



The de Lacy Gray Memorial Medal for Conservation

Elizabeth Neal Davenport, better known as Betty, of Chatham Garden Club, is the 2021 recipient of the de Lacy Gray Memorial Medal for Conservation. The award was presented at the Garden Club of Virginia Annual Meeting hosted by the Ashland Garden Club on May 5.

First presented in 1965 as a memorial to de Lacy Thompson Gray, this award recognizes an individual member or member club of the Garden Club of Virginia for outstanding effort to further the knowledge of our natural resources and encourage their wise use.

Proposed by Chatham Garden Club, Betty has played a central role in transforming a 1,300-acre tract of land on her property, Banister Bend Farm, into a nature preserve. The goal of the preserve has been to construct, restore and preserve wildlife habitat with a mix of streams, riparian areas, wetlands and adjacent uplands,



which further enhance and complement the functions of the Banister River and Stinking Creek. A Banister Bend Mitigation Bank, serving a large portion of the Roanoke River Watershed, can sell wetland and stream credits to offset unavoidable impacts to aquatic resources that may arise with future construction projects.

Conservation easements have been placed on the farm's river banks. A pond has been a dedicated project of Ducks Unlimited to provide nesting space for ducks. Virginia Tech students have identified trees and plants along a designated nature trail, which is open to school groups and clubs.

A recent project is a 10-acre wildflower garden bordered by three pollinator gardens. Plantings of butterfly bushes, periwinkles, cat mint, black Dutch clover and a grove of persimmon trees contribute to Banister Bend Farm's self-sustaining habitat for all wildlife. Betty's love of birds has resulted in more than 40 bluebirds and 30 wood ducks who call Banister Bend Farm their home. The planting of hedgerows and warm-season grasses provide birds and other animals safety and protection.



Wood ducks are welcome at Betty's Banister Bend Farm. *Photo by Frank Vassen from Wikimedia Commons*

With her husband, Ben, Betty has been influential in developing a master plan with Virginia Tech to revitalize Chatham. This plan includes the installation of gardens at the town's entrance, as well as planting garden spots in various locations throughout Chatham. The plan was so successful that it served as a catalyst for the community to unite to revitalize the downtown area.

Betty's record of service in Chatham Garden Club and multiple town and regional organizations has resulted in significant environmental and quality of life improvements for all area citizens. Her leadership positions in Chatham Garden Club include serving as president; chair of Picnic-in-the-Park, a event that provides park restoration funds; and hospitality chair for the club's Centennial Celebration. As chair of the Building and Grounds Committee of Chatham Baptist Church, Betty oversaw restoration of the century-old church.

With service in her club and community covering more than 50 years, Betty has truly promoted the wise use of the natural resources of our commonwealth. In recognition of these conservation initiatives, the Garden Club of Virginia is proud to present Betty Davenport with the de Lacy Gray Memorial Medal for Conservation.

**—Jane Edwards, GCV
Conservation Awards Chairman,
The Garden Club of Norfolk**



Betty Davenport from Chatham Garden Club was presented with the de Lacy Gray Memorial Medal at the 2021 Annual Meeting. *Photo by Edie Hessberg*