

Issue Date: View April 2008, Posted On: 3/14/2008

## The Eco-Activists

by Maria Hess



Photograph by Todd Vachon  
[www.toddvachon.com](http://www.toddvachon.com)

### **Alan Muller**

Green Delaware founder Alan Muller of Port Penn may be Delaware's best known environmental watchdog—if only for his reputation as one gigantic, abrasive pain.

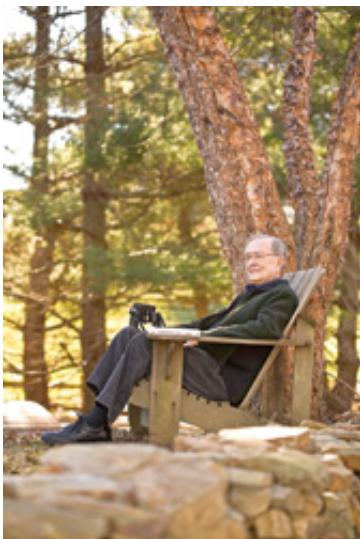
"We're trying to get cooling water intakes [in industrial plants] along the river stopped so some fish can live," Muller says. "We're trying to get some real recycling going, trying to get the garbage empire reformed, trying to get the raw sewage out of the Brandywine and the Christina, trying to get the Coastal Zone Act enforced and trying to do something about the continued nuking of Delaware with carcinogens."

His accomplishments have been many. In 1998 Green Delaware secured passage of a law to ban garbage incineration in the coastal zone. DNREC credits Muller's work for reduction of poisonous emissions from the notorious Delaware City Valero plant. In 2006 Muller brought experts in the zero-waste movement of recycling to create alternative waste strategies for DNREC—though "nothing's been done with them," Muller says.

The remark is typical Muller, who recently convinced DNREC to hold public hearings on a plan to set limits on dangerous emissions from Delaware's large electric generation units. He's pressuring Wilmington to stop dumping sewage into Brandywine Creek, and he's a big supporter of Bluewater Wind's plan to build an offshore wind farm in Delaware.

As for his reputation, "Alan is a professional protestor who's alienated more people than he's influenced," says attorney Michael Parkowski, who served as counsel to the Delaware Solid Waste Authority and currently represents the DuPont Co. As for Green Delaware, "It's like the Molly Maguires. You don't know who they really are."

Says Muller, "We are an outlier in a sea of retreat and compromise, and there have been organized efforts to marginalize us, if not destroy us entirely."



Photograph by Todd Vachon  
[www.toddvachon.com](http://www.toddvachon.com)

### Russell W. Peterson

If anyone could capture the zeitgeist of the environmental movement, it's Russell W. Peterson.

As governor from 1969 till 1973, he was the first politician to call for a worldwide ban on the use of ozone-depleting chlorofluorocarbons. But his biggest contribution to Delaware's environment can be summed up in four words: the Coastal Zone Act.

When the ex-DuPont chemist became governor, 13 oil companies and two transportation companies planned to build major facilities on Delaware's shore. The financial gain would have been great, but Peterson, an avid birder, had already seen that the environmental degradation would have been greater. Peterson bucked most of the state and the U.S. Secretary of commerce to protect the coast. His Coastal Zone Act passed the legislature by one vote.

The law may have cost Peterson reelection, but it drew national attention. He was appointed as chairman of President Nixon's Council on Environmental Quality in 1973, then became director of the Office of Technology Assessment of the United States Congress for the Ford administration in 1976. Two years later Peterson was awarded his "dream job," president of the National Audubon Society.

The Coastal Zone Act continues to protect the state, yet there are occasional threats. Last year Delaware rejected an application by BP subsidiary Crown Landing LLC to build a 2,000-foot pier into the Delaware from New Jersey to transfer liquefied natural gas for shipping. That decision is under review by the U.S. Supreme Court. A ruling is expected before June.

"Russ is vehemently opposed to the plant," says his wife, June. "He is anxiously awaiting the decision."

