A scenic view of a river flowing through a lush green forest. The river is calm, reflecting the sky and the surrounding trees. The foreground is dominated by a stone wall made of irregular, rounded stones in various shades of brown, tan, and grey. The wall has a decorative top edge. The background shows a dense forest of green trees under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

The
History
of
SEQ

The History of SEQ

Index

Introduction by Daniel O'Connor	2-3
Members	4-16
Advisors	17-24
Closing Comments by Daniel O'Connor	25-27
Student Interviewers	28

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Introduction

By Mr. Daniel O'Connor

The history of the Bellport High School (“BHS”) club, Students for Environmental Quality (“SEQ”), is rather well known in local environmental circles. Having been established over thirty years ago, many of its past members have stayed in touch and there have been many informal reunions prior to and since its founder, Mr. Art Cooley, was formally honored back in 1992. On that occasion, thankfully captured on videotape, an assembly of friends and former mentees met at the Bellport Library and spoke to and of Cooley. His numerous environmental concerns, his local and national contacts and his leadership qualities were recounted. Memories of student/citizen activism were highlighted and Cooley was graciously feted as being central to encouraging individual awareness and group accomplishments in what could accurately be called the modern environmental movement.

Mr. Daniel O'Connor,
Advisor of SEQ 2004-Present



In a recent club interview with SEQ's first chairman, Ron Rozsa (BHS '71), Rozsa related that SEQ's first accomplishment involved convincing the Dodge Dealership on East Patchogue's Swan Lake that it should correct its polluting of the lake with what, obviously, was used motor oil. That eventual success is further appreciated today, as the site of that Dodge Dealership is currently a Town of Brookhaven park.

In this document, current members of SEQ and I have decided to include interviews with former SEQ officers from each decade, as well as interviews with all past advisors. It is our sincere hope that we have conveyed the origins of the club and provided examples of some of its noteworthy efforts. Certainly it is not meant to be all-inclusive. Obviously there are many members of SEQ who, individually and collectively, accomplished so many things - too many over the past thirty-eight years to accurately account for here.

In closing, I would like to thank the South Country Education Foundation ("SCEF"), for its generous grant money and patience, without which this work would not have been completed. Additionally, thanks go out to all the interviewees and student interviewers for their much-appreciated collaboration. Lastly, it should be noted that copies of this booklet will be made available to the SCEF, to all interviewees, to the environmental organizations with which SEQ interacts, and to each of the South Country School Districts' school building libraries and the two local community libraries.

Members

Bellport High School's ("BHS") Students for Environmental Quality ("SEQ") club, was officially started in September of 1970. Ron Rozsa (BHS '71), one of the founding members and first "chairman" of SEQ, remembered, "It was to be the last of Art Cooley's summer Marine Biology classes — the very last day of the trip and the return from Montauk Point. On the bus ride home I discussed with my colleagues, probably Linda and John Jensen and Charlie Shellabarger, the idea of SEQ. We may have even devised the name on the bus. The class also decided to donate our well-worn, muddy sneakers to the school and we tied them all together, leaving the school barefoot."



The first members of SEQ from the 1971 BHS yearbook picture.

That September, when school resumed, Ron Rozsa organized the first meeting of SEQ. This meeting's purpose was to strategize over what SEQ was to actually do. Meeting "occasionally," this group of between ten and fifteen students, mostly juniors and seniors from Cooley's Marine Biology Class, decided on tackling two problems: 1. East Patchogue's Dodge Dealership spilling oil into Swan Lake and 2. Writing to New York State Senator Bernard C. Smith regarding the killing of harbor seals in Moriches Inlet. (It was Senator Smith who introduced the bill in New York State that prohibited the killing of seals, which later became law in 1972.) These goals set into motion what was to define SEQ – environmental awareness and political activism!

Possibly the ultimate compliment to Cooley, Rozsa pursued his studies in marine biology, then, coastal ecology, followed by plant ecology in graduate school. Today Ron is a Coastal Ecologist in the Office of the Long Island Sound Program for the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

Mike Butler (BHS '74) was another member from the original group that started SEQ. A member for all four years, Butler was in the SEQ canoe that "defeated" the League of Women Voters ("LWV") challengers in a race that was staged on the Carmans River on Sunday, March



The Advance, April 4, 1973

18, 1973. The race was held to publicize a bill before the New York State Legislature that was aimed at getting the Carmans River listed as a “study river.”

