

Wally Wood Award, 2008

George Zacharek of Syracuse is the 2008 recipient of the Wally Wood Distinguished Service Award from the Finger Lakes Trail Conference (FLTC). He was honored at the annual meeting in Montour Falls on April 26, 2008 for his many contributions to the FLTC. George has been a very active member of the Onondaga Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK), the Central New York Chapter of the North Country Trail Association (NCTA) and of course the FLTC, including serving two terms (one currently) as an FLTC Board Member. He is a trail and outdoors advocate, donating time, energy, and ideas to help people learn about and use trails, especially the Finger Lakes Trail.

Bill and Mary Coffin, longtime supporters of the FLTC, NCTA and Onondaga ADK, first nominated George for the award. Bill and Mary said "George is an FLTC member who has shown the best that can be seen with dedication, commitment, enthusiasm and long time support for over 17 years. He is a great idea man." "His consistent work for many years has been promoting the FLTC at hiking and other outdoor events. He has created and manned exhibits and has widely distributed...FLTC materials at museums, libraries, schools and even barber shops. He personally recruits and promotes the FLTC."

One outstanding example of this is the FLTC exhibit at the DEC's lean-to at the New York State Fair. George personally staffed it every day the first year (2000) and then recruited other volunteers. True to George's modest attitude, he credits Ed Sidote for the idea. This extraordinary exhibit has become a major FLTC and NCTA 2008 Erv Markert Distinguished Contribution Award by Lynda Rummel, TMC Regional Coordinator, Bath-Watkins Glen annual publicity event for thousands of State Fair visitors who are genuinely interested in hiking and hiking trails.

George and his family (6 children) enjoyed camping and hiking at Heart Lake. Displaying his wit, George said "I found out that ADK members could park for free at Heart Lake, so I joined!" He later learned of the ADK Onondaga Chapter and became a trail steward for the FLT in DeRuyter for nine years. He assisted in the search phase of 20 miles of new FLT and NCT in Central NY and with his positive attitude generated support for it at a time when many others were discouraged. He continues to be a consistent worker for the FLT and NCT maintenance of existing trail and construction of new trail mileage.

After working on the FLT, George decided it was time to join the FLTC. Not content with just joining, he was elected to the Board of Managers for 1996-99 and is serving again for 2007- 10. In between he continued to attend Board of Managers meetings to learn and report on his activities. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the Central New York NCT, and belongs to Tramp and Trail Hiking Club of Utica and the Long Path North Hiking Club of the northern Catskills.

George was born in Syracuse and graduated from Eastwood HS. He is a Life Scout and enjoyed his time as a Sea Scout sailing on Onondaga Lake. He never moved far from Syracuse, saying "central New York is a beautiful area," except for two years service in the Army Air Corps, joining in 1944. He became a gunner, training in B17s and flying in B29s. Even peace time flying could be harrowing, as George recalls one memorable weather mission flying into a hurricane! His wife, Cindy, recently gifted him with a flight in an AT6, the same kind of plane he trained in over 40 years ago! George spent time at Clark AFB in the Philippines and recollects flying over the capitol city Manila on their independence day, July 4, 1946. George is a photographer and with another serviceman set up a darkroom behind the motor pool and developed film without charge. Today he serves many organizations including the FLTC as a video historian and has



George Zacharek (right) receiving award. Recognitions Committee chairperson John Andersson at left.

recorded many memorable events. He shows tapes on the Public Access Channel in Baldwinsville that he makes of the Lysander Town Board Meetings, his travels, and local events.

George “retired” 17 years ago after 18 ½ years with the Lennox plant, when they ceased operating in Syracuse. (He says he still buys Lennox furnaces, though!) He started in the stock room, moved to the planning department, and became a foreman, running two departments at one time. He held many jobs around Syracuse, with now defunct businesses, joking that he closed all of them down. He attended Alfred State and Syracuse University studying business.

George likes to promote health, especially for children. He likes to see children involved in outdoor activities. For several years he has arranged middle school student visits to join in the work on the FLT and NCT and experience how hiking trails are built and maintained.

George likes to keep busy and meet new people, and hike in new areas. He jokes with new hikers that “hiking can be dangerous – you might meet somebody and fall in love!” He speaks from experience, having met Cindy while snowshoeing. They enjoy traveling together, and it is a treat to meet them.

George is also End-to-End # 132, completing the Finger Lakes Trail on July 2, 2001.

The W. Wood award is presented each year to the person or persons who have made outstanding contributions to the Finger Lakes Trail Conference. Wallace (Wally) Wood came up with the idea of a long distance footpath across New York State and founded the Finger Lakes Trail Conference. George Zacharek exemplifies W. Wood with his ideas and enthusiasm for envisioning the future of the FLTC.