

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Fall 2025

www.oneidalakeassociation.org

It's Still a Lake!

By OLA Past President, John Harmon

The Board of Directors for the Oneida Lake Association continues to stay focused on the ongoing issue of the newly enacted regulations concerning wetlands in New York State. Our readers will recall from past issues of the eNews, and especially the Spring issue of The OLA Bulletin, that we are very concerned about the DEC regulation that has abandoned the long-standing use of wetlands maps in favor of shifting the onus of responsibility onto the landowner. No longer can we rely on published maps to determine if our property is in or near a wetland. We now have to make an application to the DEC for that determination. And, of course, if the land is in or near a wetland, a host of regulations and permit requirements now apply. Furthermore, although the new regulations went into effect on January 1, 2025, very little advance warning was given to NYS residents. And in the previous issue of the Bulletin, we outlined how DEC gathered several thousand input statements from New Yorkers, most of which were ignored or dismissed.

With those concerns in mind, the OLA Directors invited representatives from DEC to attend one of our Board meetings to present their case, as well as to listen to our concerns. On July 14, four members from DEC spoke to our Board. These officials included: Krysta Spohr (DEC Wetlands Outreach Coordinator), Jon Stercho (Region 7 Biologist), Steve Case (Region 6 Biologist), and Jessica Hart (Region 6 Permit Administrator).

Spohr began the presentation with a series of slides outlining the new regulations. Like all laws or regulations,

clear and precise definitions are the key. According to Conservation Law Article 24, freshwater wetlands means “lands or waters which contain any or all of the following:

- Emergent vegetation
- Rooted, Floating-leaved vegetation
- Submergent vegetation”

So . . . land or water that contains vegetation? Isn't that pretty much all of New York State outside of Times Square?

Spohr explained that this very broad definition is intended to refer to Forested Swamps to Shrub-swamp to vegetation emerging from water to vegetation that remains largely submerged under water.

Perhaps the biggest concern of the Board of Directors, and many of our lakeside residents, is the specter of having Oneida Lake named as a wetland, thereby casting thousands of properties under wetland jurisdiction. Spohr's next slide asked, “Is a lake or pond a wetland?” She replied that “parts of it are.” “Which parts?” we might ask in alarm. There are two issues to consider.

- The definition of a wetland is overly broad, such that millions of acres could suddenly be declared as wetland overnight.
- This designation is no longer tied to a clearly defined map.

In the past, residents or developers could go to a DEC developed map and get an indication where the DEC-designated wetlands were. This clear and understandable process worked well for decades. Now, the jurisdiction is no longer tied to maps. DEC claims that

the maps are no longer accurate due to constant development, changing climates, and other natural processes. That explanation seems reasonable, however, rather than use the immense power of technology that is currently available to keep the maps updated, DEC now requires the landowner or developer to ask DEC for a determination. In other words, DEC says, “We won't tell you in advance where the wetlands are. You have to come to us to find out and to ask permission.”

There is also some helpful news. DEC intends to regulate only wetlands that are 12.4 acres and larger. Therefore, that swampy area on the corner of your lot, filled with cattails and peepers, would not be a regulated wetland because of its relatively small size. Keep in mind, however, that if that small area on your property is part of a 15-acre swampland, most of which is outside of your property, then that corner would be regulated. In fact, any of your property within a 100-foot buffer zone from the edge of the wetland, would also be regulated. Furthermore, the minimum size for a regulated wetland drops to 7.4 acres in 2028.

And here is one more proviso to keep in mind. DEC reserves the right to designate an area as a “wetland of unusual importance.” All wetland regulations now apply regardless of the size of the area! There are eleven criteria that could result in such a designation:

- Urban areas
- Rare plants
- Previously designated as a wetland of Unusual Local Importance (ULI)

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President's Message

As your president, I would like to thank our 2000+ members for their dedication to the continuing health of Oneida Lake. Your commitment to help preserve and protect Oneida Lake is the backbone of the OLA, now in existence for 80 years!

