



Jim Barrett works alongside Beach Road after the June storm. *(Photo provided)*

Responding to desperate times

Many workers pitched in to help clean up following June's storm, and one man in particular stood out, says the Soil and Water Conservation District.

(The following article was prepared by the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District.)

WATKINS GLEN, Sept. 3 -- June of 2015 brought catastrophic flooding impacts to Schuyler County when 5 inches of rain fell in less than two hours. Damage from this event was vast and costly to both public and private infrastructure. The storm had widespread impacts, but especially focused its devastation in the Towns of Tyrone, Reading, and Catharine.



Flooding events have become more and more numerous annually in New York State. We have been very thankful that our County has fared relatively well until June's storm. However, with damage and devastation the storm brought something else to the forefront of our county -- resiliency, dedication, and a true shared services effort to help repair the infrastructure that was lost and in order to preserve our needed tourism season, but most importantly for the thousands of year-round residents who depend on it daily.

Our Town, County, and Village Highway Departments shined. Municipal boundaries didn't exist. The Emergency Management Department, our local fire departments and our Sheriff's Department all put forth a swift and immediate response.

The most cost-effective means to ensure that issues could be rectified in a timely manner was what mattered most. The area received many phone calls, many pieces of equipment, and immense amount of labor from all of the Chemung Town Highway Departments, the Chemung County Highway Department, the Chemung County Soil and Water Conservation District



(SWCD), and the Town of Wayne Highway Department, to just list a very few of those who came to our aid.

Within our own Schuyler County, the towns that did not feel as great an impact jumped immediately to the aid of those that did. Every highway department aided one another to help shoulder the seemingly impossible burden that lay ahead, making that burden more bearable.

The Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District focused its efforts first to assess damage, prioritize work, get permitting in place, and to obtain and utilize funding to assist with these efforts of rehabilitation. The next phase was to construct as many projects as possible to aid in lessening some of the burden. This would not have happened without the joint effort of support from all of our highway departments, and from one individual who is a true asset to the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District and to our towns, villages and county: Jim Barrett.

Jim has been an equipment operator for nearly 40 years in Schuyler County, working much of that time for the Schuyler County Highway Department. More recently, over the last several years, he has worked as the seasonal equipment operator for the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District. His talent and abilities are known throughout every highway department, not only in our county, but throughout the region.



What stands out most about Jim Barrett is his selflessness. He sees a job that needs to be done and he finds a way to do get it done. He does this with a smile on his face and with one of the best attitudes you could ever have at work or in life. He helps with team morale no matter what the situation because his work ethic and attitude are infectious. If it means staying late to finish the job in a less costly manner, or to come in on the weekend, you don't even have to ask, Jim is there. The abilities he has shown time and time again on an excavator can only be mimicked by a handful of operators throughout the region, at best.

During these trying times over the last several months, Jim has worked literally with every one of our town highway departments, county highway department and even many Chemung County town and highway departments. The common theme you hear back from any of those folks he has worked with is gratitude and appreciation for making an impossible situation manageable and bearable.



Jim Barrett has received formal letters of appreciation from the Schuyler County Legislature and Town of Reading, and informal recognition from another dozen municipalities in the region, and too many private residents to list.

With the assistance of many to make this possible, the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District has stabilized over 18,000 feet of road ditch, nearly 6,000 feet of stream, and utilized over 9,000 tons of rock rip-rap, all accomplished in just the past few months' time. All 9,000 + tons of rip rap were set by Jim Barrett, and paid for with competitive grant funding obtained by the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District. This again took a monumental effort of borrowed equipment, trucks to bring the material, operators to run loaders to assist with bringing the rock to be placed, and many individuals to provide the necessary hand labor to finish the jobs, all while each highway department worked on dozens and dozens of its own projects.

Again, one common theme existed -- "Whatever we can do to help Jim. If Jim is running the equipment, you can use whatever you need." These statements and many others were heard time and time again. Although the storm magnified this work, this is the type of effort Jim Barrett has shown year in and year out for the Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District.



There is still a great deal of effort that is needed ahead. The Schuyler County SWCD has applied for an additional \$942,000 in funding through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Water Quality Improvement Program to help bring even more funds to our region to assist with continued work and clean up from this challenging event.

When you see your local highway department personnel, take the time to thank them for their united effort. Each department has many dedicated workers that put forth this type of effort daily to help ensure the integrity of our stressed public infrastructure. Oftentimes they put their own safety aside to ensure our safety.

Photos in text:

From top: Jim Barrett operates an excavator along Beach Road; Kendall Hill Road in the Town of Tyrone before and after; Beach Road in the Town of Reading before and after. *(Photos provided*