Extension staff bid farewell!

Marilyn Wyman, who was with CCE Columbia Greene Extension for almost 27 years, celebrated her last day in mid-January. Wyman was the Issues Leader for the Environment and Natural Resources Program. “It has been an amazing experience”, says Wyman.” If I could have invented my dream job, it would be close to what I have been able do here at CCECG.” Wyman explained that she first came to CCE as a community youth recycling educator back in the early 90’s. “I saw opportunities to provide other types of crucial information our communities needed.” Over the years, Wyman was involved in projects ranging from a Cornell University program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors to the importance of Agritourism to local economies. Then ten years into her tenure, things shifted. “We were a small county, rich in forests, and as an organization, we decided to embark on an effort to provide an educational resource on that topic. I have always loved the rural New York environment and I wanted to help our associated communities by providing relevant information, especially forest related, allowing them to make timely, informed decisions. We still provide our signature programs like 4-H youth development, agriculture and horticulture, and community service like parenting education and economic development, but forests, and all their values, especially the clean water they produce and protect, became a big focus. The construction of the Agroforestry Resource Center and the establishment of the Siuslaw Model Forest in 2007, made it real and the efforts of the staff and board volunteers made it happen.”

Over the years CCE’s Agroforestry Resource Center has offered hundreds of programs ranging from How to Grow Shiitake Mushrooms to Legacy Planning for Landowners. They have also interfaced with local municipal officials assisting them in understanding issues such as the importance of culvert sizing, as extreme weather events increase and the increased impacts of invasive species. These efforts are underscored by partnerships. “When we began we had 9 partners and now work with over 50. But our crowning jewel is the Siuslaw Model Forest. It is 142 acres with trails winding through forests and streams and meadow, interspersed with signs, explaining key messages. It also has killer views of the Catskills. This is all here due to the incredible generosity of Eric and Liz Rasmussen and their families. They gave us the entire 142 acres. Eric is still its best steward.”

Tom Pavlesich, Forestry Program Director with the Watershed Agricultural Council shared his thoughts “Marilyn has the rare ability to combine information about our forests with an inspiration that compels people to get outside, experience nature and do something to make our world better.”

Deb Allen, founder Black Dome Press & Cornell Master Naturalist, stated “Fortunately for all of us, Marilyn’s legacy is the practices she put in place which will insure successful participation and future stewardship. She is a leader as well as teacher and always made learning fun and transformative. I will miss her steady hand.”

Connor Young has now joined the staff as Team Leader of the Environmental & Natural Resources Program. He has assumed responsibility for overall leadership and management of the Association’s Environmental and Natural Resources Program. This encompasses regional program areas including forestry, agroforestry, watershed, invasive species management, biodiversity preservation, and energy conservation.

Upon her retirement Marilyn said “I know that the new team leader, Connor Young, will do a great job.”

Please join us in wishing Marilyn all the best!