With this much needed publicity, Butler recently recalled that he and fellow SEQ member, John Sailor (since deceased), decided to take a bike ride all the way to Albany and back to further publicize the bill. According to Butler, “The bicycle trip was conceived as a publicity stunt to jump start the bill’s chances. New York State Assemblyman Bill Bianchi was a freshman Democrat in a Republican controlled Assembly.” Besides handing Mr. Bianchi a bottle of “still-pure water” from the Carmans River.

Butler and Sailor “were introduced to a lot of politicians and presented a petition (from concerned local residents) to Assembly Speaker Perry Duryea. “All of the publicity worked as the Carmans River was eventually accepted as a “study river” in May 1973. Now all that was needed to protect the natural state of the Carmans River was for New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation (“DEC”) to recommend that the river be protected by the Wild, Scenic, and Recreation of Rivers Act (“WSRRA”), which was an amendment to New York State’s 1970 Conservation Law.

SEQ decided to help the DEC with its studies of the river. Butler stated, “The idea of doing the study was to speed up the DEC regulation writing process. John and I were more into the legal and zoning aspects of the preservation; Pam Borg, Elizabeth Shreeve and others were well versed in the flora and fauna of the river corridor.” Building upon the earlier work of students in Cooley’s spring 1970 Topics in Biology/Advanced Biology class, including Joseph Beitel and Helen Gelband, 1973’s SEQ group of twenty-two students wrote a detailed report that they submitted to the DEC and to a supportive New York State Senator, Mr. Leon E. Giufreda, in January of 1976. Six months later, then New York Governor Malcolm Wilson signed the Carmans River Protection Act.

Butler noted that he was also involved in “getting signatures for the petitions supporting the New York State Marine Mammal Act (1972)”, and spending a lot of time on Mr. Dennis Puleston’s farm. “Dennis Puleston would catch birds in nets, band them and release them, Advanced Biology and Taxidermy/Ornithology were great courses. Art always made us think...”

Like Rozsa above, Scott Stoner (BHS ’75) continued his SEQ interests, today managing New York State’s Water Quality Standards

Program for the DEC in Albany. Stoner recalled that “I was active in SEQ for all four years at BHS and its vice-chair in ’74 to ’75.” Three specific events stood out in his mind: 1. Petitioning for a New York State Bottle Bill at Smithaven Mall, 2. Speaking before the Suffolk County Legislature and asking for their assistance regarding a home rule message in support of a statewide bottle bill, and 3. An anxiety-filled trip to Jamaica, Queens for a bottle bill public hearing: “Four of us took the day off from school to present SEQ’s position in favor of the bill. I think we were the only ones there in support of it. The others who participated were Arvid Friberg (BHS ’75), Joe Grispino (BHS ’76), and Steve Rabin (BHS ’77) . . . I had prepared the written position statement and we ‘elected’ Steve to get up there and give the presentation . . . the very large room was packed with very large, rough-looking men, who were attired in union or beverage-labeled uniforms. They were adamantly opposed to any effort to impose a bottle bill. After Steve bravely articulated our position . . . we scooted out of there, jumped in our car, and didn’t stop until we were safely home.” In the spring of 1975, Stoner and several others even traveled to Albany for a student environmental congress at the State Capitol. Again, political activism seemed to be the focal point of SEQ’s existence.

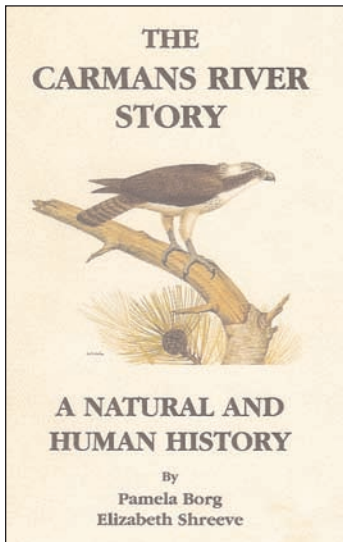
Steve Rabin (BHS ’77), who served as SEQ chairperson for his senior year, related that he had many fine memories, including working on the bottle bill and later seeing it become law in New York State in 1982. “We probably ticked off a bunch of teamsters and grocery store owners in the process, but sometimes you can’t please everyone to do what is right!”

“Trash-a-thons” were another major effort of SEQ. “We wanted to have a forum to distribute information and raise interest in some of the important issues (the bottle bill, Carmans River protection, spaying/neutering pets, etc.); so we came up with the idea of the trash-a-thon; people would donate money to our causes on which we educated them and, in return, we’d clean up areas in our neighborhoods.”

