



# Great Swamp Watershed Association

P.O. Box 300 • New Vernon, NJ 07976 • 973-538-3500 • [www.GreatSwamp.org](http://www.GreatSwamp.org)

*Protecting our waters and our land for 30 years*

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 18, 2011

Contact:

Steven Reynolds

Director, Communications & Membership

(973) 538-3500 x21

[sreynolds@greatswamp.org](mailto:sreynolds@greatswamp.org)

### **Local Nonprofit Celebrates 30 Years of Environmental Engagement**

Great Swamp Watershed Association fete benefits water and land conservation.

(Morristown, NJ)— *A Watershed Event*—the aptly named gala event celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA)—drew more than 300 people to Morristown's Westin Governor Morris Hotel last Thursday to support the health and beauty of the local environment.

Guests from throughout the region and all walks of life gathered together to honor Abigail Fair and Julia Somers, two local environmental heroes whose tireless efforts have helped preserve the integrity of water and land within the 55-square-mile Great Swamp Watershed over the past three decades. In 1981, Ms. Fair, better known as Abbie, founded the Great Swamp Watershed Committee, a group that would eventually become the GSWA. Known throughout the region for her 22 years of service to the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC), Abbie also coordinated the Freshwater Wetlands Campaign which paved the way for passage of *New Jersey's Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act of 1987*. Ms. Somers served as the Great Swamp Watershed Association's first professional executive director, a position she held for 16 years, from 1992 to 2006. Today, she serves as Executive Director of the New Jersey Highlands Coalition where she works to protect, enhance, and restore the lands and waters of northwest New Jersey's entire Highlands region.

The evening kicked off in high gear as revelers gathered along the hotel's second-floor mezzanine for cocktails and a performance by the local acoustic rock band Faded Genes. For those looking for a bit of friendly competition, GSWA elegantly arrayed items from a 120-lot silent auction outside the dining room for all to peruse. Guests swapped bids on everything from stays at luxury accommodations in Donegal, Ireland and Montana's Big Sky Resort, to works of art created by local artists and private tours of Great Swamp's remotest corners. By evening's end, the auction generated a substantial amount of financial support for GSWA's ongoing environmental education, stewardship and advocacy programming.

Dinner was a grand, two-hour affair punctuated by remarks from GSWA's current Executive Director Sally Rubin, Gala Chair David Budd, and the Chairman of GSWA's Board of Trustees Ben Wolkowitz. An

army of servers distributed course after course of the evening meal to tables sponsored by event underwriters, including Pfizer, Chrysalis Pharma Partners, Merck Consumer Care, Novartis, Peapack-Glastone Bank, and United Water.

As the feast proceeded, Ms. Rubin expressed her deep gratitude to the assembled guests.

“As I stand here and look out over all of you who have turned out tonight, I feel myself choking up a little,” Rubin said, “It’s wonderful to know that so many of you care about the Great Swamp and the important work done by this small organization.”

A delectable dessert course and reflections from guests of honor Abbie Fair and Julia Somers capped off the evening. After receiving a framed print of the gala’s signature photograph—a great blue heron from Great Swamp captured in flight by photographer Ari Kaufman—Ms. Somers thanked all those in attendance.

“It is wonderful to see so many people come out for the Watershed Association, and for Abbie and me,” Julia remarked. “It is very humbling to be recognized for something I never did alone. I know I could never have accomplished anything without broad support from folks who feel just as strongly as I do about the importance of protecting the watershed.”

Following the event, Ms. Fair offered the most compelling summary of the festivities. In an email to members of GSWA’s staff she wrote:

The crowded room at the gala was a great testament to the work GSWA has done and continues to do to protect the Great Swamp Refuge and its watershed. Working for clean water is essential to the future.

As the celebration drew to a close—after the last speech had been delivered and the last silent auction prize claimed—the future of clean water in New Jersey was a little more secure. Proceeds from ticket and auction purchases had exceeded all expectations, and, in the words of Gala Chair David Budd, the larger-than-expected turnout “...represented undeniable evidence that all those who live, work, and play in our region value the service done by Great Swamp Watershed Association.” All proceeds from the gala will be used to support GSWA’s environmental education, stewardship, and advocacy work within and beyond the boundaries of the Great Swamp Watershed.

Profound thanks go out to all those who contributed to the success of *A Watershed Event*. The Board of Trustees, staff and volunteers of GSWA look forward to seeing you at next year’s gala!

###

Founded in 1981, the Great Swamp Watershed Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the water and land of the 36,000-acre watershed region in Morris and Somerset counties. We work to maintain the beauty and health of our open space, and to monitor and protect five streams: Loantaka Brook, Great Brook, Primrose Brook, Black Brook, and the Upper Passaic—which feed into the Passaic River and provide drinking water to more than a million people.