Currently there are a few major issues impacting our membership and Oneida Lake, such as the new NYS Wetlands law implemented on January 1st this year. The OLA Directors believe that this law places an unnecessary burden directly on the waterfront property owner to determine if their property is a wetland or not, instead of referring to the previously published wetland maps. The OLA Board is currently communicating with elected representatives, urging them to support State Senator Joe Griffo's bill that exempt lakes that are greater than 150 acres. We will keep you informed on our progress. [See the lead story in this issue of the Bulletin for more details]. Other issues that the Board is actively monitoring are the declining population of smallmouth bass and hiring freezes at agencies that have great impact on Oneida Lake.

Research at the Cornell Biological Field Station has indicated that in the past few years a declining trend in the smallmouth bass population in Oneida Lake. Because this trend is very alarming, we are in communication with researchers at Shackleton Point to help determine the cause as well as a solution. The Field Station currently faces a hiring freeze that could possibly impact the important research conducted by the facility. The OLA is ready to support our dedicated colleagues at the Field Station to overcome these hurdles so they can continue to do the great work they do.

I was notified recently that the Soil and Water Conservation Districts around the lake had applied and received a grant to harvest water chestnuts in 2026 on Oneida Lake. This year the OLA

coordinated with Soil and Water Conservation Districts from Oswego, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, and Herkimer counties on several non-chemical weed pulls this summer, harvesting thousands of pounds of water chestnuts. Many thanks to all of those involved, many of whom were volunteers. We look forward to working with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts in their efforts next year.

As most of you know, this year, on June 13, we all lost a dear friend of the OLA and longtime Director Captain Tony Buffa. Captain Tony was loved by everyone who knew him, and he will always be in our hearts. Tony's unfortunate passing left an opening on the board of the OLA. If you have a similar passion as Tony and a love for Oneida Lake, please consider joining us as a member of the Board of Directors of the OLA. If so, send a letter of interest and a brief resume to any one of our Directors, or you can send an email to president@oneidalakeassociation.org. In closing, I am honored to be your president and again thankful for the commitment of our entire membership, serving as good stewards of Oneida Lake.

Thank you for helping us fulfill our mission to protect the fisheries, wildlife, and natural resources of Oneida Lake by promoting science-based conservation and management through education and outreach, in partnership with our members and local communities.



Lance Vella
President, Oneida Lake Association



The Oneida Lake Association, Inc. Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., so that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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Terms Expiring April 30, 2028

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OLA Mission

The Mission of the Oneida Lake Association is to protect the fisheries, wildlife, and natural resources of Oneida Lake by promoting science-based conservation and management through education and outreach, in partnership with our members and local communities.

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- Wetlands in floodways
- Previously mapped
- Habitat for essential behavior of Endangered/threatened/special concern/species of greatest conservation need
- Watershed with significant flooding
- Productive vernal pools
- Class I wetland
- Regional or local significance
- Significant for protecting state's water quality

All of these abrupt changes, with several layers of definitions and regulations, certainly have left New Yorkers knee deep in the swamp, so to speak. Only now, several months after the regulations went into effect, is DEC trying to provide us with explanation and guidance. The OLA, true to its Mission Statement, remains committed to providing our members with "education and outreach" on this topic.

So, is Oneida Lake a wetland?

Jon Stercho, Region 7 Biologist stated: "All Oneida Lake is not a wetland." Krysta Spohr added, "But some of it is." For example, portions of the shoreline will be considered wetlands, such as the Toad Harbor area, Three Mile Bay, or Big Bay. Region 6 Biologist Steve Case added: "We no longer regulate beyond six feet of depth." In other words, waters over six feet in depth would NOT be regulated as a wetland. We need to keep in mind, however, that the entire lake is still under Article 15 regulation, as it has always been.

When is a permit needed for projects on your property?

