

## **CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR AWARD**

July 9, 2016

We now come to the presentation of the Adirondack Council's 2016 Conservationist of the Year Award. This is an annual award we give to a person or organization that has made an exemplary contribution to the well-being of the Adirondack Park.

This year, it is a great honor and privilege for me to announce that the Conservationist of the Year Award goes Joe Martens.

Joe has had one of the most extraordinary careers as a conservation leader in the history of NYS. His legacy is right up there with other giants of environmental protection our state has known. And, his beneficial impact on the preservation and quality of the Adirondack Park will be indelible.

Many of you probably know of him because from 2011 to 2015 he was the State's Commissioner of Environmental Conservation.

But at the Adirondack Council, we have known him as an environmental advocate and Adirondack champion for decades. For almost 40 years, since he got a degree in resource management from the College of Environmental Science and Forestry from Syracuse University in the early 80's, Joe has been continuously involved in major public policy decisions affecting the Adirondacks. And he has done it in every capacity imaginable – from the staff of the State Legislature, in State agencies, in the Governor's office (and by Governor, I mean the first Governor Cuomo, our current Governor's father), in public benefit corporations, and in the private non-profit sector.

His career path from student intern and junior staffer to major executive positions, including the Presidency of the Open Space Institute from 1998 through 2010, Chair of both the Olympic Regional Development Authority and the Adirondack Lakes Survey Corporation, and, as I said, most recently Commissioner of the Department of Environmental Conservation, followed a rising trajectory of accomplishment and excellence.

When one thinks about Joe's imprint on the Adirondacks, here are some of the things to keep in mind:

- He was there at the side of then Governor Mario Cuomo in 1993 when the Environmental Protection Fund was created at a location within the Adirondack Park. Hundreds of thousands of acres of Adirondack forests and waters have been saved using monies from the EPF.
- He was there in Ray Brook during the formative days of the Adirondack Park Agency with significant Agency managerial responsibilities
- He was there at the helm of the Open Space Institute for the acquisition of the 10,000 acre Tahawus Tract, and also when the Nature Conservancy needed significant multi-million dollar support from OSI for the protection of 161,000 acres of Adirondack land being sold by the Finch Pruyn Company.

- And then, at DEC, his hand was steadily on the throttle as, piece by piece, 69,000 of those Finch lands were acquired for the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

Any one of these achievements would mark the achiever as a great conservationist. Yet, Joe was involved in a leading role in them all, and they are just highlights from a much longer list.

You might think that someone with his history of accomplishment, and need to break a few eggs while making omelets, might have acquired some arrogance along the way. But, Joe built his career and lived successfully among wolves and pit bills with a wonderfully calm and rational demeanor, with unquestioned integrity, and with an inviting wry smile that has always made interactions with him a pleasure. He surely is a man of whom it can be said: “He has made lambs lie down safely with lions”.

Joe Martens: for all you have done – and I am sure you are not finished with your many contributions to our causes -- the Adirondack Council is thrilled to be awarding you its 2016 Conservationist of the Year Award.