Rabin also mentioned Tony Sutin (since deceased) as being a key contributor to the club. “Tony was co-chair the year I was chair (1977), and he really set the tone with intelligence and class... Tony was a real driver in getting things done. He was a good friend whom we all miss.”

It should be noted that Sutin was tragically killed on January 16, 2002 by a student at the Appalachian School of Law in Grundy, Virginia where he was both Dean and Associate Professor of Law. We offer our respect to Sutin for encompassing the true meaning of SEQ and the powerful relationships it helped to foster.

Rounding out our interviews of SEQ's first decade (of existence), we interviewed Anthony Graves (BHS '78). Graves explained that before entering BHS, he "had heard of a student at Bellport riding his bike to



*The Carmans River Story -
A Natural and Human Story*
first edition, April, 1974

Albany with a jar of water from the Carmans River in order to draw attention to the efforts to make the river a Wild and Scenic River. I had also read the "Guide to the Plants and Animals of Carmans River" that was written by Bellport High School students, and I was impressed..." Graves' reference to Michael Butler (and John Sailor) bicycling to Albany and meeting with New York State legislators, and the published efforts Pamela Borg and Elizabeth Shreeve inspired Graves to join SEQ. He had already met SEQ advisor, Cooley, and his parents were friends with Dennis Puleston and his wife. They all used to meet on the Puleston property to help band migrating birds they caught in "mist nets" during their fall migration south.

Although Graves couldn't recall being an officer of SEQ, he stated that he was chairman of the Marine Mammal Alert, "a subset of SEQ that would be alerted if a whale or dolphin washed up on a beach." Besides attending one of the first Marine Mammal Symposiums held in this country with Cooley and a number of other SEQ members on Cape Cod, Graves shared another local story that is both educational and amusing. "We got a call that a dolphin had washed up dead on the shore in East Patchogue. We couldn't find anyone with a truck so I borrowed my parents' station wagon and Jonathan Cooley (BHS '79), who is the son of Mr. Art Cooley and now an expedition leader for his own company with National Geographic in Fruita, Colorado, and Lee Snead (BHS '78), who was vice president of SEQ his senior year, and is now a Bellport Village Trustee and an attorney specializing in environmental issues, and I managed to use a board as a ramp and get this three hundred pound dolphin into the back of the station wagon. Somehow we got it into the freezer at school. It turned out to be a very rare animal, a Gray's Grampus. A scientist came to the high school from the Smithsonian and dissected it. We got to attend the dissection and help him."

Additionally, Graves mentioned that SEQ continued working on the recycling of glass, paper and metal, and that “we may also have written letters asking that Fire Island Wilderness Area be officially designated and protected. Now it is protected, and it is the only federally designated wilderness in New York State.” He also won a Presidential Environment Awareness award for writing letters requesting an investigation of a case concerning the shooting of a bald eagle, which was on the endangered species list.

Today, Graves works for the Town of Brookhaven’s Department of Environmental Protection. Using his vacation time, he also works as a professional naturalist for several cruise ship companies specializing in trips to unique nature destinations such as the Galapagos Islands and the Amazon River Basin. He started out working for Lindblad Expeditions thanks to his contact with Cooley and Dennis Puleston, but he now also works for Zegrahm Expeditions and TCS Travel.

His advice to present and future SEQ members is to “follow your interests! Life is short, money isn’t everything, make sure you have fun, choose a career that interests you, don’t be afraid of mistakes, listen to advice- but mostly listen to yourself.”



As the club moved into the 1980s, there were other challenges for SEQ, Nathan Thompson (BHS '80), presently a Associate Professor of Medicine at NYU Medical Center, recalled that he was attracted to SEQ through friends who were already members and because he had a class with Mr. Cooley. He was a member of SEQ for all four years, and he remembered that there were between twenty-five and thirty members during his tenure. Thompson actually wrote an article about the New York State Returnable Container Act (more commonly referred to as the New York State “Bottle Bill”) that was published in 1980 in *The Outdoor Communicator*, the official journal of the New York State Outdoor Education Association.

Another SEQ alumnus who graduated from BHS in the Early 1980’s was Debbie Schmidt-Barley (BHS '81). Having seen a notice of the History of SEQ project in the SCEF newsletter, Schmidt-Barley emailed that she was in SEQ from 1977 to 1981. She too worked extensively towards the passage of the countywide “bottle bill” that passed in 1981. Additionally, she stated that, “I then continued the work towards statewide



passage with the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) while I attended SUNY-Binghamton.” Like all of those interviewed for this project, Schmidt-Barley acknowledged, “those Mr. Cooley and SEQ years significantly shaped who I am and what I have done since then.”

