

Conservation Awards presented as part of ERCA's AGM

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The Essex Region Conservation Authority presented its annual Conservation Awards during its annual general meeting last Thursday night in Essex. From left: vice chair Jim Morrison, Gina Pannunzio, Wayne King, Matthew Olewski (Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary), Andrew Pula, Klaus Dohring (Green Sun Rising), Tammy Dewhirst (ACO Windsor Essex), ERCA Chair Molly Allaire and ERCA CAO Tim Byrne. More photos are on the RTT's social media sites.

As part of the Essex Region Conservation Authority's annual general meeting (AGM), the conservation authority took time out to honour members of the Windsor-Essex County community.

A total of six organizations and individuals were honoured with Essex Region Conservation Awards for their contributions to creating a sustainable future of the region at ERCA's AGM last Thursday night. They were honoured along with members of ERCA's staff, with the long-service staff receiving Staff Service Awards.

"It's very inspiring to have the opportunity to celebrate so many organizations and individuals who have made an incredible impact on the environment," said ERCA chair Molly Allaire. "We thank them for all of their contributions."

The Windsor-Essex Branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) captured the John R. Park Homestead Award "for its advocacy work in protecting the region's heritage buildings while providing guidance and support to other heritage organizations across the

region,” noted ERCA’s director of communications and outreach services Danielle Breault-Stuebing.

Tammy Dewhirst accepted on behalf of the local ACO branch. She noted they have been promoting education and advocacy and she took the opportunity to do so again. Dewhirst highlighted the 2025 Jane’s Walk festival, with free walks highlighting history and neighbourhoods coming to Essex County April 25-27 and Windsor Tecumseh May 2-4.

The Education Award went to Andrew Pula. Pula is a teacher at Belle River District High School and he noted his 25-year career in taking students on field trips and engaging them in environmental initiatives and stewardship opportunities.

Wayne King was awarded one of two Volunteer Awards. He was recognized for monitoring changes to Hillman Marsh and shorelines in the Leamington area. He was also acknowledged for engaging the community in its restoration. King thanked the Municipality of Leamington and ERCA for shoreline work but “the project dear to me is Hillman Marsh.

“Thanks to ERCA and (ERCA CAO) Tim Byrne for taking it on.”

Green Sun Rising was also recognized with a Volunteer Award, with ERCA stating it was awarded for its activities to transform to a clean energy system “while supporting a wide variety of tree planting and environmental initiatives.”

Klaus Dohring accepted on behalf of Green Sun Rising and thanked all associated with the business.

“It’s a team effort. Maybe I am in the front, but there is a great team behind me,” said Dohring.

The Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary earned the Environmental Achievement Award. The Ruthven sanctuary is 120-years-old and was credited for having a legacy of conservation, including conservation education, outreach, and property-based restoration efforts.

Executive director Matthew Olewski said they are doing their best to live up to Miner’s legacy and thanked ERCA for the partnership they have.

Gina Pannunzio was awarded the Dennis Chase Staff Award “for her kindness, optimism and dedication to a future of conservation.” Pannunzio recalled working with Chase and noted he had a joy for being outside. She said she is glad for spending the time she did working with him.

“We are actively changing the world,” Pannunzio said of their work at ERCA.

ERCA’s annual report and the Annual Report video can be found on ERCA’s website at: <https://www.essexregionconservation.ca/governance>.

Warden Hilda MacDonald brought greetings from the County of Essex at the AGM. She thanked the board and staff “for another banner year” but noted it hasn’t always been easy.

“There are no municipal boundaries for our shared watersheds, water quality or the beauty of our greenspaces,” said MacDonald.

MacDonald and Byrne both touted the Clean Water Green Spaces initiative and the \$14.2 million that has been contributed for environmental initiatives through it. MacDonald also cited the acres of land that have been acquired and turned into prairie lands and wetlands as well as the acquisition of new trail lines.

There have been over three million trees planted since the start of the initiative.

“That will provide shade for many years to come,” said MacDonald.

Byrne added the \$14.2 million has allowed ERCA to leverage about \$15 more in funding. He pointed out the partnerships between municipalities to fund non-mandatory services. He added he was proud of his staff and proud of the board he serves.

By Ron Giofu