

PRC advocates give out their annual river protection awards

BY TERESA EDMOND
Staff Writer

The Pequannock River Coalition (PRC) recently honored locals who have helped to preserve and restore the Pequannock River Watershed. The awards were presented at the PRC's annual meeting at the Riverdale Senior Community Center in Riverdale on April 13. Approximately 25 people attended the meeting.

Awards were given out in several categories. The local honorees included Bill O'Hearn of Ringwood, Estelle Anderson of West Milford, and Donald Pruden of Riverdale.

The Pequannock River Coalition aims to preserve the Pequannock River as a natural, recreational, aesthetic and water supply resource. Launched in 1994, the organization has a membership of more than 520 people and groups from at least 90 municipalities.

The Pequannock River Watershed itself is 98 acres and covers 11 municipalities and three counties.

Before presenting the awards, PRC Executive Director Ross Kushner recapped the coalition's accomplishments in 2009 with a slideshow depicting "a pretty busy year." One accomplishment is the PRC's "River in the Classroom" program, which brings an aquatic life curriculum to schools in Bloomingdale, Butler, Riverdale, Kinnelon and West Milford. Between 3,000 and 4,000 students have participated in the program,

according to Kushner.

"Eventually we would have brainwashed every child in every town," Kushner quipped.

Other accomplishments include the Glenburn Estate restoration in Riverdale and a permit acquisition from the City of Newark, which controls the flows of the Pequannock River. The PRC also completed two environmental resource inventories (ERIs) for Pequannock and Butler. An ERI is a compilation of information reporting on a region's environmental features and natural resource characteristics.

"Tonight is the awards (presentation) because we never lose sight of the fact that it's the people that make this happen," Kushner said.

O'Hearn won the Volunteer Service Award, given to dedicated volunteers who have demonstrated effort in protecting the Pequannock River Watershed. O'Hearn professionally served in the Highlands Coalition, the Passaic River Coalition and the NY-NJ Trail Conference. Even more commendable is that when he's not working, O'Hearn said he still "loves to get dirty and get wet" while cleaning the Pequannock River.

"In my career, I've probably preserved around \$10 million of open space, but some of my most satisfying experiences have been slipping and falling into the Pequannock River," he said.

Anderson and Pruden each won the River Protector Award, bestowed upon individuals, groups

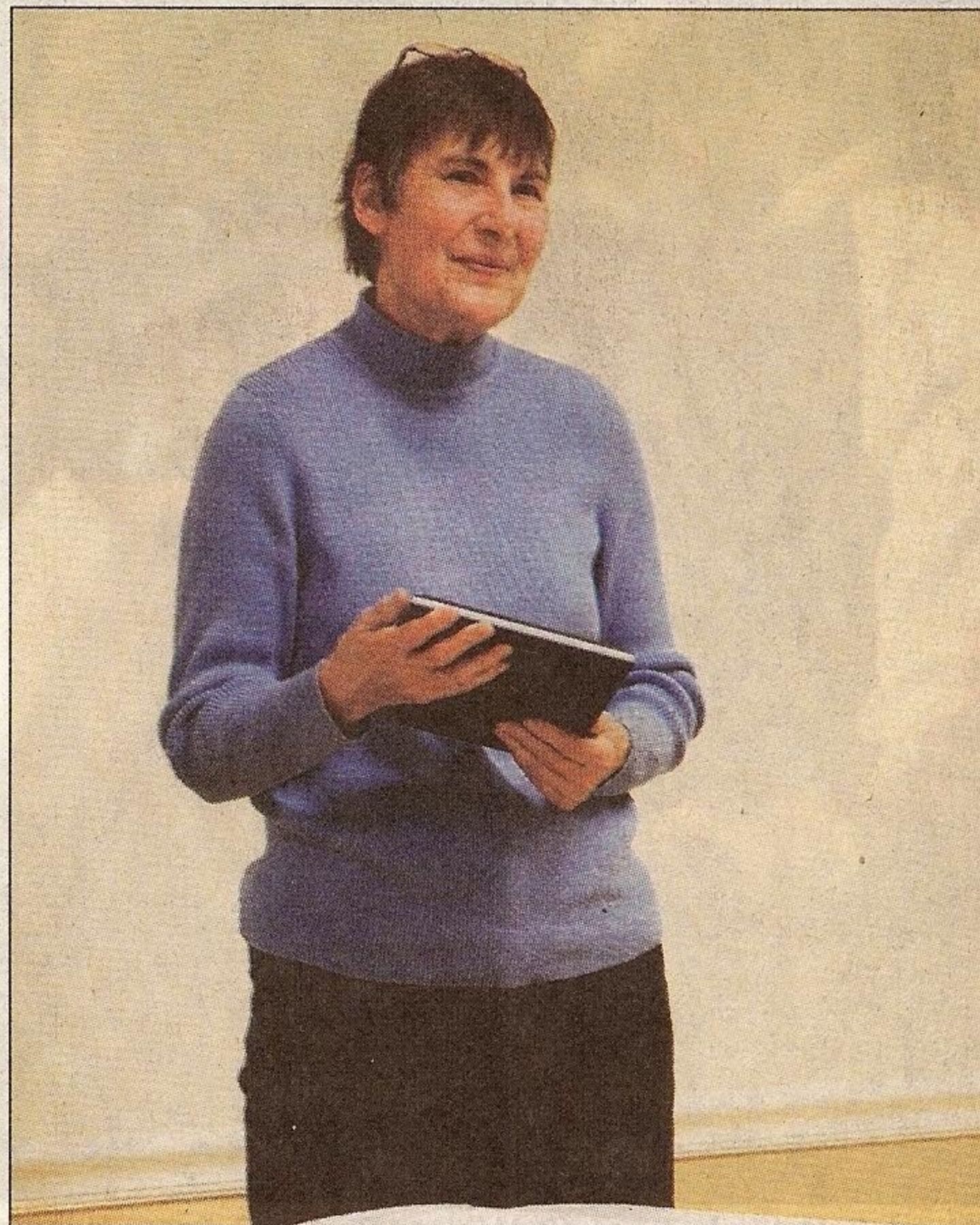


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PEQUANNOCK RIVER COALITION

Estelle Anderson of West Milford with the River Protector Award she received from the Pequannock River Coalition last week.

and companies who have made philanthropic contributions to the Pequannock River Watershed.

"I do love River in the Classroom. I support it because I agree with brainwashing kids while

they're young," Anderson joked.

Pruden said that youths do recall what they learn from years back, indicating some impact on young minds.

"They talked about this insect with hairy armpits," he said. "They learned that in the fifth grade, and they still remember that in the ninth grade, so we're doing something right. How can you fail?"