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A profile in preservation

Conway recognized for efforts in preserving state's land, heritage, culture, resources, traditions and history

Tom Eastman
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FRANCONIA — The town of Conway and Tamworth resident Frumie Selchen, director of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire, along with the Granite State Ambassadors, are the 2009 recipients of the Old Man of the Mountain Legacy Fund's sixth annual Profile Awards. In honor of New Hampshire's Old Man of the Mountain, Ted Austin, former general manager of Mount Cranmore Resort, and newly-named director of N.H. Parks and Recreation, along with Joe McQuaid, publisher of the Union Leader of Manchester, presented the annual Profile Awards at Franconia Notch State Park on Sunday — the sixth anniversary of the fall of the Old Man of the Mountain granite profile.

The recipients were recognized for “work on behalf of the conservation or preservation of New Hampshire’s natural resources and scenic beauty; preservation of its cultural, social or political history, traditions or structures; and leadership, particularly of a volunteer nature, in these areas and displaying the independence of thought and spirit symbolized by the Old Man.”

The Profile Awards were established in 2004 as a way to memorialize the Old Man of the Mountain, the extraordinary rock profile that was New Hampshire’s official symbol. It was viewed by millions of visitors to Franconia Notch State Park before its fall six years ago. Last year, Gov. John Lynch delivered a proclamation making May 3 the official “Old Man of the Mountain Day” in the state.

“We’re very honored to receive this award. It’s always nice to be recognized for good, positive accomplishments,” said selectmen board chair Larry Martin Monday.

Representing the town at the awards ceremony Sunday were Paul Pinkham, member of the town's conservation commission, his wife, Connie, and Kim Beals of North Conway who serves on the board of the Old Man of the Mountain Legacy Fund and on the group's nominating committee.

Beals said that the award is for all of Conway, as it reflects the town's leadership in protecting and promoting its resources, especially over the past decade. She cited town staff's willingness under town manager Earl Sires and others to work with the community cooperatively.

“I wanted to nominate the town because although there has been some controversy over the years and some acrimony, overall there have been some major accomplishments in the Conways that were deserving of recognition,” said Beals, who said that Conway was selected in a strong field of other town nominations that very likely could win in coming years.

This year's award belongs to Conway alone, however — and Beals saluted the overall leadership of Sires and others for setting the tone for interactions between the business community, the public and town hall.

“There has been a lot of good done in this town, especially since the management team at town hall came on board, and specifically I give Earl a lot of the credit for that,” said Beals. Sires said he has been struck since coming East nine years ago to Conway from Utah that the town shares environmental goals — following a cooperative government and development model that his former town in the West was still trying to achieve.

“There is a spirit of finding common ground here that is not the case in other parts of the country,” said Sires, adding, “When you look at our town, we have a higher percentage of preserved open spaces than other parts of the state, yet we also have big box development — but that development is located in areas where townspeople through the master plan said it should be concentrated.”

He said the town's role is to be a facilitator for making projects that benefit the community happen.

“Our role has been to cooperate with community-driven projects that are good for the community, rather than taking a top down approach,” said Sires.

He said the award “reflects the community's spirit of accomplishment and forward thinking — as well as this community's sense of place.”

Pinkham — who represented the town at the ceremony — agreed, saying the town overall has been good stewards of public lands, and specifically, the conservation commission, in achieving forestry projects working with town forester Don Johnson of Tamworth.

“I think this recognition is for the work of the town and the support that voters have shown in funding these projects,” said Pinkham.

The conservation commission today manages 11 parcels and 1,600 acres of land, much of it for recreational and or scenic values. When North-South Road was constructed, the conservation commission joined with the N.H. Department of Transportation to add 150 acres in Redstone to a 5,000-acre tract stretching from the Redstone Quarry to Hurricane Mountain.

Conway has also worked to preserve historic resources and maintain the character of its downtowns. The historic Whitaker Home Site was preserved and expanded for a park, recreational trails and playing fields, and more recently volunteers organized and raised funds to purchase property adjacent to the Whitaker land, remove a filling station, and restore the original blacksmith shop, adding considerable scenic, historic and recreational value to the area. Since mid-2000, Beals said, the North Conway Village Association and the town have undertaken significant streetscape improvements, adding new brick sidewalks and crosswalks, upgrading Schouler Park, and adding historical lighting on the village streets, Beals said, citing a

\$1 million grant obtained by U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., to fund the North Conway Village Main Street improvements.

The other local winner, Frumie Selchen, was cited in the "individual" category. She is best known for her role in developing and promoting arts and cultural programming in the northern third of the state, according to Beals.

“She has quietly and effectively encouraged a flowering of creative expression in towns from Plymouth to North Conway and northward, and persuasively articulated the value of the establishing a viable creative economy sector in this region as well,” said Beals.

During the 1990s, Frumie served as rural arts field coordinator for the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, and now serves as director of the Arts Alliance of Northern New Hampshire. She has volunteered on a number of boards and commissions and earned wide admiration as a champion the arts and as an effective advocate for true collaboration within and across sectors in her volunteer work.

The Granite State Ambassadors was named a Profile Award winner in the “organizational” category. Over the past decade, Granite State Ambassadors Inc. has worked tirelessly to promote and protect New Hampshire’s sense of place by valuing both built and natural environments, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of residents and guests alike. As a non-profit charitable organization, Granite State Ambassadors Inc. trains volunteers and professionals and serves hundreds of travel and tourism-related businesses including two key partners: Manchester-Boston Regional Airport and the N.H. Division of Travel and Tourism Development.

For more information, contact Maggie Stier at oldmanlegacyfund@comcast.net or www.oldmanofthemountainlegacyfund.org.