

New York State Parks announces employee awards

Honors include inaugural Waletzky Award for Environmental Stewardship

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has announced its annual employee awards, which recognize outstanding work on behalf of the New York state park and historic site system. The awards included the L.L. Huttleston Executive Award, the agency's highest honor, given to a senior manager; the first Waletzky Award for Environmental Stewardship; and the agency's top peer recognition, the Maple Leaf Award.

"New York state is fortunate that we have such dedicated staff taking care of our parks and historic sites, and working hard to offer countless opportunities to explore the outdoors and enjoy family-friendly fun," State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid said. "It's a pleasure to recognize some of the very best of our staff each year for extraordinary service. Congratulations to all our award recipients who share a positive, can-do spirit that we rely on to maintain and enhance our world-class park system."

AnnMarie McVicker, park operations manager for the Palisades Region, earned the L.L. Huttleston Executive Award, the agency's highest honor given to recognize outstanding ability in the enhancement, administration and implementation of the park system's philosophy and development for the public good. McVicker has built a 42-year career in state service, the past 15 with State Parks. Among her roles with parks were general



Pictured, from left: State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid, Angela Berti, Eryn Iacovitti, Gabriella Cebeda Mora, David Spiering, Lynn Bogdan, John Honan, Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky and Regional Director Mark Mistretta.

park manager for the Palisades in 2017, and park operations manager in 2018. Before joining parks, McVicker served with the Department of Corrections for 27 years.

The award is named for the former director of State Parks, Leonard L. Huttleston, "long considered one of the top professional park administrators in the country."

Local winners include: The Niagara Environmental, Capital and Operation Team earned the inaugural Waletzky Award for Environmental Stewardship. The award is named for Dr. Lucy Rockefeller Waletzky, who served 14 distinguished years as chair of the New York State Council of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the Taconic Regional Commission. The hon-

or is given in recognition of her "lifelong and unwavering dedication to protecting, conserving and enhancing the ecology and biodiversity of New York state and beyond."

Niagara Region team members include Regional Director Mark Mistretta, Capital Facilities Manager John Honan, Community Affairs and Public Outreach Coordinator Angela Berti, Great Lakes

Restoration Coordinator Dave Spiering, Environmental Analyst Eryn Iacovitti, as well as Albany-based staff Gaby Cebeda Mora, director of division of environmental stewardship; and conservation section head Lynn Bogan.

Funded via an \$11 million grant from the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the work started with State Parks designing and implementing four habitat restoration projects in Beaver Island and Buckhorn Island state parks along the Niagara River on Grand Island. The projects were focused on protecting, restoring and enhancing coastal wetlands along the shorelines and in the shallow areas of the Niagara River, including East River Marsh, Burnt Ship Creek, Grass Island and Buckhorn Shoreline. All were completed on schedule and under budget from 2019 to 2021, and restored more than 58 acres of habitat along over two miles of shoreline. Remaining funds are being used to complete three additional habitat restoration projects on Grand Island.

Special Achievement Awards, which recognize outstanding service in a specific aspect of Agency operations, went to Stephen Lee and Tyler Shields (Niagara Region)

The Special Service Award to recognize extraordinary achievement, continuous outstanding service or acts of valor, was given to Mike Vorel (Niagara Region).

Niagara University announces construction of solar array on campus

Submitted by Niagara University

Niagara University announced it has partnered with Montante Solar to develop and maintain a solar array on its Lewiston campus. The array, which is expected to generate four megawatts at peak solar capacity, is targeted to be operational in October 2023 – and represents another major step forward in the university's commitment to environmental stewardship.

"Pope Francis has implored each one of us to be better citizens of this planet and stewards of the environment, asking us 'What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?'" said the Rev. James J. Maher, C.M., president of Niagara University. "As a binational institution located near one of the world's most recognizable natural resources, Niagara University is committed to protecting our environment, and we are proud to be a leader in ensuring that everyone – especially future generations – have access to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment."

The project will convert 17 acres

of vacant land near Niagara's Witmer Road entrance into a solar power farm that will provide renewable power to the university. Post-mounted bifacial tracker panels will follow the sun during the day to maximize production, using both direct and indirect sunlight, and minimize the array's footprint. As part of the project, the invasive species of plants that are currently found there will be replaced with native pollinators to further enhance the environment.

"Niagara University is redefining the industrial legacy that has historically prevailed over this part of Niagara County," said Dan Mon-

tante, cofounder and president of Montante Solar. "Strong vision and leadership has transformed what was once idle property into a truly unique educational experience for students, while supplying the university with low-cost renewable power; a true 'win' for the community."

Niagara's efforts toward its goal of carbon neutrality have included planting hundreds of trees on campus; the construction of its LEED Gold-certified, 50,000-square-foot integrated science center; the use of solar panels and live plants on roofs; the installation of four electric car charging stations on cam-

pus; and a campuswide conversion to LED lighting, an initiative that decreased electric consumption for lighting by more than 50%.

The university is annually fea-

tured in the Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges and, in 2019, was honored by the Niagara USA Chamber with its "Green Initiative Award."

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