

Conservation District bestows honors at its annual luncheon

Special to The Odessa File

WATKINS GLEN, Feb. 1 -- The Schuyler County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) held its Annual Luncheon at the Elks Club in Watkins Glen on January 31 and presented the Conservation Farmer of the Year Award to Jim and Eric Hazlitt of Sawmill Creek Vineyards in Hector, a Merit Award to Jessica Verrigni, Regional Stormwater Specialist, and Service Awards to retiring Board members Doris Karius and Glenn Larison.

Joe Sempolinski, District Office Director for Congressman Tom Reed, also presented the award winners with special certificates from the Congressman's office.

Soil and water improvement projects accomplished in 2013 were also reviewed for an audience of over 100 people that included local officials, municipal staff, farmers, and other landowners. The importance of shared services, especially with highway departments, to achieve natural resource protection was emphasized.



Highlights of implemented work presented at the meeting include: five stream stabilization projects; 3,000 feet of hard road ditch stabilization in three towns; 29 miles of seeded road ditches and 82 acres of other critical area seeding that included a gravel pit and construction sites; planning and implementation of agricultural environmental management on nearly 100 area farms including 100,000 feet of fencing for improved grazing, 190 acres of cover crops and mulching; farm structural practices; pesticide sprayer retrofits and weather stations for integrated pest

management; and educational events, many done in cooperation with Farm Bureau and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Former Schuyler County legislators Karius and Larison were formally thanked for their many years of service to the District. “Board members like Doris and Glenn are so important because of their sincere commitment to the Soil and Water mission and to improving constituents’ way of life. They will have a lasting impact on the Soil and Water District,” said District Manager Jerry Verrigni.

This year was one filled with many changes for the Soil and Water District as it made the transition to a new office site after the fire in the Shared Services Building. Jessica Verrigni, Regional Stormwater Specialist and Stormwater Specialist for Chemung County, helped on her own time with packing up office supplies, arranging for replacement equipment, and organizing materials so work could resume within days. She also helped design and build a demonstration rain garden and community garden. “Three thousand nine hundred pounds of fresh produce were donated to the Schuyler County Food Bank, and this would not have happened without Jessica’s help,” said Board Chairman Tony Specchio. “The drive, energy, and organizational abilities of Jessica are truly inspirational, and we deeply appreciate her help this year.”

Jim and Eric Hazlitt were recognized for the numerous conservation practices implemented on their farm over the years to protect soil and water resources: diversion ditches; row middle management, including the use of mulch and minimum tillage; an agrichemical mixing facility; use of integrated pest management with an on-farm weather station; and nutrient management planning. They grow 20 varieties of grapes on 85 acres and have four acres of sour and sweet cherries.

“Since Sawmill Creek Vineyards is located very close to Seneca Lake, natural resource conservation has been a priority for this farm for many generations; we are very pleased to recognize their efforts,” said Elaine Dalrymple, District Field Manager. “They have used many Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM) programs offered by the State, the Conservation District and the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service.” Sue Hazlitt, Jim’s wife, along with Tina Hazlitt, Eric’s wife, and Jason Hazlitt, Eric’s son, were also recognized for their help on the farm.

For more information on soil and water conservation programs for landowners and municipalities, go to www.schuylerswcd.com

Photo in text: Award winners with local officials and family. From left: Tony Specchio, SWCD Board Chairman; Joe Sempolinski, District Office Director for Congressman Tom Reed; Jessica Verrigni, Glenn Larison, Sue Hazlitt, Jim Hazlitt,

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Eric Hazlitt, Tina Hazlitt, and Jason Hazlitt. Missing from the photo: Doris Karius. (*Photo provided*)