

‘Our persistence has paid off’

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The coal mining industry once dominated and fueled the economy of southern Northumberland County, but environmental consequences remain today, years after the closure of most mining operations.

One visible reminder is the unnatural orange tint of water flowing in Shamokin Creek, caused by iron, aluminum, manganese and other minerals filtering into the water through former mine shafts, slopes, drifts and boreholes, settling at the bottom of the stream where the highly acidic water stunts plant and aquatic life.

For the past 28 years, however, the region has been fortunate to have a non-profit environmental group — the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance — working to remediate the effects of acid mine drainage into the Shamokin Creek, which flows from Mount Carmel, through the heart of Shamokin and Coal Township, then slightly northwest to a point just south of Sunbury, where it flows into the Susquehanna River.

Just last week, members of the alliance received some encouraging news. Thanks to the diligent research coordinated by the alliance members through the past nearly three decades and federal attention focused by U.S. Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is providing a \$500,000 grant through the Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving program. The funding will be used to establish a brick-and-mortar downtown presence in the community staffed by a full-time coordinator.

“Our persistence has paid off,” said Steve Motyka, the alliance vice president. “We’ve been targeting this forever, it seems like.”

“Over the past 25 years, our group has had many successes,” Motyka writes on the Shamokin Creek Alliance website. “Students and citizens of our Valley have been educated as to why Shamokin Creek’s aquatic life is depleted and how it can be fixed. Treatment sites have been built, thousands of trees have been planted and

tons of trash has been collected. Fish now live in some tributaries where fish haven't lived for 100 years. Our goal of a cleaner Shamokin Creek has been achieved, but not completed.”

With the help of this funding, the alliance program manager and advisory board, working in partnership with several community, governmental, educational and environmental entities, will coordinate project proposals and expenditures to promote the goals of the community — to improve the quality of water flowing in the Shamokin Creek.

One of the first priorities — announced on Friday — will be to hire Phil Dunn as executive director. Dunn was a one-time staff member for former state Sen. John Gordner.

The alliance will continue to address related environmental issues, including acid mine drainage, blight, pollution, brownfield development and sustainable job creation.

The grant, the new downtown office and executive director all represent major steps forward in the effort to clean up and restore Shamokin Creek — steps that would not have been possible without the years of dedicated environmental work provided by members of the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance.

For much more information, including how to become an alliance member, visit online at: shamokincreek.org.

NOTE: Opinions expressed in The Daily Item's editorials are the consensus of the publisher, top newsroom executives and community members of the editorial board. Today's was written by Digital Editor Dave Hilliard.