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On The Bright Side: OCCA honors Otsego lawyer

By Tom Grace

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GARRATTSVILLE _ Edward Lentz of New Lisbon has been named conservationist of the year by the Otsego County Conservation Association.

At OCCA's annual dinner and meeting at the Otesaga Ballroom on Oct. 25, Lentz, 52, will be honored for his environmental work, which ranges from raising awareness about the world's declining oil stocks to asking probing questions about Catalyst Renewables.

Catalyst, a Texas-based firm, had proposed building a large woodburning plant in Oneonta.

At home Thursday on Dockstader Road, Lentz, a patent attorney, said he did not initially oppose Calayst's proposal, but did so only after the principals ``just couldn't provide the details we needed to make an informed decision about their project."

Questions kept coming from many sources, he said, and eventually Catalyst gave up on the project.

When a 200-unit recreational vehicle park was proposed for state Route 51 in Morris a couple of years ago, Lentz began to ask questions and didn't like the answers he heard.

``I'm not opposed to development, but I think it should be done in a way that respects others' property rights," he said.

The RV park proposal would have had vehicles close to property lines, without buffers, he noted.

Neighbors on higher ground near the proposed large park were worried about the project's affect on the local aquifer, he said, but the developer did not address these concerns. After the state Department of Health asked for more detailed information, the developer moved on.

Lentz noted that New Lisbon, his hometown of four years, is working on a comprehensive plan to guide development.

Lentz and his wife, Vicky Lentz, a biology professor at the State University College at Oneonta, moved to New Lisbon from Davenport about four years ago. Before that, they lived in Philadelphia.

Vicky Lentz said they moved to upstate New York after she was hired by SUCO. Her husband was working for a law firm in Philadelphia and, after seeing the area, decided to open his own practice.

He works from his hillside home overlooking state Route 51.

Since moving to New Lisbon, Lentz has become involved in politics and serves as vice chairman of the Otsego County Democratic Party. He is a member of the Coalition For Democracy of Central New York and a founder of an offshoot of this group, the Environmental Working Group. The Environmental Working Group seeks to raise awareness about peak oil, global warming and encourage sustainable lifestyles.

``OCCA is very impressed with Ed's involvement in environmental issues affecting Otsego County," OCCA's Executive Director Erik Miller said in a prepared statement announcing the group's award.

Teresa Winchester, OCCA's assistant director, said Lentz deserves recognition.

“I think he’s a model for others to follow,” she said.

Lentz was selected in a vote by OCCA’s board of directors.