Homeowners and developers should start by asking the question: Is the project in or near (100 feet) a wetland? If there is uncertainty, DEC suggests starting with the Jurisdictional Determination form.

How?

Navigate to the DEC website and search for Freshwater Wetlands Permits. There are a number of options, each with a set of instructions. Begin with:

Determine if you need an application:

This part is fairly easy. To save time, have your address and parcel lot handy. (You can find that on the tax maps provided by your county's website). It takes less than five minutes to fill out. Then you wait. DEC has up to six months to get back to you! So plan ahead. Once you receive a determination, you can move through the rest of the list.

If your property is indeed in or near a wetland, what kinds of activities are regulated?

Examples of projects that need a permit:

- Driveways
- New Construction (If any reconstruction alters less than 50% of the structure, it is not considered new construction).
- Applying chemicals or pesticides
- Dredging or draining.
- Access roads/driveways

Examples of exempt activities (no permit needed).

- Ordinary/routine maintenance
- Resurfacing already paved areas.
- Ordinary recreation
- Standard practice
- The continuation of any lawful activity

Once I receive a permit, how long is it good for?

Five years

During the meeting with DEC, our Directors asked a variety of questions:

Director Ed Mills: What about water level manipulation? How does this plan fit with the lake draw down? During a draw down there is no longer water in areas that were previously submerged. It seems like a contradiction. It seems like there should be coordination with DEC,

OLA, and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

DEC: We look at growth during the growing season to determine if it's a wetland.

Director Kurt Snyder: How long does it typically take to make a determination? Best case scenario?

DEC: The General Permit is a fairly short process. About 3-4 weeks. And a vast majority of activities will be permitted. The GP is designed to expedite smaller projects from homeowners. After you file for a GP, feel free to contact the regional office.

Director Amy Hetherington: Do you have enough staff for the increase in applications?

DEC: We need more staff. The GP is designed to alleviate the workload and to speed up the process. If a project fits the GP, it's much quicker. Providing a decent, accurate set of plans is critical. We don't like structural shorelines. But . . . we don't make the guy in the middle do bioengineering when he could match the process on either side.

Director Bob Walczyk: Does DEC have a plan to update the maps?

DEC: We are taking away the maps because they are unreliable. Any new maps would be for information only.

Director Matt Snyder: The prior regulations did a good job. Are you aware of any troublesome areas near Oneida Lake? What Oneida Lake problem is this solving?

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To submit questions or comments about *The Bulletin*, contact editor John Harmon at jpharmon1@gmail.com



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DEC: There is strong development pressure near the lake in spots.

Director Bill Girvan: What about the chemical weed killer applied to Cazenovia Lake. Is that regulated?

DEC: Yes

President Lance Vella: Weren't the weed beds already covered in the old regs?

DEC: Hmmm

Director George Reck: Can we combine applications for adjacent properties?

DEC: Yes, we can review both at the same time.

Director John Harmon: What about enforcement? How are these regulations going to be enforced? Is there staffing for that?

DEC: We think of it more as educational awareness at this point. We don't have the capacity to chase people down.

Director Bob Walczyk: So the burden is now on the landowner?

DEC: Yes

Following our meeting, I posed a few other questions in writing to Steve Case, Region 6 Biologist.

When applying a buffer zone of 100 feet in a lakeside property, what does DEC use as the waterline for such a measurement, considering that there are seasonal drawdowns during the seasons? In other words, 100 feet from what?

Case: The 100-foot adjacent area is measured from the wetland boundary. The wetland boundary and the shoreline MHW (Mean High Watermark) will not always be contiguous. In fact, I suspect that the wetland boundary and MHW will rarely coincide perfectly. There will be situations where the wetland boundary is the edge of a weed bed, some distance

from shore. Conversely, there may be situations where there is a wetland in the lake that extends upland of the MHW mark. MHW is not necessarily relevant to the wetland. Wherever the wetland boundary is identified, the adjacent area extends 100-feet from that delineated line.

