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Environmental Journal



Save the Bay celebrates Spalding's 17 years of leadership

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John Scanlon, left, Save the Bay's first executive director, and Alan Nathan, a vice president, were part of the celebration at Tuesday's annual meeting at the headquarters in Providence.

Courtesy of Save the Bay

Curt Spalding, the longtime director of Save the Bay, the state's largest environmental advocacy group, said goodbye last week. And John Scanlon, the group's first executive director, gave a humorous account of Save the Bay's founding 38 years ago — a time, he said, when corporations, unions and just about everybody mistrusted environmentalists.

Through it all, Trudy Coxe, the group's only other executive director, sat in the front row and laughed and applauded as Scanlon told his stories, such as how he was told to hire Coxe years ago, and he didn't realize how demanding she would be.

Or, "We'd always say we had 21,000 members so we would have more impact, but only 2 or 3 paid their dues."

And, why did every group that invited him to speak serve fish at the meals. Scanlon said, "I don't eat

fish.”

Usually Save the Bay holds its annual meetings in Newport. But this year it decided to meet at its waterfront headquarters in Providence. One reason was the unveiling of plaques that honored its founding board and the board members who were in office in 2005, when Save the Bay completed construction of its \$7-million headquarters on a former dumpsite in Fields Point.

“We wanted to connect the inspiration of the past with the accomplishments of the present,” said Spalding. (A link to a video of the presentation can be found by going to www.SaveBay.org.)

Alden M. Anderson Jr., Save the Bay's president, praised Spalding for his 17-year tenure in charge of the group. Spalding announced this spring that he is leaving this summer. Last week he said he still didn't know what he will do in the future.

While Spalding was in charge, Save the Bay grew from a 15-person staff and \$800,000 budget to a 35-person staff with a \$3.5-million budget, Anderson said. And, he noted, it now has a state-of-the-art green headquarters building overlooking the Bay.

Spalding noted that he learned that 100,000 menhaden were recently caught in the Bay. There have been drastic reductions in sewage and toxins flowing into the Bay. Seals appeared in Providence recently.

“We're seeing life in Narragansett Bay where we never saw it before,” Spalding said. And that happened, he said, not just because of efforts by local governments. People worked together.

Similarly, fish ladders are now being installed around the upper Bay, and every project is a collaboration of several levels of government as well as local volunteers, Spalding said. He said he hoped such efforts would grow into something more global.

“What has to happen on a grand scale is what happened here in Rhode Island,” he said. “We transformed people's relationships with Narragansett Bay.

“Every day mattered that I worked at Save the Bay,” Spalding said. “That's why I will always be proud of the time I spent here.”

Scanlon, 81, said Save the Bay grew out of a Sunday afternoon meeting at Louise Durfee's house in Tiverton to talk about how to stop plans to build an oil refinery in that town. Durfee, a prominent lawyer, has been an executive director of the Department of Environmental Management and a member of the Tiverton Town Council.

“Somehow I got imbued and infected by the group,” said Scanlon. “They thought they were there to save the world.”

Scanlon marveled at Save the Bay's current successes and noted that back in the early days, the late Dr. William Miner and a few others started the group with just \$6,000 and a tiny office in East Greenwich.

The staff later moved to a triple decker near the State House, fittingly just upstairs from the Rhode Island Petroleum Association, lobbyists for the oil industry.

Not only did the group defeat the refinery proposed for Tiverton, it fought other refinery proposals around the Bay, Scanlon said. It also lobbied for creation of the Coastal Resources Management Council

to protect the state's coastline.

"The Save the Bay story is a great American story," Scanlon said. "It's a story of simple people working together to save something precious."

Save the Bay last week unveiled a plaque honoring the following members of its founding board of directors: G. John Canulla, Thomas Hazlehurst, Dr. James W. Holt Jr., Arthur A. Kidder Jr., Charles B. McGowan, Dr. William W. Miner, John T. Scanlon and Irving C. Sheldon.

