

# Kulpmont environmentalist working to restore Shamokin Creek

- [By Justin Strawser jstrawser@dailyitem.com](mailto:jstrawser@dailyitem.com)



Steve Motyka, vice president of the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance, was nominated this year as one of The Daily Item's People Who Made A Difference in the Valley in 2023. Motyka is pictured here west of Kulpmont at a tributary of Quaker Run that goes into Shamokin Creek west of Kulpmont. It is one of 60 sites that the alliance is trying to clean up.

Justin Strawser/The Daily Item

*Editor's note: The Daily Item will recognize people who have Made a Difference in the Valley in 2023 this week. This is the fourth part of a series that will continue until New Year's Day.*

**KULPMONT** — Steve Motyka's involvement with environmental preservation started as a young man with a desire to fish in Shamokin Creek near his hometown of Kulpmont.

The 32.4-mile Shamokin Creek is a tributary of the Susquehanna River in Northumberland County affected by acid mine runoff. Coal mining started in the 137-square-mile watershed more than 200 years ago.

"It was something we never had the opportunity to do in the upper Shamokin Creek Valley," said Motyka, the vice president of the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance. "Little did I know how hard it is to accomplish such big goals. We are making progress. I won't get to fish any time soon, but my son or his son might be able to use the stream."

Motyka was nominated as one of The Daily Item's People Who Made A Difference in the Valley in 2023. The work that Motyka, also a council member of the Kulpmont Borough Council, and the alliance do was recognized this year with the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence.

Motyka works as a union carpenter who works for a construction management firm, having been involved in the building of hospitals across Pennsylvania for the last 14 years. In addition to the creek alliance, he is a sergeant-at-arms in the Sons of the American Legion, works with community groups in Kulpmont and is a member of the Faith Alliance for Revitalization in Shamokin.

Motyka's position on the alliance is voluntary. He receives a \$2,000 annual payment for being on borough council, but he donates that back to the borough each year, he said.

The alliance, which formed in 1996, has a mission to partner with local government, businesses, and citizens in cleanup efforts, provide educational opportunities for residents living within the watershed to learn about abandoned mine land issues, and restore abandoned mine lands to a condition supportive of commercial and residential development and recreational uses.

Motyka was a junior in high school 28 years ago when he first got involved in the alliance. He left the area briefly and returned in 2014 to start working as vice president of the group. He was first elected to borough council in 2012 and has helped facilitate grant opportunities and environmental projects.

As vice president, Motyka said he has been taking steps to prepare for applying for funding from the Infrastructure Reduction Act. There is \$1.5 billion available to Pennsylvania to clean up acid mine draining. Motyka said the goal is to build a \$30 million treatment facility on Shamokin Creek.

"It's very exciting times," said Motyka. "We've never been more excited and hopeful in the last 28 years. It's a great time to be a member."

The alliance is also working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Shamokin. The EPA is providing \$500,000 through the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Program to establish a brick-and-mortar presence in the community staffed by a full-time coordinator.

"They look at a clean stream as a catalyst to a healthy, vibrant community," said Motyka. "They think cleaning the stream would go a long way to bring the city back to being a productive functioning city. They really took a liking to our group."

Earlier this year, the creek alliance received the 2023 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for Veterans Memorial Field improvements in Kulpmont. Volunteers built a footbridge to connect the site to the borough. The bridge became the catalyst for even more improvements. Penn State Master Gardeners worked with volunteers to install a pollination garden.

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources funded a restroom project that highlights aspects of green construction, including rainwater capture flushing toilets, solar power, recycled materials, and a rain garden. A Sierra Club grant was combined with environmental penalty money levied against a pipeline builder to restore a section of wetlands feeding Quaker Run. A Growing Greener Plus grant was utilized to restore the stream channel through the recreation complex and seal the stream bottom, preventing water from entering the mine pool and becoming polluted.

Through a grant, the alliance can bus local students to the area to learn about filtration, retention, detention, erosion prevention and other environmental topics.

"We act as a group trying to make a difference," said Motyka. "We never look for recognition, but it was pretty amazing that they recognized us for all of our efforts."

Motyka was nominated by Lana Gulden, a member of the North Central Chapter of the Sierra Club of Lewisburg. Gulden and Motyka crossed paths when Motyka was seeking funding through the Sierra Club.

“We learned about how much he was doing in the Shamokin Area,” said Gulden, of Northumberland. “We came to really admire him. He seemed to be hands-on and got his hands dirty doing the work.”

Gulden said she was impressed with the work completed at Veteran’s Memorial Park. “It’s just a really, really nice area,” she said.

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Justin Strawser/The Daily Item Steve Motyka, vice president of the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance, was nominated this year for one of The Daily Item’s People Who Made A Difference in the Valley in 2023. Motyka is pictured here at the foot bridge built by SCRA at the Veterans Memorial Field in Kulpmont.  
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