

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Land Stewards Honored

Annual Ah Why Knot Awards recognize a commitment to land stewardship and volunteerism.

By Karla Rossini, Executive Director, CU Maurice River

At the heart of CU Maurice River's watershed conservation is our community of volunteers. In 2025, more than 560 volunteers dedicated 8,900 hours to protecting the integrity of the Wild and Scenic Maurice River – a river recognized for its nationally significant Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values. Each hour that is dedicated

advances the protection of water resources, biodiversity, and habitat health for the enjoyment of future generations in *Down Jersey*.

Throughout the year, CU Maurice River (CUMR) staff coordinate volunteer opportunities to tackle pressing environmental issues and connect the public directly to hands-on stewardship. Through its diverse community science and advocacy programs, CUMR invites all watershed residents to make a tangible, positive impact on local ecosystem health.

Last year, dedicated volunteers powered a wide array of conservation initiatives. In the field, teams supported outreach for Manumuskin River wetlands restoration, tracked avian populations, removed invasive species from Wildlife Management Areas, and surveyed threatened and endangered plant species. Community scientists got their hands dirty by collecting dragonfly samples to generate air and water quality data, while others sampled local fish populations to

document how aquatic habitats respond to active restoration.

Closer to the coast, volunteers walked the shorelines to return stranded horseshoe crabs back into the bay and cleaned beaches of washed-up debris. Across local neighborhoods, stewards removed invasive flora from open spaces and maintained vibrant rain and wildlife gardens to revitalize urban landscapes. Beyond the field, volunteers also led outdoor education programs, hosted cultural and historical appreciation activities, orchestrated major fundraising events, and assisted with essential marketing and mailing tasks. The sheer breadth of these efforts proves that no matter your background or skill set, there is a place to make a difference at CUMR.

At the forefront of the CU Maurice River team are volunteers passionate about education. These dedicated stewards (including teachers, instructors, naturalists, and outdoor enthusiasts) devote time and energy to cultivating a shared appreciation for the natural world. Last year, they made a

lasting impact by leading guided nature walks, helping staff design educational programming, and connecting residents to the wealth of outdoor recreation offered in our region. Serving as local ambassadors for conservation, they spark the curiosity that drives the next generation of environmental caretakers.

Beyond these community educators, CUMR extends its gratitude to the biologists and conservationists who generously donate their specialized expertise. These volunteers provide the scientific backbone for the organization, leading critical fieldwork, analyzing data, and serving as advisors for restoration and data-collection initiatives.

Since 2014, CU Maurice River has used its annual "CU's Big Day" celebration to honor exceptional volunteers with the Ah Why Knot Award. The name captures the classic "can-do" attitude of the organization's volunteers, who routinely answer requests for help with a cheerful, "Ah, why knot?" The moniker is also a play on words: the award given to honorees is a custom wood carving of

the red knot created by decoy carver Alex Hascha.

As the volunteer network has grown, so has the recognition program. CUMR has since introduced the Sanderling Award to celebrate youth achievements, the Executive Director Award to honor volunteer leaders for notable accomplishments, and the Presidential Award to recognize individuals whose contributions have had a significant regional impact. While the final recipient of the night remains a closely guarded secret to be revealed live at the event, the baseline of gratitude is already historic. With the addition of the 2026 class, CUMR has officially recognized 159 dedicated volunteers whose environmental stewardship has left a lasting imprint on the health of the Wild and Scenic Maurice River. Here is a look at this year's award winners and the vital conservation work they champion.



Dr. Cathy Davies

As a food safety consultant, Dr. Davies (Cathy) helps small- and mid-sized food businesses and food entrepreneurs develop food safety programs and strategies to ensure

they produce high-quality, cost-effective, and safe products while staying true to each business's core values. Cathy works to build a community of food specialists to make the food system safe, resilient, sustainable, equitable, and healthy. Cathy is originally from Birmingham, England. She moved to Millville in 2018 and has been a CUMR member and volunteer ever since.

Volunteer Activities:

Installation and maintenance at public native rain and wildlife gardens, Representation of CUMR at community festivals, Shorebird awareness outreach, Pollinator surveys, Leadership for school field trips



From left to right: CU Maurice River Board President Jane Morton Galetto, Rob Tomlin, and CUMR Executive Director Karla Rossini

Rob Tomlin

Rob Tomlin is a lifelong Port Elizabeth resident, growing up along the shorelines of the Wild and

Scenic Manumuskin River. Rob is a retired Lieutenant of the Department of Corrections and now owns Ron's Locksmith. Rob not only grew up on the river but spent much of his waking hours outdoors camping, fishing, hunting, and boating. He and his wife, Vicky, manage a small, self-sufficient homestead and enjoy sunset boat rides down the Bay.

Rob has been a champion for the wetland restoration project on the Manumuskin. When we hit a brick wall trying to contact a few riverfront property owners, Rob's lifelong knowledge of the Maurice River Township community kicked in. He stepped up to bridge the gap. He proved that sometimes the best way to save a watershed is simply

to start a conversation over the backyard fence.