Our Directors made the point that during the winter draw down, any submerged shore line vegetation becomes exposed and dies off. You stated that this die-off is treated the same as any winter die-off of upland vegetation in a possible wetland. Correct?

Case: Correct. Wetland delineations are required to be conducted during the growing season to allow for annual vegetation to be identified. If, during the growing season, wetland characteristics (i.e. hydrophytic vegetation) are present, then the area will be considered a wetland. If the characteristics do not exist, then it is not a wetland. Please keep in mind, also, not all of Oneida Lake is considered a wetland, and not wetlands are DEC regulated. Before a shoreline property owner is impacted by these new regulations, there must first be an area that meets the definition of a wetland present. Once a wetland is identified, it must then meet DEC criteria for regulation (i.e. size threshold or unusual importance criteria).

And it was also stated that once the water level exceeds six feet that DEC no longer considers that a wetland. Correct?

Case: Correct. It is DEC's current policy that we will not be asserting jurisdiction over wetlands consisting of submerged aquatic vegetation (weed beds) at depths greater than 6-feet.



Cicero Town Meeting

Several of our OLA members also attended a meeting of the Cicero Town Board on July 30th. At the invitation of the Town Board, two representatives from the DEC gave a similar presentation to about 150 concerned neighbors. Although this meeting covered much of the same information as the OLA Board meeting, one concern stressed by residents was the effect of these regulations on property values. If a property now comes with a host of regulations because it is on or near a wetland, does that reduce the value of the property? Will property owners challenge their assessment based on this reduction in value? Such reassessments could have a significant effect on the tax rolls for the townships.

OLA's Legislative Response

In the previous issue of the OLA Bulletin, you read about our meeting with State Senator Joe Griffo. We continue to support and encourage Senator Griffo in his efforts to pass Senate Bill 3656. This bill would exempt bodies of water over 150 acres from the newly enacted legislation. Senator Griffo explained to us that he needs bi-partisan support to pass this bill. With that in mind, we decided to approach State Senator Chris Ryan to speak to him about our concerns. OLA President Lance Vella, along with Past Presidents, Matt Snyder and John Harmon, met Senator Ryan at his office on September 15. Although we got to speak with Senator Ryan for only a few minutes, we spent considerable time with his staffers. We outlined our concerns about the unintended consequences of this legislation for our lakeside residents.

Two main points that we stressed were the great burden that this process places on the landowner, as well as the possibility of decreased property values once a wetland determination is made. State Senator Ryan stated: "I take the concerns of my constituents seriously,

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and I thank the Oneida Lake Association for bringing these important issues to my attention. I have been actively in contact with the DEC and with residents, property owners, and businesses affected by these wetlands regulations to explore practical solutions. My legislative team and I are carefully reviewing multiple options to ensure that any action we take supports and fully addresses the needs of the Oneida Lake community.” The OLA is grateful for Senator Ryan’s attention.

We are well aware that we are not alone in this battle. The Cazenovia Lake Association is also challenging this regulation. More intently, the Chautauqua Lake Property Owners Association is vigorously mounting an aggressive legal challenge. They have developed a lawsuit against New York State and the DEC. They base their lawsuit not so much on the merits of the legislation, but on their belief that the regulation itself was not properly and legally enacted. The OLA Board is closely following their lawsuit.

Benefits of Wetlands

Once again, the Board of Directors wants to remain clear about their unswerving support for the protection of wetlands. We recognize the importance of these protected areas. Our position statement on wetlands emphasizes: “The Oneida Lake Association understands and supports the many benefits that wetlands provide to our precious natural resources. We recognize and support the need to protect aquatic vegetation, as well as the abundant wildlife that depend on wetlands for a safe and protective habitat. However, Oneida Lake is a navigable lake, not a wetland.”

In conclusion, we want to assure our OLA members that the Board of Directors continues to stay fully engaged regarding this wetlands situation. Our publications will keep members informed of any progress.

