

Honor to be among inductees, families, friends, friends of conservation

Bill: 31 years of records on same deer stand; keeps all bridge scores; golf scores

Honored to have worked with him on national conservation initiatives

First slide: Refer to the comment: Vasectomies in the 12th ward.

As Ron Zimmerman will underscore, we would not be gathered here today if not for Bill. Bill credits Dan Trainer, the late former dean of the UW Stevens Point College of Natural Resources, for the idea to have a hall of fame. Bill took that idea and pursued it with the vigor and determination that few can muster.

How fitting that after serving as executive secretary of the Conservation Hall for 21 years, Bill is alongside the other conservation greats. Where he belongs.

NEXT SLIDE—boy

There is Bill – a six-year-old boy in the rural town of Navarino, Shawano County. Bill says he became a conservationist at that early age when he saw a favorite fishing stream destroyed by a drag line.

SLOW: Something else happened when he was a child. His parents divorced. The second of five children, Bill left home at age 9 to live with and work for a nearby dairy farmer because there wasn't enough to go around at home.

Describing the feeling of walking away from home that day, Bill once told me, "It felt like a giant rubber band was trying to pull me back." But he kept walking.

Later, a teacher saw promise in a 13-year-old boy and gave him a catalog for Central State College, now UWSP. He worked fulltime while attending college and earned a double major in English and conservation.

Bill also did a very intelligent thing in his college days: He courted a local girl, Nancy Damrau. At first she wouldn't have much to do with him, but he kind of grew on her. They married, raised two children (Nancy did most of that), and today I think you could call them the best of friends. It is said of Bill, "You always know where he stands." The same can be said of Nancy.

NEXT SLIDE—riverfront park

Don noted some of Bill's local accomplishments. The list is almost endless. Here are just a few:

He served on the local Common Council for 10 years in the 1970s and 1980s. In that time, he:

- Spearheaded the effort to organize the city's nationally recognized urban forestry program.
- He was a strong advocate of urban planning and land use
- He chaired a special city committee that created a three-quarter-mile Wisconsin riverfront park, including a path linking two city parks. This was literally the first link in the city's 26-mile Green Circle Trail.

I was a newspaper guy in those days, and I quickly learned to admire him. He always asked the tough questions at meetings. Later, he told me he knew the answers, but wanted them stated publicly.

NEXT SLIDE—Managed forest

As Don noted, Bill was elected to represent Stevens Point in the state assembly in a special election. He served in 1983 and 1984.

Don Last mentioned the “berry picker law.” It was the first such law in the country and became a national model.

Bill also spearheaded efforts to pass the original Managed Forest Law in Wisconsin. MFL is a landowner incentive program that encourages sustainable forestry on private woodlands. Today, there are more than 2 million MFL acres in Wisconsin.

Bill has also served on numerous state committees. He is involved to this day as a member of the committee that oversees the state’s new Deer Management Assistance Program.

NEXT SLIDE—conservation district work

Suffice to say, Bill Horvath has gotten around.

Leaving Point, he earned a Master’s degree at the University of Michigan and then took a regional position with the Pennsylvania Soil and Water Commission. Thus began his long career in the soil and water conservation movement. 18 months later, he was offered the position of director of the Maryland State Soil and Water Conservation Agency. He was 25.

Soon he was offered the same job with the Soil and Water Conservation Board in Wisconsin. He was an advocate for watershed management. Here is one example:

The board approved all applications for public assistance for watershed management administered by the Soil Conservation Service. The program had become a huge channelization program. Bill created an inter-agency biology team of federal and state agencies to assess potential biological damage of proposed projects. That stopped many projects and saved a lot of wetlands.

Five years later, the National Association of Conservation Districts came calling. Bill said yes – if he could run his regional office out of Stevens Point. Bill and Nancy came home. Well, sort of. Bill was gone about half the time, traveling around the country to work on private lands conservation.

Don noted the vast impacts of Bill's work in terms of numbers. He wasn't exaggerating.

Everyone in private lands conservation knew Bill, from secretaries of agriculture and NRCS and Forest Service chiefs to the regular folks on conservation district boards around the country. Bill treated them all the same. Invited to a White House conference on Climate Change in the 1990s, he turned them down. Why? He had an NACD meeting, and his first allegiance was to conservation districts.

This went on for 40-plus years. Name the natural resources concern, and Bill probably had something to do with trying to solve the problem.

Bill was also a rainmaker: He secured more than \$24 million in federal, state and private monies to support the work of NACD and America's conservation districts.

A few examples:

When the EPA was established in the early 1970s, the farming community and NACD avoided any working relationship with the agency. Not Bill Horvath. He led his Midwest region to the table with EPA, resulting in dozens of projects to demonstrate conservation practices on a watershed basis to achieve water quality objectives.

He arranged or received more than \$15 million in grants from EPA. One grant helped NACD produce two 28-minute color films on non-point water quality. They were viewed by more than a million people. One received a national film award.

He also directed the only national inventory of recreational facilities on private lands across the US. The then Bureau of Outdoor Recreation needed the information to administer the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which made grants to states for purchase and development of recreational land.

In the early years of this century, Bill convinced the US Forest Service and Department of Interior to support an effort to engage conservation districts in promoting forest health and woody biomass utilization.

John Stewart story

NACD was a leader in raising awareness about the dangers of wildfire, the need for managing our forests and the potential of utilizing woody biomass from forest thinning projects.

NEXT SLIDE—home

Remember that photo of the little boy. Years later, Bill acquired the original family homestead. He undertook a model restoration project, establishing Wisconsin's first federal Stewardship Forest, planting thousands of trees, restoring wetlands, establishing a prairie and creating wildlife habitat.

NEXT SLIDE—Full circle with Bobby

Bill Horvath had to leave his home one day as a little boy. But he returned. In between, he did so much.

LAST SLIDE—thank you