

OCCA names long-time nature enthusiasts as Conservationists of the Year

The Otsego County Conservation Association has named Dr. J. Robert Miller and his wife, Jean, as 2009 Conservationists of the Year. The Millers will be recognized at the organization's annual dinner, to be held on Nov. 13 at the Stella Luna Ristorante in Oneonta.

"For the first time, we invited nominations from the general public," said OCCA assistant director Teresa Winchester.

"We're glad we did this; otherwise, we might not have become aware of all that the Millers have done in the way of environmental advocacy and education," she said.

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society board member Jonathan Richardson submitted a nomination on behalf of the Millers.

"Bob and Jean were already long-time birders and naturalists when they helped found DOAS, and they channeled this interest into abundant and ever-enthusiastic support for Audubon activities. Bob's editorship of the DOAS newsletter, "The Kingfisher", and Jean's many conservation-focused articles in this publication, are tangible evidence of their efforts," Richardson said.

Robert Miller, who grew up in rural Iowa, graduated with high honors in chemistry from Iowa State University and went on to obtain a Ph D in organic biochemistry from Syracuse University. He then worked as a research chemist with Parke Davis Company for four years before beginning a 34-year career teaching chemistry at Hartwick College.

Miller, who has published chemistry and ornithological papers in major scientific journals, edited "The Kingfisher" for 30 years. He continues to organize December and May bird counts for DOAS.

"Bob's collection and analysis of bird count data provide valuable long-term records of the ups and downs of individual bird species in Otsego County. This is important comparative information both locally and as part of a national conservation assessment," Richardson said.

Jean Miller was raised in a family whose parents and siblings were biologists.

"I was immersed in learning about many aspects of nature all my life, and we passed this on to our six children by investigating, learning, exploring, and traveling," she said. She describes herself as a "writer, presenter, photographer and active environmentalist.

For many years she assisted her husband with off campus courses in ornithology associated with Hartwick College and with nature trips to Central and South America, Australian, and New Zealand. She holds a B S in music education and has taken many graduate courses in music at Oberlin and Hartwick colleges as well as SUNY-Oneonta. She has also taught music locally.

Jean Miller has photographed wildflowers and other natural subjects for many years and has turned some of her pictures into nature photo cards as a means of spreading her love for nature and of educating others about the beauty in nature.

Reservations for the dinner must be received in the OCCA office by Nov. 3. To obtain a reservation form, contact OCCA at 547-4488 or admin@occainfo.org.

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.