

OLEAN TIMES HERALD

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Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County seeking new, younger members



Phil Stock (right) and Gary Abraham, volunteers with the New York Water Sentinels Program and Concerned Citizens of Cattaraugus County, sample water in Pratt's Brook, which flows through Mount View Cemetery on South Union Street, in April 2013. Olean Times Herald file photo.

OLEAN — Cattaraugus County Concerned Citizens, an environmental and health watchdog over the past four decades, is seeking new members in order to carry on its mission.

Concerned Citizens formed in the early 1990s in response to a proposed landfill in Farmersville and reorganized in 2010 to fight a proposed 29-turbine wind farm in the Chipmunk area in the town of Allegany.

Cattaraugus County and Concerned Citizens fought against the proposed landfill and it was effectively stopped in 2004. Five years later, the county auctioned off parcels there with the understanding the land could never be used for a landfill.

Ironically, another Farmersville project, the proposed Alle-Catt Wind Farm, split the remaining members of Concerned Citizens and it dropped out of the coalition of groups and individuals opposed to the wind farm.

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Part of the group pointed to the positive of green energy represented by project, while others remained concerned about the wind farm's health effects on nearby residents and the towering, industrial-grade structures in a rural setting.

The environmental group has taken positions on other projects over the years including the **West Valley Demonstration Project**, where it sought a total cleanup. Concerned Citizens weighed in most recently in opposition to a proposed hydraulic fracturing wastewater treatment facility in Potter County, Pa., that would have discharged treated water into the Allegheny River.

One longtime Concerned Citizens member, Great Valley environmental attorney Gary Abraham, said the group will meet March 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Olean Public Library and invited interested county residents to attend. To get the Zoom link, email programming@oleanlibrary.org.

Abraham can be reached at (716) 790-6141 or emailed at gabraham44@eznet.net.

Kathy Kellogg, a founding member and former president of Concerned Citizens, said most of the groups's members are 70 or older. Soon after the Farmersville landfill issue arose in the early 1990s, the group had a mailing list of more than 500 people, she said.

"It started as an educational group — before Farmersville," Kellogg said. "We did research and tried to get the truth out. There was a lot of disinformation going to county decision makers. We tried to get the truth out and let people make their own decisions. I want to see it continue."

Barbara Dyskant, who joined Concerned Citizens after moving to the area in 2002, said the Farmersville landfill issue prompted her to join.

"I've been involved ever since then," she said. "I want to see it keep going. We are going to need some new blood in our leadership. I do not see us disbanding. Not on my watch."

Abraham agrees. Longtime members are inviting younger people to the meeting at the library. Those who cannot attend will be able to give their input via Zoom.

"We're inviting people to the meeting to see if we can chart a new course," Abraham said. "I'd like to see some new blood in the group."

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Rob Mrowka, who recently stepped down as Concerned Citizens president, issued a statement: “The CCCC is a venerable and respected conservation organization formed in 1990 from citizens concerned about the environment and heritage of Cattaraugus County.

“From landfills to invasive plant and insects, protecting pollinators, fracking and dangerous natural gas pipelines, abandoned oil wells leaking explosive methane gas, wind and solar farms, to the quality of water in our streams and rivers, CCCC has been there to highlight the issues and educate and inform residents.

“Unlike some presidential candidates, the officers of CCCC see and feel the need to pass the torch to younger leaders with more energy,” Mrowka said.

Abraham said, “CCCC initially grew out of the anti-toxics movement led by Lois Gibbs and her fight to get Love Canal cleaned up. We learned that large industrial-scale landfills like the one proposed in Farmersville in the 1980s and ‘90s accept volumes of toxic substances comparable to smaller hazardous waste landfills.

“We helped launch a regional campaign against landfills and, since then, no new landfills have been sited in New York. We also learned that rural communities are targets for large industrial facilities whose harms would never be tolerated in urban areas,” Abraham said.

“In many cases these present the question of environmental justice because urban areas export their own environmental impacts to disadvantaged rural communities,” Abraham continued. “That’s why CCCC got involved in the EverPower wind farm project in the town of Allegany, and later with the Alle-Catt wind project in Cattaraugus, Allegany and Wyoming counties. It seemed (and still seems) to be the same urban-rural environmental justice issue as the Farmersville landfill,” he said.

“However, the time has come for new leadership for CCCC, in order to chart a course to a cleaner, healthier environment.”

RICK MILLER