Black Bass Tournament Permit Update

In September 2024, the DEC initiated their Black Bass Tournament Permitting and Reporting System which requires tournament directors to obtain a permit to conduct any bass tournament with 10 or more participants, as well as to provide results from each event. Although the OLA did not request a permitting, system, we did push for the DEC to study the effect of tournaments on the bass populations, especially those of Oneida Lake. This permitting system was designed to gather the necessary data from which DEC can draw conclusions and take action, if needed.

On September 15 of this year, Steve Hurst, Chief of the Bureau of Fisheries for DEC, attended OLA’s Annual Networking Meeting. To an interested gathering of OLA partners, he presented the initial report of results after one year of data gathering.

Chief Hurst explained that so far there have been 862 permit applications statewide, with 815 approved (95% approval Rate). Of the New York waters, Oneida Lake had the fourth largest number of applications with 45. Lake Champlain topped the list with 74, and Onondaga Lake was second with 49.

One important aspect of the permit process is that tournament directors must file a report following each event. These reports allow DEC to gather valuable data. Hurst stated that the reporting rate is good from tournament directors. In his presentation, Hurst explained that these data “afford insights on where bass are caught, when, how large, and how many.” This information then informs management decisions for the fishery, as well as providing guidance for best practices. Hurst added, “The system also helps to foster relationships among the anglers, clubs, and DEC.”

The chart below provides some of the data from Oneida Lake specifically, with a comparison to other nearby waters. Of the thirteen categories, note that Oneida Lake is first in only four of the categories, indicating that there is plenty of bass fishing on lakes that are considerably smaller than Oneida.

The information gained through this program is already providing valuable insights on the extent of tournament activity throughout the state and will help DEC better understand and manage the state’s black bass fisheries.

For more information, visit the DEC website and click on the **Black Bass Fishing Tournament Permit** webpage.

Permitting to Date - Oneida				
Category	Oneida Lake	Onondaga Lake	Cayuga Lake	Otisco Lake
Total # approved bass tournaments	45	49	46	24
Total # boats	1,491	926	1,622	510
Total # bass anglers	2,688	1,770	2,510	820
Number of tournaments before June 15	2	3	9	3
Total # bass fishing days	55	51	54	24
Total # bass angler-days	2,999	1,830	3,016	820
Max number of bass boats in a tournament	200	50	250	100
Max number of participants in a tournament	400	100	250	100
Total # different organizations	32	27	37	17
Number of motorized boat tournaments	45	49	42	21
Number of kayak tournaments	0	0	4	2
Number of immediate release tournaments	1	2	10	5
Number of access site weigh-in tournaments	44	47	36	19

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

5

Artisans of the Tackle Box: Oneida Lake's Lure Makers, Part I

By Jack Henke

Discussions of today's Oneida Lake lure craftsmen quickly focus on Brian Hammond, Carl Kapfer, James Petrello, Nick Sokolowski, the Lakeside Outfitter's crew, among others, whose creations consistently fool the finny tribe. These contemporary artisans perpetuate a valued local tradition that originated in the 19th century.

This article considers the lake's historic lure makers. Discovering information about the topic was challenging. The OLA welcomes details and stories that broaden this legacy. If you have information that you would like to share, please email: president@oneidalakeassociation.org.

In 1883, the John H. Mann Company, a Syracuse grocery/fishing tackle store, advertised Oneida Lake-specific "perfect revolving spoons" in the Daily Courier. Mann boasted: "Our Oneida Lake No. 30 takes the most fish. Our Oneida Lake Spoon comes next." A dedicated angler, Mann fished with the famous oarsman (guide) Billy Dyer, who worked out of the Old South Bay Hotel (founded in 1805) on Lower South Bay.