Today Peterson, of Greenville, devotes his time to the education center at the Russell W. Peterson Wildlife Refuge. Built in 2006, the sanctuary is one of a handful of urban wildlife areas in the country.

"Our greatest hope is that suburban and city kids learn about nature here," Peterson says, "and they go on to be environmental ambassadors."



Photograph by Todd Vachon  
[www.toddyvachon.com](http://www.toddyvachon.com)

### **Joan Dever**

Since she founded Citizens for a Better Sussex in 2004, Joan Deaver of Rehoboth Beach has lobbied successfully for laws to prevent the state from distributing treated wastewater on open space and is fighting DelDOT's proposal to build a parkway between U.S. 9 and Del. 24 to relieve congestion on Del. 1 at the beaches.

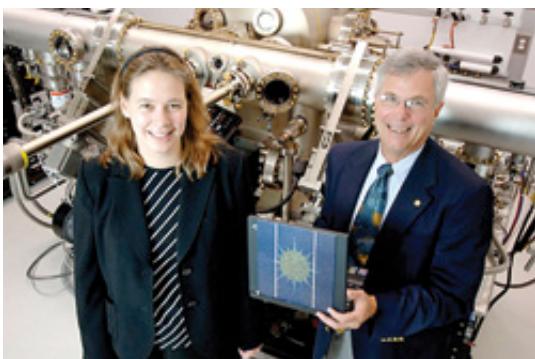
Now she's out to change county council in an effort to curb over-development.

Four of five councilmen represent the western side of Sussex, which makes it difficult to pass measures that protect the unique environment of the beaches. With three seats up for grabs in November's election, Deaver is hitting every club, civic organization, church and neighbor in the area to urge people to vote—and encourage them to run. She also lobbied heavily for House Bill 42, which would add two at-large members to council.

"This is personal," Deaver says, "This is our home. We have to vote for people who care about the land, not for those who constantly support development."

Darrel Cole, director of public relations at DelDOT, says Deaver "does her homework and is great at organizing folks." But the Western Parkway is inevitable. "This is a project that we know in 20 years the residents will need. But there is no construction funding in our six-year plan. Construction is a decade or more out."

Deaver isn't buying it. "It is not safe for us to assume that because DelDOT is short of money that we're safe," she says. "There is something cooking, some big development. The parkway is not for us. And we're not having it."



Christiana Honsberg and Allen Barnett

Solar cell pioneer Allen Barnett and Christiana Honsberg are trying to develop the world's most efficient solar cell. Both professors of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Delaware, Barnett and Honsberg lead a team of 15 universities, corporations and laboratories that are working on solar. The team set the world record for efficiency by converting about 40 percent of the sun's radiation into electricity. They hope to hit 50 percent by 2010. "There is a million times more solar energy that hits the earth than we need in energy," Barnett says. "When anybody looks at all the energy options, solar jumps off the page as a must-happen option. In much of the world, it's a norm, but we're way behind because all energy is policy driven." Barnett's policy work led to tax breaks for commercial and residential property owners who use solar power. "But when I look back, my greatest achievement will be all the people I've educated," he says. "The people who will carry the flag."



George Bunting

Many complain about the Indian River Power Plant near Millsboro, but Senator George Bunting, a Democrat from Bethany Beach, has formally requested a public hearing with DNREC to discuss the numbers of fish killed and other damage to the bay caused by the plant's two cooling units. Bunting garners admiration on both sides of the aisle, from developers and environmentalists. "I don't always agree with him," says Joan Deaver, founder of Citizens for a Better Sussex. "But I respect him."



Mark Carter with son Heron

When surfers started getting sick in the ocean Mark Carter started getting suspicious. So he convinced the State Division of Water Quality Management and the UD College of Marine and Earth Studies to test samples of water collected year round by him and other members of the local chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. The group works to protect oceans, waves and beaches across the country. For Earth Day, the Delaware Chapter will clean up its adopted beach, Herring Point in Cape Henlopen State Park, on April 20.