Another 1980’s graduate and former SEQ member, Mike Fishman (BHS ’84), contacted us through the SCEF. Fishman, presently a certified biologist working for Stearns and Wheler,

LLC, Environmental Engineers and Scientists, Cazenovia, NY, was a member from 1980 to 1984. “At that time SEQ’s focus was its diligent lobbying efforts for the state bottle bill and there was an article written by *Family Circle Magazine* concerning groups of students who had accomplished outstanding achievements - and that SEQ was highlighted. It included a picture of the members standing by the Beaver Dam Creek.”

Michael Bernstein, who was involved with SEQ from 1983 to 1986, remembered SEQ lobbying in Albany on behalf of a few causes: expanding the bottle bill beyond soda cans and bottles, and habitat protec-



tion. “We chartered a bus each year and went up to Albany to meet with individual legislators and their aides.”

Additionally, consistent with some of the efforts from the 1970’s, Bernstein noted that “we did an annual fundraising drive in Bellport Village followed by a clean up day where we’d pick up massive amounts of trash from various locations around the school district... and bring the trash to the dump.” Some things apparently don’t change, as trash cleanups continue today, be they land-based with the Bellport Chamber of Commerce up and down Station Road, or water-based with our annual Fall Carmans River canoe/kayak trips, which SEQ now does with the BHS Outdoor Club.



Representing the transition into the 1990’s, Juliet Berman (BHS ’95) was a member for three years and president for her senior year. (It should be noted that over the years the leadership titles changed from chairman and vice chairman to president and vice president.) “At the time I joined the club, efforts to close the Town of Brookhaven landfill were being made by the community. [The landfill] was causing dangers in people’s backyards, and members of the community wanted it shut down.”

Berman mentioned that in her first year of SEQ there were roughly fifteen to twenty members. After that, the club membership declined and the club reportedly “disbanded” for almost a year. According to Berman, it was the issue of the landfill that recentered the club: “The club was really organized around the landfill. We brought the club back to its lasting legacy... getting people aware of the environment’s role in the community was a major accomplishment... on a large scale everything was new, even recycling.” Berman is presently a grant writer, living and working in Manhattan.

Another key was the club’s association with the Post-Morrow Foundation (“Post-Morrow”). Started in 1969, Post-Morrows’ mission statement is “to preserve and conserve the rural, cultural, and historic character of the Hamlet of Brookhaven and surrounding areas in Suffolk County, New York.” Not only did SEQ share in Post-Morrow’s concerns regarding the landfill, but SEQ continues to share in their mission statement by maintaining its “stewardship” responsibilities regarding a piece of Post-Morrow-owned land located on Bellport Bay at the western end of Bay Road. This stewardship started in the 1990’s and continues today.



Sean Pilger at the HOG

Sean Pilger (BHS '98) was a member of SEQ for his four years at BHS, and vice president in his junior year. He recalled growing up in Brookhaven Hamlet and always loving being outside “in nature.” His memories of SEQ include “everyone in the group being totally involved.” The group then consisted of a core of eight to ten members and they often met weekly. His recollection of the most interesting projects of SEQ included a reinstatement of paper recycling at BHS and throughout the South Country School District, hosting the South Shore Estuary Symposiums at BHS and starting a flower garden, vegetable garden and compost site in the northern courtyard (the present day Atrium). Pilger expressed his appreciation of then-advisor Mr. Marv Loewen for encouraging him to participate in a great program sponsored by the Student Conservation Association (“SCA”), which works with our National Parks Service. Pilger ended up spending a month in Washington State living in the woods and clearing trails with his team of fellow volunteers from all over the country. Today, Pilger lives locally and manages the Hamlet Organic Farm (“HOG”). He has been a guest speaker for SEQ and SEQ members have visited the HOG on Beaver Dam Road in Brookhaven Hamlet.

Another member and BHS class of 1998 was Bridgid O’Connor. She was Vice President of SEQ her first two years and president for her junior and senior years. She joined as a freshman because she “always had a fond interest of and growing concern for the environment”, and she was

“anxious to finally get involved with other people my own age who had the same interests.” This common theme of combining expanding knowledge and activism continues to exemplify SEQ.



