

Chautauqua Watershed Notes
From the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy
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Meet Chautauqua's Watershed Steward
By Betsy Hite
For the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy



*A clean and healthy Chautauqua Lake depends on people taking good care of its watershed.
Watershed stewardship is everyone's job for the sake of present and future generations.*

“In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand;
and we will understand only what we have been taught.”

-- Baba Dioum

Watershed? Stewardship? If we are asking the residents of Chautauqua County to save the watershed and practice responsible watershed behaviors don't they need to know what a WATERSHED is? This was the spark that lit the fire under the new Watershed Stewardship Program developed as part of the Chautauqua Lake Management Commission's 2007 Lake and Watershed Action Plan. The CLMC funded the stewardship program and collaborated with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy to get the program up and running. Through community outreach the CLMC, CWC and Cornell Cooperative are trying to help residents, visitors and businesses take voluntary steps to protect the watershed.

As part of the program, a portion of the funding the Chautauqua Lake Management Commission provided has allowed the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy to hire me, Betsy Hite, as the new WATERSHED STEWARD.

What is a watershed steward? It took the eyes of a child to give me the simplicity and the perspective I needed in order to properly answer this question. Lisa Certo-Card's K-2 class at Rogers Elementary School in Jamestown gave me both. As the new Watershed Steward, I gave a presentation to the class about the Chautauqua Lake watershed and what we can do to protect it. After the presentation, the students were asked to define the term Watershed Steward. Even though this is technically my job title, I had yet to be able to thoroughly explain what it is that I do. Three simple words that the class came up with gave me the perspective and understanding of exactly what my job title means: HELPER...SCIENTIST...TEACHER. All the jargon and technical definitions of stewardship lack the simplicity and the power of these three words.

What is watershed stewardship though? Simply put, it is us, as a community, making simple changes in our behavior and learning ways to live within our watershed that protect Chautauqua Lake, and the surrounding land, for future generations. It can take the form of recycling, planting trees, composting, mulching, voting, keeping leaves and waste out of storm drains, positioning downspouts toward your lawn, participating in beach clean-ups and stream restorations, minimizing soil erosion, the list goes on and on. Understanding that our collective actions affect the quality of Chautauqua Lake – even if we don't live directly on the lake – is the first step of stewardship.

If a lake is a reflection of its watershed, then Chautauqua Lake's Watershed needs a facelift. The Chautauqua Lake watershed is like a bathtub with Chautauqua Lake as the drain opening. It is approximately 175 square miles in size, and its waters drain through six successive streams, ultimately ending up in the Gulf of Mexico. So what we do to the 155 square miles of land surrounding the lake (the sides of the bathtub) not only affects the water quality of Chautauqua Lake but has the potential to affect all the areas downstream.

People are smart and adaptable and no one wants to intentionally pollute the environment. Yet, we all have busy lifestyles, and sometimes we don't realize the impact our actions have on Chautauqua Lake. In addition, not knowing WHAT to do or HOW to do it, in terms of changing our behaviors, gives us no other choice but to continue doing things the way we have always done. This is where the Watershed Stewardship Education Program steps in. The program offers community outreach in the form of presentations, demonstrations, informational brochures, public service announcements, environmental awareness events, and coordination of environmental projects for groups (i.e., scouts, clubs, associations). If you would like more information on how to organize a presentation or stewardship project, please call Betsy Hite, Watershed Steward, at 499-7454 or e-mail at emh92@cornell.edu. The health of our lake and our watershed depends on the stewardship of every resident and visitor of Chautauqua County.

The Watershed Steward position is administered by a partnership between the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chautauqua County funded through the Chautauqua Lake Management Commission. The mission of the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy is to preserve and enhance the water quality, scenic beauty and

ecological health of the lakes, streams and watersheds of the Chautauqua region. Please call 664-2166 for more information.