Leann Ferguson

Executive vice president Leann Ferguson is the force behind the Southern New Castle County Alliance, a group that educates citizens on development and environmental issues. She's working on House Bill 30, which would prohibit the use of state owned open space for wastewater disposal. With the support of House Majority Leader Dick Cathcart, the bill passed the House in June. It awaits a hearing in the Senate.



**Jeremy Firestone**

University of Delaware professors Jeremy Firestone and Willett Kempton, both of Newark, found that more than 90 percent of Delawareans prefer offshore wind power to new coal or natural gas, thus opening debate about an offshore wind farm in Delaware. "Along with The News Journal, we were the two that really pushed to have the process open and to have as much public disclosure as possible, on all three bids (for alternative electricity sources)," Firestone says. Firestone, an attorney, combines legal knowledge with 25 years of environmental work to help move processes forward.



**Sallie Forman**

Under the leadership of Sallie Forman of Rehoboth Beach, volunteers are clearing debris from the town's Silver Lake, Lake Comegys and Lake Gerar. Forman started the Save Our Lakes Alliance 3 in 2004 to publicly address the lakes' inconsistent water levels, algae, fish kills, pollution and other problems. At SOLA3's request, the City of Rehoboth Beach and DNREC began testing. The findings? Unhealthy conditions in all three lakes. DNREC now tests annually.

**Kim Furtado**, a naturopathic doctor in Millsboro, is one of the more outspoken members of Citizens for Clean Power, a grassroots coalition founded in 2006 to reduce emissions at the Indian River Power Plant. Furtado sees evidence of coal combustion pollutants in her patients, which she attributes to the plant. Furtado helped get the Division of Public Health to issue a report showing the existence of a cancer cluster in the Indian River area. "We are pushing for DNREC to improve air quality monitoring and do a bioburden (level of microorganisms present) analysis of the area residents," she says.



Nick DiPasquale Debbie Heaton and Jay Cooperson

Jay Cooperson, of Wilmington, chair of Sierra Club Delaware; Nick DiPasquale, of Dover, conservation chair for the Audubon Society, and Debbie Heaton, of Middletown, associate director of philanthropy for The Nature Conservancy in Delaware, run GreenWatch Institute, a group that monitors compliance of the Logan Generating Plant in Salem, New Jersey, as it unloads hundreds of tons of coal each year. "The subaqueous land that the dock sits on is Delaware's," Heaton says. GreenWatch funds summer interns at the Delaware Nature Society and awards scholarships to environmental law students.



Glenn Gauvry

Glenn Gauvry of Lewes convinced landowners in Broadkill Beach, Kitts Hummock, Pickering Beach, Slaughter Beach and Fowler Beach to designate private beaches as horseshoe crab sanctuaries. President of the Ecological Research and Development Group, Gauvry founded the only nonprofit devoted to the world's four remaining horseshoe crab species. Locally, their eggs are a primary food source for one of the world's largest migrations of shorebirds. Thanks to the group, 12 miles of prime horseshoe crab spawning habitat has been protected.



Roger Jones Jr. (left) and Andrew Manus (right)

Healthy forests filter water, remove air pollution, sequester carbon, and provide homes for wildlife. That's why Roger Jones Jr. of

Wilmington, state director for The Nature Conservancy, and Andrew Manus of Clayton, director for conservation programs for TNC, are working to protect 800 acres in the Blackbird-Millington corridor, as well as 500 acres near Redden State Forest in Sussex County. "Forests are rapidly disappearing throughout Delaware, especially in Sussex," Jones says. Redden is a critical resting and feeding site for migratory birds.

Retired Wilmington attorney **Jacob Kreshtool**, 90, filed 600 environmental suits in Delaware during his 40-year career, including the first citizen suit filed under the Federal Clean Air Act, which he helped get passed in 1970. He serves as president of Delaware Citizens for Clean Air and is a member of Green Delaware's steering committee. Because property values are a hot topic in Brandywine Hundred, Kreshtool wants to alert Realtors to the dangers of the dioxin pile at DuPont's Edge Moor plant. "That'll get people excited," he says.

