

LOCAL CITIZENS CAN PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCES

Maintaining the health of the Quinnipiac River is a never-ending mission, an occupation carried out by a team of dedicated volunteers throughout the year. Addressing 62 Y's Men of Meriden on Tuesday, Jan. 17, David James (Board President) and Ginny Chirsky (Immediate Past President) of the Quinnipiac River Watershed Association (QRWA) described the history, challenges and gratifications that have empowered them and others to remain committed to being advocates for the river's health.



David James and Ginny Chirsky.

The Quinnipiac River, the most urbanized river in the state, derives its water from 19 municipal watersheds and empties at New Haven into Long Island Sound. Older state residents may recall that its waters frequently ran multi-colored, but aging out of large industrial polluters, increasing public consciousness (in part due to passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972 under President Nixon) and a significant lawsuit win against the Upjohn Company (a pharmaceutical manufacturer) has turned the water clear again. And due to ongoing efforts by QRWA volunteers, water quality has improved an additional 50 percent during the past 20 years.

QRWA sponsors semiannual river cleanup events (removing mattresses, tires, and a host of other debris), paddle contests, river festivals, an April canoe race (the longest in Connecticut) and advocacy with local and state governments. Ongoing issues include flooding, habitat distribution and pollution. Point-source pollution (coming from single locations such as factories) is now a lesser threat than non-point-source pollution (fertilizers, pesticides, highway oil residues and wintertime salt treatments) washing into wide swathes along the river. QRWA supports healthy riparian buffers, forested strips of land along river banks, which prevent toxins from flooding into the water, and encourages bioretention areas and other structural solutions to excess storm water runoff.

Located at 540 Oregon Road on Hanover Pond in Meriden, QRWA built its headquarters starting in 2005, refurbishing a building that had housed the Meriden Humane Society for the previous 25 years. Assisted by generous grants and donations (monetary and in-kind) from foundations, companies, government sources, service organizations and individuals, the facility now sports classrooms, research laboratories, offices and lecture areas. Instruction on environmental topics is now provided to students at Maloney and Platt High Schools, with a recent outreach to Meriden elementary schools. For additional information, visit www.qrwa.org.

Retired or semi-retired men from Meriden or surrounding communities, interested in attending a Y's Men of Meriden meeting, are invited to call 203-238-7784 or visit the www.ysmenofmeriden.com.



On the river.



Kayak lessons.



Classroom work.