It also unveiled a similar plaque honoring the board members who were in office when the new Save the Bay Center was dedicated June 2, 2005. They are: Karen Augeri Benson, president; Alden M. Anderson Jr., president-elect; Timothy Burns, past president; Kate Kilguss and Joan C. Abrams, capital campaign co-chairs; Dr. Vincent C. Rose, secretary; Gail A. Ginnetty, treasurer; F. Paul Mooney Jr., assistant treasurer; and H. Curtis Spalding, executive director.

Also honored were four vice presidents: Lawrence A. DeMichele, Steven P. Hamburg, Alan Nathan and Vanessa Toledo, and the following board members: Stephen H. Clark, Zechariah Chafee, Anne G. Earle, Mohamed Farzan, Simon A.J. Goudiaby, Virginia Lee, Stephen J. MacGillivray, Trip Millikin, B. Michael Rauh Jr., Betsy Ray, Thomas E. Rogers and William Vareika.

Save the Bay's Esther B. Small Volunteer of the Year Award went to board member Cindy Butler, a human-resources consultant who has provided training for the staff and guidance for the national search to replace Spalding.

An Environmental Achievement Award went to the board and members of the Rhode Island Country Club who, with support from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Barrington Land Trust, restored 165 acres of fish spawning habitat near Mussachuck Creek. Board member David Piccerelli, who supervised the project, accepted the award.

A second Environmental Achievement Award went to Mark Stein, who led efforts at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to get the Brayton Point power plant to change its cooling process to one less damaging to Mount Hope Bay.

The Alison J. Walsh Award for Outstanding Environmental Advocacy went to Donald Pryor, a lecturer at Brown University who does research on the Bay and played a key role in developing consensus in recent years for a 50-percent reduction in anthropogenic nitrogen inputs.

Bike to Work Day is set for Friday

The 52nd annual National Bike to Work Day is scheduled for Friday and Rhode Island will celebrate the event with a gathering at the skating rink in Providence's Kennedy Plaza at 7 a.m.

Providence Mayor David Cicilline, Michael Lewis, director of the state Department of Transportation, and Richard Godfrey, director of Rhode Island Housing and chairman of The Providence Foundation Bike to Work and College Committee, will all cycle to the event.

Breakfast and refreshments will be served from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. At 3 p.m., vendors of bike equipment will be at the rink offering merchandise, safety tips and demonstrations.

Experienced bicycle commuters are also organizing "bike trains" from various locations. For more

information go to www.bikeprovidence.org.

New group focuses on green building

Twelve local professionals have formed a Rhode Island “interest group” of the U.S. Green Building Council, a national organization that promotes green standards for a wide range of buildings.

The new group is sponsored by the New England Institute of Technology and will have its first meeting at 4:30 Thursday at the school's main campus at 2500 Post Rd. in Warwick.

Formation of the group is the first step to organizing a fully recognized chapter of the USGBC, according to Connie McGreavy, who is leading the effort. McGreavy is associate vice president for planning and development for DPS Sporting Club Development Co. and owner of a green consulting firm, Conserve by Design.

The group plans to meet on the third Thursday of each month. The meetings are open to anyone interested in learning more about green building and getting involved in raising green building awareness. For more information, call McGreavy at (401) 862-3158.

Forest group to hold walk

The Rhode Island Forest Conservators Organization is holding its annual spring program on Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon along the Pawtuxet River in the Hope Village area of Scituate. There is no charge.

A walk will begin at the parking lot for the town beach and barn at the end of Ryefield Road, just downhill from the Hope Library. Local foresters will lead a tour of the spruce and pine stands managed by Hope Associates at the Trott/Perry Preserve.

Directions are available by calling (401) 568-3421 or going to www.rifco.org.

The Environmental Journal is a listing of brief news items about the actions of individuals, organizations and businesses that affect the air we breathe, the water we drink and the landscape that surrounds us. If you have comments or suggestions, please contact environment reporter Peter B. Lord at 277-8036, or by email at plord@projo.com or by writing him, care of the Providence Journal, 75 Fountain St., Providence, R.I. 02902.

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