

UDC remembers Ed Wesely

By LIAM MAYO

NARROWSBURG, NY — On June 3, the Upper Delaware Council took a moment to pay tribute to Ed Wesely. Chairperson Jeffery Dexter praised the work Wesley accomplished with the community, citing his work with school groups and with his

support of the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge. Dexter mentioned specifically an initiative Wesley organized around monarch butterflies, where volunteers would rescue stranded butterflies and drive them south to rejoin their kaleidoscope. (After some discussion at the meeting, “kaleidoscope”

was found to be an official term for a group of butterflies.)

His sentiments were echoed by other members of the council. “Now that we’ve lost Ed,” said Town of Tusten representative Susan Sullivan, “it’s our responsibility to carry things forward.”

Ed was a big fan of poet Emily Dickenson and Inez George Gridley. Ed used Gridley’s poem here as an introduction to his booklet “Milanville Days.”

**A scarlet thread of wonder
Runs through the woof of days.
For all the little magics
This is my hymn of praise.**
— Inez George Gridley

Distinguished Service Award: Ed Wesely

[Editor’s note: Ed Wesely received the Upper Delaware Council’s Distinguished Service Award in 2017. The following is an excerpt presented at the award ceremony.]

The Distinguished Service Award is the Upper Delaware Council’s highest honor. It is given to individuals for “lifetime achievement” in modeling the goals and objectives of the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Management Plan, for dedicated work on a particular project, or outstanding representation of one’s community.

Ed Wesely of Milanville, PA never seeks this type of attention for himself and was speechless and humbled when we advised him about this award nomination that Jeff Dexter made for Damascus Township to the universal agreement of all who know Ed.

Passionate, deliberate, literate and well-spoken, Ed has a certain omnipresence in the Upper Delaware River Valley but somehow manages to always turn the focus to his subject matter while remaining relatively quiet and mysterious as an individual.

In his case, the subject could be the natural resources of his surrounding environment which he is constantly observing and documenting.

It could be Monarch butterflies, which he reared, released and sometimes tagged more than 7,000 of over the two decades that his Butterfly Barn nature center was active in Milanville, PA.

It could be about hiking the Damascus Forest Trail that he designed and led many nature walks along its two-mile path.

It could be teaching adults and children through hands-on activities, animal puppetry, his writings and lectures, and volunteering hundreds of hours staffing informational booths at festivals and public events.

Or it could be his campaign to raise awareness of the Milanville Historic District and its 1901-built interstate bridge crossing, which are the subjects of two booklets that Ed recently wrote, illustrated with his stunning photographs and distributes free on his own dime.

Ed concludes his booklet on the Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge



with this personal plea: “In Milanville... we have a vibrant community with roots in colonial America, with 14 homes and structures (including our bridge) listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Park Service also maintains a Resource Management office in town for managing the ecology of the Upper Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River. The Milanville Bridge fits hand and glove into this remarkable setting. Treasured by residents and visitors, it would be tragic to close it for good. It must be preserved for present and future generations.”

The plaque reads, “Upper Delaware Council Distinguished Service Award, presented to Ed Wesely in recognition of your contributions to the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River Valley through your roles as a naturalist, educator, conservationist, historic preservationist and renowned butterfly expert, on this 23rd day of April 2017.”



This story about the rehabilitation of the Roebling Bridge was the first story that Ed did for The River Reporter on June 23, 1983. His last piece was a letter to the PA Department of Transportation in support of the rehabilitation of the Skinner’s Falls-Milanville Bridge that ran on May 20, 2021.



RR photo by Owen Walsh

Whether it was teaching about monarch butterflies or the ecology of the river, Ed Wesely was able to create fun. And he always had a bag of interesting props. He is pictured here in Judy Redick’s 2nd grade classroom at the Damascus Elementary School where he was a regular visitor.



Ed, right, did a variety of tasks for The River Reporter. In this photo, he is carrying a box of “flats,” the physical pages that we spent days pasting up, to the Union Gazette in Port Jervis in be printed.

The first River Talk, developed by Ed, ran in the January 19 to February 1, 1984 edition. The first version of Soundings premiered on January 30, 1986.

Ed continued his relationship to the paper up until his death on Wednesday, May 26.

RR photo by Barbara Yeaman

Save the Milanville Bridge

In support of Ed’s wish to “Save the Milanville Bridge,” he requested that a legal fund be established to defend the bridge. Damascus Citizens for Sustainability has created the Ed Wesely Bridge Fund for that purpose. All earmarked money will be dedicated to Ed’s cause to save the Milanville Bridge.

Memorial contributions can be made online or by sending a check. Be sure to indicate in the “in memory of” section in the PayPal donation page or in the memo line on a check.

Visit www.bit.ly/edweselydonate or mail checks to DCS, PO Box 147, Milanville, PA 18443.