Volunteer Activities:

Outreach to riverfront property owners for the Manumuskin wetland restoration project, assistance with associated surveying and sampling, setting minnow traps for nekton study, host for CUMR's Family-Friendly Friday; The Jersey Devil Hunt, waterway clean-ups, Osprey platform installation and maintenance, donating riverboat experiences and sunset cruises in support of CUMR's fundraising efforts, and always answers the phone when we have a question or a request. Thank you, Rob!



**Elizabeth "Liz"
Wonderlin**

Liz Wonderlin has been living on the banks of the Maurice River for the past four years. Yet, since her childhood, she has regularly visited her grandmother's home on the river. Liz is very reserved and quietly works behind the

scenes to make many of our events a success. She is detail-oriented, making our auctions and dinners run smoothly. If asked about a task, she simply says, "Okay, I'll take care of it." Miraculously, the task or problem is addressed. No fuss, no hullabaloo, just quiet action. Our members are continually aware of her comfortable, welcoming aura.



**John
McMahon**

John McMahon grew up in Cumberland County and has been living

in Maurice River Township since 2010. John McMahon retired as a Lieutenant with the New Jersey State Police after almost 30 years of service. As a certified arborist, John owns and operates "Trees is Company," a tree-care business based in Port Elizabeth. John is an avid duck hunter and served two terms as the State Chairman for Ducks Unlimited, NJ. There isn't a tool John can't handle. When a massive project lands on our plate, he is always one of the first people we call.

Volunteer Activities:

Sampling habitat response to restoration on the Manumuskin River, outreach to homeowners within the project area, waterway clean-ups, growing public awareness and appreciation for wetland restoration project goals, recording restoration progress via PhotoPoint survey, osprey platform installation and maintenance, lending the services of his boat to fieldwork and surveying, serving as a crab chef for the Raise the River summer fundraiser, and cooks for the International Team of Shorebird Scientists.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AWARD



Pam Weichmann

Pamela Weichmann is the Director of the Master of Arts in Arts

Administration program and an Adjunct Professor in the College of the Arts at Rowan

University. Additionally, she serves as the Director of Education and Artist Services at WheatonArts and Cultural Center, where she

leads lifelong learning programs, an international artist fellowship, and cross-sector partnerships that expand access to the arts for diverse communities.

In her role with WheatonArts, Pamela has lent a hand in numerous partnership initiatives with CUMR. Her contributions include helping install both the WheatonArts Nature Trail and the expansive system of rain- and upland pollinator gardens in the entry circle. As the Director of Education, Pamela has assisted in the coordination of CUMR's Summer Nature Journaling Program. Over the past three years, she has devoted considerable volunteer time to overseeing the continuation of CUMR's Connie Jost Scholarship, which supports young artists who draw inspiration from nature and aspire to major in the arts. CUMR is deeply grateful for Pamela's dedication to nurturing the next generation of creative minds who seek to share their appreciation of the great outdoors with others through their artistic ability.

You won't just find Pamela inside the art studio. She loves the great outdoors! On

summer days, you might just catch her wading into a local creek with her son, volunteering with CUMR to sample dragonflies as part of a national community science program measuring mercury deposition trends.

PRESIDENTIAL AWARD – *Surprise!*



Peter Galetto, Jr.

Peter Galetto is a Vineland businessman who moved to the banks of the Maurice River in Millville 43 years ago. He has donated countless pieces of glasswork, designed by him, to CUMR and other nonprofit organizations for fundraisers. Since 1985, he has led CUMR volunteer crews in erecting osprey platforms on the river. When solicited, he offers us business insights. His knowledge of zoning and planning has been invaluable. He and his wife, Jane, have hosted countless CUMR events at their home on the river, including Elevate Youth Enrichment Program events, celebrations for the North American Wetlands Conservation

Act, campfires, award ceremonies, river tours, and the like. His philanthropic nature, industrious spirit, and “git ‘er done” attitude are contagious.

INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF SHOREBIRD SCIENTISTS

Every spring, an International Team of Shorebird Scientists establishes its basecamp at Reeds Beach in Cape May County. From this hub, researchers venture out daily for a grueling two weeks to survey, track, and assess the status of the threatened red knot and other migratory shorebirds along Delaware Bay.



From left to right: Dr. Larry Niles, Susan Moody, Dr. Antonio Brum, and Dr. Amanda Dey

When the scientists return from these long, exhausting field days, CUMR volunteers are waiting to welcome them

home with a hot, home-cooked meal. Each night, a different crew of volunteers prepares dinner for a rotating crowd of 20 to 40 researchers. This vital partnership frees the

scientists from cooking duties, allowing them to focus on data analysis and next-day coordination before getting some well-deserved rest. Over the years, countless cross-organizational friendships have been forged over these shared dinner tables.

CU's Annual Big Day, Ah Why Knot Awards, and Pig Roast is a grand celebration of our teamwork, fueled by a diverse network of stewards from all backgrounds, interests, and abilities. As part of the festivities, the Shorebird Science Team takes the opportunity to honor those within their own ranks who go above and beyond. The 2026 Shorebird Team Ah Why Knot recipients were Susan Moody (Cape May), Dr. Antonio Brum (Brazil), and Roberta Rodrigues (Brazil).



From left to right: Roberta Rodrigues and Dr. David Mizrahi