

Volunteer Awards 2019

2019 Lifetime Service Awards

Marnie Lacouture was a founding member and original incorporator of RIWPS and has been with the society since its inception in 1987. She recalls wonderful walks those first years, as well as an inspiring week-long native plant course taught by Lisa Gould: “The weather was lovely that June. And it was very rewarding, as Betty Salomon and many other original members shared their knowledge and enthusiasm for native plants.” Those first members met at one another’s houses and toured their wildflower gardens.



At some point Helen Drew, chair of Seed Starters West, asked Marnie to help out with the group. When she mentioned that shrubs were her passion, she was promptly put in charge of them for the plant sale.

Marnie and her family moved from Providence to Arcadia more than 40 years ago. This forested site along the Wood River strikes a balance with Marnie’s artful eye and her respect for the native flora and fauna. As the land’s steward, she shares seedlings, monitors birds, and welcomes visitors.

She is a generous colleague who shares her extensive botanical knowledge just as Betty shared hers with Marnie. We owe Betty Salomon many debts of gratitude for all that she did for RIWPS. This year, we are acknowledging one of those debts: She brought Marnie Lacouture into our fold.

Carolyn Curtis is one of those plant whisperers who seems to be able to grow just about any native plant she loves. She not only propagates hundreds of specimens at her home in Narragansett, growing them from seed, scales, and cuttings, but she also shares her experience and knowledge with fellow growers,



Carolyn has been with RIWPS since its early years. She served on the board and as propagation chair, working with Dr. Irene Stuckey to bring many native species into the plant sales. Before that time, Carolyn recalls, “If it was a perennial, we sold it, no matter what the origin.”

(Dr. Stuckey was a family friend from Kingston. “I was a teen-ager when Dr. Stuckey came to photograph the bottle gentians that my mother nurtured around our pond.”)

Carolyn uses the baseball rule of “Three strikes and you’re out!” when trying to propagate plants. “I’ve had my share of strikes,” she says. “Bird-foot violets, Virginia bluebells, trailing-arbutus, lady’s-slippers,” and others she refuses to remember.

To us, Carolyn will always be at the top of her game.

2019 Volunteer of the Year Awards

Peggy Buttenbaum has been a member of Seed Starters East for five years, increasingly taking more responsibility both for propagating plants and orchestrating the June plant sale, including organizing the volunteers (no small task)! In recent years, she has created and managed the files for our seed collection in Portsmouth as well as headed up the fall seed sale at our RIWPS meetings. Peggy embodies that old adage, “If you want something done, ask a busy person.” (Who has time to run the RIWPS table at the URI Master Gardener symposium? Peggy does.)



She propagates native plants at home to donate to the plant sale and in recent years has demonstrated the ‘winter-sowing’ technique not only to SSE members, but also to Seed Starters West and at RIWPS meetings.

If you are growing Joe-Pye weed from seed this winter, in a recycled plastic spinach container, outdoors, you probably learned how from Peggy. She just says with a shrug, “I am continually learning about native plants while in the company of some pretty awesome teachers.”

Pat Foley joined RIWPS with his wife, Judi, after a move to Rhode Island in the summer of 2017 and soon volunteered for the much-needed job of editing our monthly E-News. After a few tips from Mary O’Connor back in October 2017, he was off and running. Pat reaches out each month to the RIWPS board, committee chairs, and others for information, providing us with excellent coverage of the society’s activities, programs, and events. He also searches outside the organization for resources, opportunities and events he thinks will be of interest and posts them to expand our horizons. Members are definitely taking notice: eNews subscriptions are up by more than 200.

