

## **Community efforts receive recognition from OCCA**

The Otsego County Conservation Association is giving a nod to three local initiatives having a positive impact on the county's environment. The Butternut Valley Alliance, Cooperstown Elementary School Kid Garden and Sustainable Otsego will receive certificates of recognition at the association's annual dinner, to be held on Nov. 13 at the Stella Luna Ristorante in Oneonta.

Also at the dinner, Robert and Jean Miller will be honored as 2009 Conservationists of the Year for lifetime achievement in environmental endeavors. OCCA announced its choice for this recognition in October.

"It is gratifying to know that so many people are working so hard locally for the environment," said OCCA president Martha Clarvoe. "The individuals devoting so much volunteer time to raise awareness about environmental issues augurs well for Otsego County."

The BVA, spearheaded in 2008 by Ben Friedman and Carla Hall, will be acknowledged for action taken on the environmental components of its mission statement. Co-chairs of the alliance are Stacia Norman of Morris and Robert Eklund of New Lisbon. Eklund will officially represent the BVA at the dinner to receive the certificate of recognition.

Since its formation, BVA has contacted local agencies and organizations, with knowledge and expertise in water quality, with the goal of establishing baseline data on the water quality of the Butternut Valley, and has given a presentation to its membership providing an overview of information collected. Committee Chair Les Hasbargen has attended water quality conferences, reporting on them to the BVA. He also visited Bradford County, Pa. to observe gas drilling operations and reported his findings to the alliance.

Alliance members have also collected and distributed information in regard to gas drilling. In summer 2009, BVA member Maureen Dill of Morris made a presentation on the impacts of drilling operations to the Village of Morris Board of Trustees.

Also receiving recognition at the OCCA event will be the Cooperstown Kid Garden, a volunteer-run organic vegetable garden cultivated at the Cooperstown Elementary School. The garden is the brainchild of Antoinette Kuzminski of Fly Creek, herself an avid gardener. Bennett Sandler, also of Fly Creek, Richard deRosa of Middlefield and Kristen Griger of Cooperstown, along with others, assisted in the effort.

The Kid Garden is being recognized by OCCA because it creates organic produce while providing education on organic gardening. It also raises awareness among young people about where food comes from and helps them make a connection between a healthy environment and healthy food, as well as giving them the opportunity to observe plant life cycles first hand. Soil quality and erosion control are other components of the learning experience offered by the Kid Garden.

Kristen Griger, Kid Garden coordinator, will receive the recognition on behalf of all involved in this effort.

The third group to be recognized by OCCA is Sustainable Otsego, an ad hoc group of local residents banding together to promote the concept of sustainability. The group formed in 2007, under the leadership of Adrian Kuzminski of Fly Creek. Over the past year, Sustainable Otsego largely addressed the prospect of horizontal gas drilling in the county, organizing three educational forums on the subject.

Sustainable Otsego has also invited prominent guest lecturers to speak locally. In 2006, author, lawyer, teacher and influential environmentalist Albert Bates spoke in Cooperstown on permaculture, an approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems mimicking relationships found in nature. In 2007, due to Sustainable Otsego's efforts, Sarah James, co-director of the Institute for Eco-municipality Education & Assistance, spoke on a book she co-authored, titled "The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities & Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices."

Ron Bishop of Cooperstown will represent Sustainable Otsego at the OCCA dinner.

The keynote speakers at the dinner will be Professors Mary Allen and Zsuzsanna Balogh-Brunstad of Hartwick College. The topic of their joint presentation will be "Antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the Upper Susquehanna River."

Reservations for the dinner are required and may be arranged by contacting OCCA at 547.4488 or [admin@occainfo.org](mailto:admin@occainfo.org). by Nov. 6. Anyone missing the cut-off date should call the same number to see if space is still available.

The Otsego County Conservation Association is a non-profit environmental organization serving the county since 1968. OCCA promotes the enjoyment and sustainable use of Otsego County's natural resources through education, advocacy, resource management, research and planning. More information on OCCA is available at [www.occainfo.org](http://www.occainfo.org).