In 1907, Burhans & Black's two stores on Salina Street promoted "the famous Oneida Lake Spoon: 15c, 2 for 25c." Their advertisements didn't state who made the lures. One possibility is the George Clark Sporting Goods Company, Utica, a firm that sprouted in 1863 and, by 1901, evolved into Horrocks-Ibbotson. "HI" built several varieties of a revolving "Oneida Lake Spoon," which may have originated during the Clark years and could have been sold to Syracuse stores.

Henry Loftie, a prosperous Syracuse wig-maker, expanded into the fishing tackle business around 1890. He patented variations of the "Loftie Trolling Spoon," a walleye lure that resembled latter-day Mepps skirted spinners. Henry's family owned a camp on Lower South Bay, where they enjoyed Oneida Lake's great fishing. In June 1893, for example, the Syracuse Standard reported that Loftie harvested sixty pounds of walleyes and pickerel during a single outing, a testament to his lures' effectiveness.

Loftie's name endures in "Loftus Shoal," Lower South Bay, one of his favorite fishing spots. The conservationist-wigmaker, a leader of the Anglers' Association of Onondaga, spearheaded lobbying efforts that brought us the original Constantia Fish Hatchery.

From 1935 through the 1950s, Canastotans Dick and Fred Cerio, and Burt Gillette, marketed lures to national firms and local shops. Among their popular creations were the "Natural Bug Spinner" and the "Pat-En Minnow," which imitated an immature lamprey. Dick, a skilled glass maker/engraver, purchased Frank Matties' boat livery on Messenger's Bay around 1955 and operated it into the 1970s.



In 1945, Syracusan Angelo "Julie" Angeloro, with partner Emil Colozzi, purchased the W. O. Zischang Company, a hunting/fishing supplies wholesaler. Three years later, Julie was sole owner. Faced with a shortage of imported lures after World War II, the inventive Angeloro designed his own and established the "A-A Brand" of fishing tackle as part of his Zischang operation. Among his popular models were the "Julie Boy" (a wobbling spoon), the "Davey Boy" (a slender fish-shaped metal lure), and the "Georgie Boy" (a dimpled spoon). These lures were named for their inventor's sons. The conservation-minded Angeloro also served on the OLA Board of Directors, as did his son, George.

Solo accounts of anglers and their homemade Oneida Lake lures emerge from newspaper columns. On May 1, 1946, the Rome Sentinel wrote about local fishermen Joseph Malorzo and Guy Guaspari, who carved stickbaits to entice walleyes and northern pike. The duo vouched for the deadliness of their “Grey Ghost” and “Black Tiger.” In a January 1965 column, Post-Standard outdoor writer Rod Hunter mentioned the “Watusi,” a spinner bait prototype built by Oneida Lake angler/Syracuse craftsman Leon Doroff. Hunter described the lure as “made up of a very small jig, double jointed to a colored propellor spinner, and set off with three pink beads.”

Many veteran East End lead-line trollers fondly recall the flutter spoons crafted by Anthony “Tony” Verno of Canastota. A master mechanic/silversmith at Oneida

Limited, Verno started making his famous flutters “on a dare” in 1961. Using a homemade punch and blocks, he gave each spoon a corncob texture and unique movement that consistently fooled walleyes and perch. Tony sold his spoons at the Devan family’s (Upper) South Bay Bait & Tackle and from his home, where visitors were often shown the manufacturing process, superbly narrated.

Numerous jig-tiers bounce through the pages of Oneida’s angling history. Some bait/tackle shop owners tied their own jigs; Shannon Bissell (Shady Grove Marina, Maple Bay, 1950s-1970s) and John Flachenaeker (Harbor Bar Bait/Tackle, Oneida Creek, 1970s-1980s) are prime examples. In the 1960s, Donald and Barbara Therre, of Therre’s Bait/Tackle Shop on Lower South Bay, paid their son, Don, Jr., \$4/dozen to tie 1/16 to 1/2 oz.

jigs. Other shops purchased jigs from established lure makers such as Murray Savage, of Syracuse.

