

Celebrating 25 Years of Conservation

This is the first in a series of articles celebrating "Coastal Bay Heroes" – those who have contributed to the establishment and ongoing work of the Maryland Coastal Bays Program



Carolyn Cummins – The Power of Listening

If you were to ask Carolyn Cummins why she was chosen to chair MCBP's first Citizen's Advisory Committee back in 1996, she'll tell you, "It's because I was a good listener." She will also tell you that many of us who live in the Coastal Bay area had common interests and protecting and enhancing the waters of the Coastal Bays were a priority for many. Particularly at a time when the loss of habitat and overall degradation of the waterways was so apparent to many who lived and vacationed here.

In 1996, Carolyn was running the store at Frontier Town – the western theme park near Assateague Island. She was Chair of the Worcester County Planning Commission and had deep roots in the community. She was politically active and always interested in what people had to say. When fisherman told her that they were headed south in the summer because the fishing was poor here in Maryland, she took notice. She answered the call in the summer of 1996 to chair MCBP's first Citizen's Advisory Committee and, in doing so, helped mold the program to what it is today.

When President Bill Clinton was planning to visit Assateague Island National Seashore in May of 2000 to announce the signing of an Executive Order that directed federal agencies to develop a network of ocean conservation areas. At the time, Carolyn was working at the Frontier Town store and got a call. She picked up and heard a voice on the other end of the line say, "It's the White House calling". Carolyn responded, "I don't know which one of my friends is trying to play a trick on me, but it's not funny". She promptly hung up the phone. Not long after that phone call she found out it really was the White House calling and proceeded to call Dave Blazer, who was

Executive Director of MCBP at the time. “Dave, I think I screwed up”, Carolyn reported to Dave. “Don’t worry”, Dave said. “I’ll fix it.” And he did. A couple of days later, Carolyn was there, on the beach at Assateague, greeting the President.

As a confirmed republican, folks were not sure that Carolyn was the best person to meet and greet the two-term democratic President. But it wasn’t politics that drove Carolyn, it was the environmental health of the Coastal Bays that propelled her. Which is why she was so invested in the developing a lasting strategy for the health of the Coastal Bays. Putting policy over politics and striving for consensus were the hallmarks of Carolyn’s legacy in establishing a program that would ensure the long-term protection of the Coastal Bays.

Carolyn still lives here and stays in touch with us here at the Coastal Bays Program. We are truly grateful for her vision and especially for putting the time and effort into making this Program what it is today. Carolyn is a Coastal Bay Hero.