THE 2026 DAVID MOREHOUSE AWARD PRESENTED TO LIZ THOMAS



It is a privilege to recognize Elizabeth ("Liz") Thomas with the Dave Morehouse Award. Liz exemplifies the qualities this award was established to recognize: sustained dedication to the Cayuga Lake watershed, collaborative leadership, and the ability to turn good ideas into lasting accomplishments.

For many years, Liz has been a committed advocate for the health of Cayuga Lake and its watershed. As a municipal official, agricultural consultant, and community leader, she has advanced sound stewardship while building partnerships among municipalities, agencies, agricultural interests, and community organizations.

Liz served for several years as the Town of Ulysses' representative to the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (CWIO), including as Chair from 2021 through 2023. Under her leadership, CWIO completed a major Organizational Assessment funded through the New York State Department of State Local Waterfront Revitalization Program. The process resulted in updated bylaws, identification of priority water quality projects, and a plan to restore the watershed manager position, which had been vacant for 15 years.

Most importantly, Liz ensured those recommendations became action. Through determination and consensus-building, she led adoption of a revised municipal dues structure that, together with support from the Park Foundation, created sustainable funding for a watershed manager. She established a partnership with the Finger Lakes Institute to host the position and oversaw recruitment and hiring. Restoring this position represents one of the most significant and enduring advances in CWIO's history, strengthening coordinated watershed protection for years to come.

Liz also revitalized CWIO itself. She increased participation by municipal representatives and partner organizations, strengthened regional relationships, and kept members engaged with emerging water quality issues, funding opportunities, and policy developments. She provided thoughtful leadership on difficult issues, guiding CWIO in public comments, letters of support, and advocacy for policies and projects protecting Cayuga Lake and its tributaries.

The impact of Liz's leadership is evident today: CWIO has stronger governance, sustainable funding, a dedicated watershed manager, and deeper partnerships throughout the region. Her work has increased the capacity of municipalities and organizations to act together on behalf of the watershed.

Dave Morehouse understood that lasting environmental protection depends on dedicated people who inspire others and build institutions capable of carrying the work forward. Liz Thomas embodies that legacy. Her years of service, collaborative leadership, and enduring contributions to the Cayuga Lake watershed make her an exceptionally deserving recipient of the Dave Morehouse Award.

THE DAVID MOREHOUSE AWARD

ESTABLISHED SPRING 2003



David Morehouse (1937-2002), exemplified dedication, leadership, and action. Throughout his life, he worked as an individual and with groups, usually in leadership positions, to protect this lake that he loved.

A pioneer and visionary, Dave became actively involved in protecting the Finger Lakes long before doing so was popular. His passing in the summer of 2002 was a great loss. Throughout his life, he worked to protect Cayuga Lake including serving as a founding member of the two organizations that sponsor this award, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization.

David was born into his boat-building family, who knew Cayuga Lake the way most of us know our front yards and grew up on the northwest shore. David graduated from Mynderse Academy in Seneca Falls and earned his BS from Cornell in freshwater biology. After serving in the United States Army for two years in Korea, he spent an additional two years away completing an MBA degree from the University of Arizona. Before leaving for Arizona, he had formed the Cayuga Lake Preservation Association (1963), and returned to nurture that organization while managing Hibiscus Harbor at Union Springs. That was the first of the lake protection organizations that were the result of his dedicated passion for keeping Cayuga clean, and it was the seed for the growth of the organizations that continue his work today.

Together, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and Cayuga Lake Intermunicipal Organization created the Dave Morehouse Award in 2003 to honor his contributions and to recognize others who are making a difference to protect our magnificent water resources. Many individuals, businesses, teachers, agricultural producers, and community groups are doing wonderful things to preserve and protect our environment.

The criteria for the award are:·
·Leadership in an endeavor that has lasting benefit.
·A minimum of five years of actively working to restore and protect the water resources of the Cayuga Lake Watershed.
·A nominee may be an individual, group, or business and it is not necessary for the nominee to live in the watershed.
·The award is announced each year in August.

Past Recipients: John Abel • Tee-Ann Hunter • Liz Thorndike • David Bouldin • Bill Ebert • John Mawdsley • Bill Foster • Steve Penningroth • Doris Brown, Dooley Kiefer & Citizen's Committee to Save Cayuga Lake • Jim White • Finger Lakes Land Trust • Noel Desch • Judy Pipher • Roxanna Johnston • Patterson Farms • Sylvia Hurlbut