A few anglers made jigs for personal use and profit. From the 1970s until 1995, for example, a Verona Beach Pier fisherman frequently landed limit catches of walleyes along the Barge Canal’s banks, using a silver/purple-tinted 1/2 oz. jig, hand-tied in his workshop. He sold these “super jigs” for 50 cents apiece. One day, perhaps out of sympathy, he gave me a jig.

A couple weeks later, I purchased more. It was the best jig I ever cast.

In the Spring Bulletin: Artisans of the Tackle Box, Part II: Contemporary Oneida Lake Lure Crafters



The Captain of Conservation: A Remembrance of Tony Buffa

By Matt Snyder, OLA Past President

Our readers of faith will be familiar with the many Biblical references to fishing, a powerful motif for abundance and divine will. The fish symbol has long been associated with Christianity, and Jesus' exhortation to become "fishers of men" has inspired generations of devout women and men.

Few took this message to heart more than Capt. Tony Buffa, whose devout faith and fishing mania were matched by his peerless intellect and his passion for conservation. Tony left this world on June 13 after a battle with cancer, leaving behind his loving wife of 50 years, Carolyn, and their son Teddy. Tony left an incredible legacy of goodwill in the angling community, and his enduring contributions to the conservation of Oneida Lake will ensure future generations of anglers can enjoy our lake's rich abundance.

Born in 1942, Tony was raised in Syracuse by his beloved mother, Susie Merluzzi, who brought him up in the devout Catholic tradition. Tony's first education in fishing came at age seven at a Catholic Youth Organization fishing outing to Green Lakes State Park. Tony fished without interruption for the rest of his 83 years, going on to earn well deserved recognition as the most accomplished charter captain on Oneida Lake and Lake Ontario.

After attending high school in Plattsburgh, Tony began a teaching career that also carried on for decades. He taught math at Mount Assumption Institute, then at Bishop Grimes and Bishop Ludden, before joining the math faculty at Onondaga Community College from which he retired and was granted emeritus status in 2015. Even in so-called "retirement," Tony was still an avid teacher, sharing his vast wisdom of angling and conservation with all who came aboard his boat. He also found time to hone his talents as a reflective, cunning chess player—an activity that Tony fondly called "the real

brain muscle exercise."

Tony's brains were key to his charter success. From the start, he sought expert knowledge from the dean of fisheries scientists, Dr. John Forney of Cornell University. Tony spent nearly 50 years as a frequent presence at the Shackelton Point Field Research Station, cultivating close friendships with Dr. Forney as well as researchers including Dr. Ed Mills, Dr. Lars Rudstam, Dr. Randy Jackson, Tom Brooking, and Tony Van de Valk.

What began as a mission to learn everything he could about fish, became a mission to spread the gospel of conservation to everyone across the fishing community. It is very likely that conversations held during Tony's fishing charters did more than any other factor to promote our community's lasting dedication to science-based conservation.

Tony moved to the shores of Oneida Lake, in Bridgeport, soon after his marriage to Carolyn in 1975. His community-mindedness led to direct involvement, as he joined the Oneida Lake Association Board of Directors in 1976. Tony remained on the OLA Board for the rest of his life, making him one of the longest-tenured directors in the history of the Association. Throughout his time on the Board, Tony was a direct link between Cornell's scientists and OLA's volunteer conservationists, and he used his charters on Oneida Lake as a bully pulpit to promote the importance of fishery conservation.

Tony served in numerous committee chair and officer roles on the Board, and most OLA members know him best as chair of the Annual Meeting Committee, a role he held better than anyone else, before or since, for more than 25 years. His public efforts as emcee were well known; less well known, but no less important, were his behind-the-scenes activities to make sure that the meeting always had high-end educational and motivational



content to encourage OLA members to fully enjoy and protect the lake.