Former Common Cause activist **Maryanne McGonegal** of Wilmington is dying of cancer, so she's making special appeals to the environmental committee of the Cancer Consortium to investigate cancer clusters in Delaware. "My issue is that the cost of treatment is more than the cost of expanding cancer cluster studies," she says. "I used my own environmentally caused cancer as an example, living within one mile of the DuPont dioxin pile."



[Ali Mirzakhilili](#)

Ali Mirzakhilili, program administrator for air quality management at DNREC, is the recipient of the Delaware Nature Society's 2007 Conservation Award for his "tireless efforts and leadership in improving Delaware's air quality." Mirzakhilili is credited with reducing sulfur dioxide emissions from the Valero Delaware City refinery, and he is overseeing processes to regulate emissions from eight local electrical generating units that burn coal or oil. The regulation will require large reductions of mercury, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen by 2012.

**Tom Noyes** of Wilmington is the author of *TommyWonk*, the must-read blog of environmentalists and politicians that focuses on recycling and wind power. After he spoke at Public Service Commission hearings last year in favor of Bluewater Wind's plan to create the first offshore wind farm in the mid-Atlantic region, hits to the blog soared. "We advocates of renewable energy now have a power purchase agreement for Bluewater Wind to sell 25 years' worth of electricity to Delmarva Power at a price that is set now," Noyes says. He's not taking credit for the purchase agreement, but he is convinced that strong public support played a role.



### Grace Pierce-Beck

Intestinal cancer, a heart attack, several mini-strokes and a fractured skull have not stopped Dover's Grace Pierce-Beck from advising colleagues like Delaware Audubon Society president Mark Martell on policy matters. "That woman is my hero," Martell says. "She is the only reason I am in Audubon. Grace educated me on my own state and its machinations." Now wheelchair bound, Pierce-Beck, 81, endures bouts of short-term memory loss but has not forgotten the long-term battle. Known as "the iron gnat" to bureaucrats and "Bubbles" to pals like Russell Peterson, Pierce-Beck inspired the 20-year court battle that pitted the Natural Resources Defense Counsel and the Delaware Audubon Society against Texaco. The case resulted in the largest citizens suit settlement in Delaware history. She was inducted into the Hall of Fame of Delaware Women last month.



Pamela Sapko

Pamela Sapko, executive director of the Delaware Center for Horticulture in Wilmington, is joining forces with the Delaware Forest Service and the Delaware Urban and Community Forestry Council to nurture or save trees in 30 communities statewide. At the same time, Delaware Center for Horticulture will increase Wilmington's tree canopy 10 percent over the next 30 years by planting 1,300 trees.



Maya van Rossum

Delaware Riverkeeper Network director Maya van Rossum of Bristol, Pennsylvania, wants to kill the Delaware River Main Channel Deepening project, a proposal by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to deepen the river's shipping channel from 40 feet to 45 feet via dredging. "The project poses major threats to Delaware by reintroducing dangerous toxins (now embedded in bottom sediments) to the Delaware River and threatening ecologically important species," she says. Riverkeeper has been fighting the deepening for 15 years. "Had we not been there," van Rossum says, "it would have been done."



N.C. Vasuki

Former Delaware Solid Waste Authority CEO N.C. Vasuki of Dover is best known for converting Delaware dumps into modern landfills. Now he works on the Clinton Climate Initiative, which helps 40 cities around the world reduce carbon emissions. "Because of my connections, family and friends, I was asked to work toward improving emissions in India," says Vasuki. He is studying the climate in greater Mumbai to explore solutions for solid waste generated by the city's 12.5 million inhabitants.



John Austin

Rehoboth Beach chemist John Austin, a self-described "retired EPA bureaucrat and data nerd," uses his smarts to help reduce air emissions of nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, and mercury from Delaware's coal and residual oil-fired power plants. His findings have led to an examination of the special education disparity downwind of the Indian River Power Plant. Austin formally comments to DNREC. "Hearings are only held if enough people write in and show enough knowledge to support their opposition to the problem," he says.