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TOP STORY

SCRA receives Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for improvements at Veterans Memorial Field in Kulpmont

By LARRY DEKLINSKI THE NEWS-ITEM
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1 of 3



The Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) was recently honored with the 2023 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in Kulpmont, in Northumberland County. Pictured are, from left, Davitt Woodwell, PEC president; James Koharski, SCRA president; C Kulpmont councilman and SCRA vice president; Richard Negrin, acting secretary for DEP; and Joe Dowkus, Kulpmont councilman.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), presented the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) with the Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence for its improvements at the Veterans Memorial Field in Kulpmont, Northumberland County.

Members of SCRA said they are incredibly honored to be selected for this award and thanked all the organization's partners that have contributed to the successes at Veterans Field.

In 1980, a Rural Abandoned Mine Program (RAMP) project eliminated a high-wall stripping pit at the site of the former Scott Colliery, located on the south side of the borough.

Prior to 2016, the recreation complex was underutilized, the walking track needed repair, the stream channel had no vegetation and the site lacked amenities.

Steve Motyka, Kulpmont councilman and SCRA vice president, said when the borough and SCRA began working on the site, it seemed like a futile effort, but the entities persevered. Believing in the site's potential, he said SCRA applied for and won the first of six Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) education grants directed toward the site.

Since 2016, hundreds of students from Mount Carmel Area and Our Lady of Lourdes Regional have participated in events highlighting the history of coal mining in the region and the effects of coal mining both on the surface landscape and in the form of acid mine discharges impacting local streams. Students also have learned what a healthy stream looks like and how planting riparian buffers can restore impaired streams. Over the years, they have helped to plant dozens of saplings and bushes at the field.

SCRA also applied for and won a \$548,000 Growing Greener Plus grant to restore the stream channel through the recreation complex and seal the stream bottom, preventing water from entering the mine pool and becoming polluted. The grant was funded by an environmental penalty.

With the blessing of borough council, volunteers also have built a footbridge over the stream channel to connect the recreation area to the borough. The bridge became the catalyst for even more improvements.

Penn State Master Gardeners worked with volunteers to install a pollination garden, which includes various perennials, fruit trees, pedestals holding the seals of each branch of the armed services, a custom-made archway honoring veterans and memorial pavers.

DCNR also has funded a restroom project highlighting aspects of green construction, including rainwater capture flushing toilets, solar power, recycled materials and a rain garden.

According to SCRA, had Veterans Memorial Field been left unimproved, it would not be attracting the hundreds of people who now utilize the facility, which includes the pollination garden, a walking path with educational signage, and baseball diamond, where Mount Carmel Area High School plays its home games.

“It’s an example of what government and nonprofits can do if they work together,” Motyka said of the improvements at the field.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection honored 21 project done by schools, businesses, and community organizations around the state with the 2023 Governor’s Awards for Environmental Excellence.

According to DEP, applications were evaluated for their degree of environmental protection, innovation, partnership, economic impact, consideration of climate change, sustainability, and environmental justice and outcomes achieved.

Motyka said the Governor's Award is a good example of SCRA's momentum to have healthy streams and creeks throughout the Shamokin Creek Watershed that will support aquatic life and promote wildlife habitat restoration and preservation.

Completed projects include a leaping weir along Venn Access Road in Coal Township, a Quaker Run and Buck Run assessment and restoration plan, and four passive mine drainage treatment systems throughout the watershed.

"We can do more if we get more people involved," Motyka said.

For more information or to join SCRA, visit shamokincreek.org or facebook.com/shamokincreek.

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