and can-do attitude helped the District complete six significant stream stabilization projects in 2014 alone.

Some of the soil and water improvement projects implemented in 2014 and highlighted during the meeting include: nine stream stabilization projects; waterway construction, shoreline protection, hard road ditch stabilization; 18 miles of seeded road ditches and 77 acres of other critical area seeding; planning and implementation of agricultural environmental management on 100 area farms including a winery pumice composting facility, 13 acres of riparian buffers, and 179 acres of cover crops

and mulching; mapping of culverts and signs for the county and local municipalities and educational events, many done in cooperation with Farm Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

“We truly could not do all the work we do without the help of our municipal highway departments and neighboring Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and want to acknowledge the importance of shared services to achieve natural resource protection,” said Verrigni..

Photo in text: Award winners with local officials and family at the annual luncheon. From left: Sperry Navone, Chief of Staff for Assemblyman Phil Palmesano; Daniel Thorpe; Rick and Karen Reisinger; Jim and Amy Wysocki, and Lisa Brower; Tony Specchio, SWCD Board Chairman; Don Castellucci, Field Representative for Congressman Tom Reed. Missing from the photo: Art Austin. *(Photo provided)*