



## ORANGE COUNTY SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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### Keeton to Retire From Soil and Water Board

After fifteen years of service, Gary Keeton is retiring from the Orange County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors, effective May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

Gary's varied and often fascinating careers and life experiences served not only to provide endless entertainment to staff and other directors, but contributed greatly to sound decision-making of the Board.



His careers and interests have included crop farming in the mid-west, managing thoroughbred horse farms, conducting biological research and becoming a respected local expert in archeology. Perhaps the greatest positive impact Gary has had on the world has been as a result of his immeasurable contribution to conservation education efforts. These efforts have taken place on behalf of various groups and agencies, and simply as a result of Gary's individual commitment to the cause. The number of children (not to mention

adults) who have been enthralled by his encyclopedic knowledge of wildlife and natural history is probably impossible to calculate. In his role as a presenter at the Conservation District's annual Conservation Field Days for 6<sup>th</sup> graders alone, we estimate that over 5,000 students were the beneficiaries of his humble yet sophisticated presentation style that imparted a uniquely engaging understanding of our natural world. Who knows how many of these students' lives and career choices were influenced in part by the joy and passion he exhibited in these presentations.

His stories ranged from all-night boating expeditions on the Hudson studying creatures of all shapes and sizes, to forays into local secluded mountain locations to capture rattlers in burlap sacks for research purposes, to spotting Mastodon tusks while floating down the Wallkill. He and his wife once rode horses from Maryland to New York. His telling of how his son's slim girlfriend and science partner was lowered into a cave upside down through an opening that practically

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gary Keeton  
360 County Route 48, Apt. A  
Thompson Ridge, NY 10985

Paul Ruszkiewicz  
255 Main Street  
Goshen, NY 10924

Paula DeBlock  
133 Whitford Road  
Westtown, NY 10998

John Wright  
329 Kings Hwy.  
Warwick, NY 10990

James Kulisek  
26 Memorial Drive  
Newburgh, NY 12550

required her to grease her shoulders was enough to make your knees weak. Want to know the history of the Basha Kill wetlands, including its former use as a rich agricultural area? Set aside a good amount of time for Gary to fill you in.

In addition to fulfilling his basic role of attending monthly Board meetings, Gary was always willing to pitch in when called upon. He commonly accompanied staff on Wallkill River inspections to maintain the functioning of the 1980's Army Corps flood control project. When an archeological study was needed in advance of 2016 Black Dirt flood mitigation work, Gary met our consultant in the field to help facilitate completion of the study so as to not delay the project. He often showed up at riparian restoration projects, rain garden plantings, and stream clean-ups, sometimes to set up an educational station but more often just to pitch in and be part of the solution.

Gary and his wife Sue will be retiring to an old farmhouse in Maine. It will without a doubt be Maine's gain and New York's loss. We wish him all the best and thank him for his years of service to science, conservation and the mission of the Conservation District. Some of us will think of him often and with great envy – far from tail-gaters, big box stores and McMansions.

