



Dear Family and Friends –

We are sad to share the news that Alexandra Dawson passed away on December 30, 2011. She died at home peacefully after battling emphysema. We all miss her wit, silly words and expressions, insightful analysis, and strong will. We are comforted by the warmth and beauty of the quilts she handmade for all of us, and by the deep sympathies expressed by colleagues, friends and family, near and far.

We invite you to join us at a **memorial celebrating Alexandra's life on Sunday, March 4, 2012, 2 - 4 pm in the Parish Hall of Grace Church, 14 Boltwood Ave, Amherst, MA.** We look forward to seeing you soon and sharing stories and memories of Sandra's life, work, and friendships. Light refreshments will be served, directions below.* Please let us know if you can attend: alexandramemorial@gmail.com.

We include one of the many tributes and obituaries below, and are greatly amused by how many of the pieces about Sandra described her as "fierce," "feisty," "a force," and appreciated her "salty language." Apparently, everyone loved the same person we do – she was and is unique.

Some have asked about donations. In honor of Alexandra's lifelong work and legacy for protecting the Earth, memorial gifts may be made in Alexandra's name to The Kestrel Land Trust, P.O. Box 1016, Amherst, MA 01004, or at www.kestrreltrust.org.

With love,

Jim, Rachel, Alex, and Adam Dawson



* Parking & Directions: Grace Church is on the Town Green in Amherst, on the corner of Boltwood and Spring streets, between Route 9 and Main Street. There are many town parking lots and street parking right in front of the church (no meters on Sunday), Boltwood Garage (Main & Lessey St), and a lot behind the Town Hall.

The Daily Hampshire Gazette, January 2, 2012

Award-winning Valley environmentalist Alexandra Dawson of Hadley dies at 80

By BARBARA SOLOW



Michael Docter talks with Alexandra Dawson, the chairwoman of the Hadley Conservation Commission, during a reception in July 2009 at his Winter Moon Farm on Lawrence Plain Road in Hadley. Dawson, an award-winning environmentalist, died Friday at 80.

HADLEY - Friends and colleagues described Alexandra Dawson, an attorney, teacher and award-winning environmentalist who died Friday at 80, as a pillar of the region's conservation movement whose "brilliance" and "feistiness" will be sorely missed.

"She was so important to so many people," said Judith Eiseman of Pelham, secretary and former chairwoman of the Kestrel Land Trust, on whose board Dawson served for years. "I've known her for 25 years or so and I was still learning from her and about her."

"She was one of the giants of the conservation movement," said Andrew Morris-Friedman, who served with Dawson on Hadley's Community Preservation Commission and Bicycle Committee. "Because of her, Hadley is first in Massachusetts in the number of acres in preservation - 3,000 acres. She was a real force."

Eiseman said Dawson, a longtime columnist for the Daily Hampshire Gazette, had been ill with emphysema for some time.

Colleagues on the Hadley Conservation Commission say that at the board's December meeting, Dawson announced she would be stepping down as chairwoman - a post she had held since 1993 - but would continue her service as a member for a few more months.

"We all booed when she said she was stepping down as chair," Morris-Friedman said. "We wanted her to serve forever."

Celebrating feats

In May 2011, the Kestrel Land Trust and the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) threw an 80th birthday party for Dawson at the Log Cabin in Holyoke to celebrate her many accomplishments in the field of environmental protection.

Among those cited in a press release written by Eiseman - who served on the MACC board with Dawson - was the legal advice Dawson provided to area conservation commissions for over 30 years and her role in helping to draft key state environmental legislation, including the sanitary code, Forest Cutting Practices Act and many other documents.

"Whether it's a legal brief, a piece of legislation, regulations or a column about tomfoolery in government, Alexandra's eyes just sparkle when someone suggests that something ought to be written," Eiseman wrote in the press release for her party.

Of the numerous columns Dawson wrote for the Gazette over three decades, Editor Larry Parnass said, "You could sense the expertise behind every word, and her deep commitment to the issues."

Dawson did not mince words, Parnass added. "She could be a little stern with people and she did not suffer foolish bureaucrats. She wasn't afraid of a fight and I think that won her a lot of respect."

In 2006, Dawson received a lifetime achievement award from the New England Office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for her efforts to help preserve wetlands and other natural resources. In 2001, the MACC established the Alexandra Dawson Legal Education and Action Fund in honor of her contributions to land conservation.

A Harvard-trained attorney, Dawson taught environmental law for many years at Antioch University New England in Keene, N.H., where she was an emeritus professor and former director of the resource management and administration program.

Ground-breaker

Paul Beaulieu of Granby was one of Dawson's graduate students. He also served with her on the board of the Kestrel Land Trust for two decades.

"Hundreds of us who were her students are now out there doing the things she wanted us to do - fighting for the environment and making the world a better place," said Beaulieu, a former president of Trout Unlimited who works as a land-use consultant. "She was in your face in a way that was inspiring. She wasn't willing to let you off the hook."

David Ziomek, another of Dawson's former students who also worked with her on Hadley's Open Space and Recreation Committee, said she is part of "a generation of environmentalists who really broke new ground.

"I will always remember her for her brilliance and her ability to analyze problems," added Ziomek, who is now director of Conservation and Planning for Amherst.

U.S. Congressman John W. Olver of Amherst described Dawson as "a feisty lady. ... You didn't want to be on the wrong side of Alexandra."

Fortunately, Olver said, he and Dawson were usually on the same side of conservation issues. He credited her with "if not initiating, certainly driving by her energy and passion" the state's current wetlands protection and other key conservation laws.

In her final column for the Gazette, published Dec. 15, that passion was on display as Dawson asked a series of rhetorical questions about the direction of the region's land-use planning.

"Can we satisfy our transportation needs without building more and larger roads?" she wrote. "Can we use our community open space for recreation and still allow it to be home to nonhuman creatures that cannot voice their needs?"

"No one can answer all these questions," Dawson concluded. "The important thing is, to see our individual arguments and actions in the broader context and to understand that we are all engaged in a great experiment for which we have little experience and even less preparation."

Longtime friend Eiseman said she and others are comforted in their loss "by knowing that Alexandra's life's work will be carried on by many people who learned from her example and care deeply about the environment and the law."