Another of his behind-the-scenes achievements was the transition of OLA's annual membership meeting through and after the Covid lockdown era. The Board entered that turbulent period not knowing what the future of the meeting would be, and Tony's wisdom and stewardship carried the Board and its members through a transition from no meeting, to an online live-streamed meeting, and back to a vibrant, well attended in-person gathering. At a time when many other conservation organizations struggled, OLA was fortunate to grow and thrive through our capacity to gather a crowd of dedicated conservationists around relevant, timely content.

In recognition of these and other achievements, the OLA in April invited Tony to the ranks of its most distinguished honorees, Conservationist of the Year Award-winners. Tony's award was announced at our annual meeting in April. On the eve of the 2025 walleye opener, a delegation from the OLA Board was blessed to have the opportunity to present the award in person at Crouse Hospital, with his son Teddy looking on. Tony was still thinking and talking about fishing and conservation, and making plans for upcoming fishing on Oneida Lake.

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"Seneca Chief" Visits Brewerton on the Way to NYC

By John Harmon

During its history, the Erie Canal, with its slow and steady mule-drawn boats, transported countless tons of goods from Buffalo to Albany to New York. And back. Cargo included manufactured implements, grains, farm produce, and all sorts of items from wheat to whiskey. And, of course, the Erie Canal transported hardy passengers, including the newcomer and the noteworthy. Perhaps the most noteworthy passenger was Dewitt Clinton himself, who traveled aboard the Seneca Chief on the inaugural voyage of 1825.

On October 6 of this year, a replica of the Seneca Chief slid alongside the wall of Riverfront Park in Brewerton, this time carrying a different cargo—200 years of history! This remarkable boat took five years to build in the hands of over 200 volunteers. Under the direction of the Buffalo Maritime Center, these volunteers provided an inspiring display of authentic material and 19th century craftsmanship.

A crowd of Brewerton neighbors showed their appreciation with much applause as the boat drifted into its mooring on a bright, sunny afternoon. After some

brief speeches by a few local dignitaries, crew members of the Seneca Chief addressed the crowd. They explained that they were part way through their 33-day voyage from Buffalo to New York City. As they pondered their next leg to Sylvan Beach, one of the crew quipped, "The one place we worried about is Oneida Lake." We all know what they meant by that!

The event was marked by a robust show of local enterprise, organized by the Northern Onondaga Public Libraries. Several organizations were invited to set up tables to showcase their mis-

sions. The Oneida Lake Association was pleased to participate in this event. Directors Rowly Hrywnak and John Harmon staffed a table where we signed up new members, handed out brochures, and spoke to neighbors about the OLA activities. Director Patricia Cerro-Reehil also joined the table event.

One very remarkable feature of the trip included the crew's commitment to recreate Clinton's original "Wedding of the Waters." At each stop, invited guests were asked to dip a cup into the local water. This cup was then poured into a small barrel (resembling Clinton's original cask) that will then be poured into the Hudson River upon their arrival in New York City.

The OLA wishes the Seneca Chief continued good will and fair weather on their way to New York.



The Seneca Chief makes its final approach to the Riverfront Park.

Buffa

(Continued from page 8)

Called home to his eternal rest before he could wet another line here, Tony left an indelible legacy on our lake's fishing and conservation community. OLA warmly thanks Crouse Hospital, Francis House, Our Lady of Pompei/St. Peter Church, and all the friends and family who comforted Tony during his battle with cancer. We are also extremely grateful to the many OLA members and supporters who made in memoriam gifts to the Association. We will use the proceeds to advance our mission of science-based conservation, following the course that Capt. Buffa charted for so many decades.



Directors Patricia Cerro-Reehil and Rowly Hrywnak prepare to greet the Seneca Chief.



Dipping into the Oneida River for the Wedding of the Waters.



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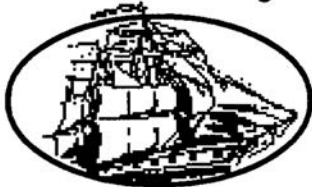
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