

## **OCCA honors Robert, Jean Miller for Lifelong Devotion to the Environment**

### *Community efforts also receive special recognition*

The Otsego County Conservation Association held its Annual Dinner and Meeting on November 13 at Stella Luna Ristorante in Oneonta. Honorees at the event were 2009 Conservationists of the Year, Dr. J. Robert and Jean Miller. The Millers are lifelong naturalists who helped found the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society. Robert Miller, who has published chemistry and ornithological papers in major scientific journals, edited the organization's newsletter, "The Kingfisher," for 30 years. He continues to organize December and May bird counts for DOAS.

In presenting the award, longtime Conservation Chair of DOAS Andy Mason, stated, "I learned how important science was from him. You need good data to be successful in conservation. He contributed more to bird life in Otsego County than any one person." As a writer, presenter, photographer and active environmentalist, Jean Miller was president of DOAS for 13 years, is still active on the Board of Directors, and writes frequent articles for "The Kingfisher." As a Board member and horticulture chairman for the Oneonta Garden Club, she has presented programs on wildflowers and written articles for the club newsletter as well.

At the dinner, OCCA also gave nods to three local initiatives having a positive impact on the county's environment – the Butternut Valley Alliance, Cooperstown Kid Garden and Sustainable Otsego.

The BVA, spearheaded in 2008 by Ben Friedman and Carla Hall, was acknowledged for action taken on the environmental components of its mission statement. Robert Eklund, co-chair of the Alliance, received the award on behalf of BVA.

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.

Also receiving recognition at the OCCA event was 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 was recognized for creation of organic produce while providing education on organic gardening. Griger, Kid Garden coordinator, was present to receive the award.

The third group recognized was 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. Marty Stayton accepted the certificate of recognition for Sustainable Otsego.

The keynote speakers at the dinner were Professors Mary Allen and Zsuzsanna Balogh-Brunstad of Hartwick College, both of whom presented preliminary findings of research conducted on the Susquehanna River. OCCA has contributed \$2,000 toward their studies. According to Allen, the goals of the project are to investigate seasonal changes in proportions of antibiotic-resistant bacteria and to look for bacteria capable of “eating” antibiotics.

“Data from this research will establish a baseline for determining the impacts of continued development along the Upper Susquehanna River,” Allen said.