

Words of Wisdom

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By Gene Chague, The Berkshire Eagle

On Saturday evening, March 23, I had the distinct pleasure of being awarded the Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs "Words of Wisdom Award" at its Annual Appreciation Banquet at the Wachusett Country Club in West Boylston. That award is presented to a person who is using the media to inform and educate about the contributions made by sportsmen and sportswomen and their clubs.

I was blown away by this honor. I knew that this column had a decent number of readers here in the Berkshires, but was unaware that so many sportsmen in central Mass. knew of, much less read it. I thank the WCLS for considering me for this award. It means an awful lot to me and I shall never forget that evening.

It was also really cool that Mass. Fish & Game Commissioner Ron Amidon presented the plaque to me. You may recall that he was one of our group of eight flyfishermen who traveled up to Labrador in September of 2016 to fish the Minipi River system for large brook trout. (That was before he became a VIP!) To make that evening even more memorable, several of the flyfishermen who made that Labrador trip (and their spouses) were also there that evening. Seated at our table along with my wife Jan were Mike and Clair Shepard of Dalton, Mike and Diane Miller of Athol. Carl Racie of Athol, who had fished with us in Quebec, was also there with Joan Starrett.

I also received citations from the State Senate and the House of Representatives.

Additional recipients that evening who you may recognize were Wayne MacCallum, who was named the WCLS Sportsman of the Year Award. He is the former Director of the Mass. DFW who served in that capacity for over 25 years. Another recipient was former DFW Youth Turkey Hunt Coordinator Astrid Huseby who recently was promoted to DFW Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) Coordinator. She received the Youth Mentor Award. Other award recipients were State Senator Donald F. Humason, Jr. who received the Legislator of the Year Award for his vigorous work on Beacon Hill supporting sportsmen's causes. Will Rogers, a central Massachusetts, farmer received the Farmer of the Year Award. He was acknowledged for opening his farmland to hunters and fishermen. Rosemary Charon who has devoted countless hours to the WCLS, was inducted into its Hall of Fame.

I was also surprised to see how popular the outdoors sports are there. The WCLS represents over 25,000 sportsmen and women from over 50 clubs in Worcester County. According to Commissioner Amidon, that evening's event drew approximately 275 people, a half dozen State Representatives, three State Senators, Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, EOEEA Secretary Matthew Beaton and many other dignitaries.

So, to the Central Massachusetts sportsmen/women and conservation minded readers who I previously did not know read this column, THANK YOU! And thanks for the wonderful work you are doing to conserve our environment and introduce our youth to it.

Incidentally, outdoor sports columnist Mark Blazis of the Worcester Telegram & Gazette wrote an excellent article covering that event in the Outdoors section of the March 26 issue, entitled "State's best sportsmen, women and outdoors advocates duly recognized".