BHS students SEQ Club 1995 (L > R)
Eric Tabone, Amy Wasser,
Bridgid O'Connor and Chris Kocher

According to O'Connor, “Overall we were very impressed by our predecessors’ projects that impacted all of New York State, but we were overwhelmed by the scope of such a big task, so we tried to start small, with Bellport High School, and gradually increased our radius.”

Between 1994 and 1998, O'Connor recalls that SEQ advocated for and started a program in the BHS cafeteria “reusing non disposable flatware, plates and other table products to decrease the amount of plastic and Styrofoam garbage.” SEQ also promoted an increased, school-wide recycling of cans, bottles, and paper. Additionally, SEQ participated in a school-wide competition, co-sponsored by the Parent Teacher Student Association (“PTSA”), to design what is now referred to as the Atrium



Mashomack Nature Preserve, April 21, 1996

courtyard by helping with gardens and a composting site. Today, this Atrium courtyard also contains a pond, a gazebo structure with seating, and brick pathways.

O'Connor described other highlights that included two overnight field trips to the Mashomack Nature Preserve on Shelter Island hosting guest speakers, including Mr. Art Cooley and Mr. Dennis Puleston, and what O'Connor termed our "biggest accomplishment," the South Shore Estuary Symposium. "We created and hosted the First and Second Annual South Shore Estuary Symposiums, which provided a forum for individuals and environmental groups to discuss current issues facing our local South Shore Estuary. Other high schools environmental clubs throughout Long Island were invited to participate to learn about and to voice their concerns for the South Shore Estuary."



BHS, East Commons, Spring 1997

Today O'Connor is an Associate Corporate Counsel for Plug Power Inc., a hydrogen fuel cell company in Latham, New York.

Tiffany Russo (BHS '01) was an officer in SEQ during her last two years at BHS. Her attraction to the club is an often-repeated response to one of this project's key questions: "I was attracted to SEQ by my love of the environment and my commitment to trying to protect it." She added that, "All of my friends were also in the club and shared this common interest with me. So it was a safe haven of sorts for us 'nerds' and a place where we could try and make changes, even if they were just little ones, in our school."

Additionally, Russo shared that in her three years of SEQ membership (1998-2001), "membership was great - averaging about fifteen to twenty people." Her most memorable activity was the numerous

“cleanups” the club did throughout the local area. She also recalled a successful fundraiser involving the sale of t-shirts sporting pictures drawn by two of SEQ members and an attempt to recreate a school recycling program, which unfortunately failed due to “lack of support from other groups involved.”

Lastly, Russo commented on the club continuing its overnight trips to the Mashomack Nature Preserve on Shelter Island (as first mentioned above by O’Connor) where they weeded some “invasive species” from the preserve grounds and viewed a slide show from Cooley. The club initiated these trips in the late 1990s under the advisorship of Marv Loewen and with the help of Mr. Michael Scheibel, a local Brookhaven Hamlet resident.

Maureen Gundlach (BHS ’01) reported that she was thrilled to see our ad in *The Advance* (Dec. ’05) about the club’s intention to write this History of SEQ. Her email noted the transition of advisorship from Mr. Marv Loewen to Ms. Lois Etzel; her use of the compost bin in the Atrium, which was then being actively used by SEQ, the custodians and Mr. Dunton’s class; and the club’s two trips to the Mashomack Nature Preserve during her four years of membership. On these trips she remembered, “dragging brush from a field, hiking on the preserve property, yanking some non-native plants, and most memorably, listening to Art Cooley who gave a lecture about his recent trip to Japan and New Guinea.”

She added that she did her “authentic research class” project at the local Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge and that she found several of its employees to be particularly helpful, especially Mr. Bob Parris and Ms. Patricia Martinovak.

Nikki Frankel (BHS ’05) was the president of SEQ, after serving the previous year as vice president under Andrew Dunbar (BHS ’04). She recalled several experiences including having a “scary” room for BHS Safe Halloween to help the community and increase awareness about our club. She also spoke of canoe/kayak trips on the Carmans River organized by then advisor, Mr. George Ruland. “This was more of an appreciation for nature and our local resource type of thing.”

Additionally, Frankel stated an often-repeated sense of frustration with in-house recycling. “We also tried to get BHS to recycle on a more continuous and proper basis with flyers posted in hallways educating others about what should and shouldn’t go into the blue recycling garbage bins, but I don’t think we had that great of an impact.”

During her senior year, she continued attending South Shore Estuary Reserve Council Citizens Action Committee meetings at the Suffolk County Maritime Museum in West Sayville and, along with then-vice president Jeffrey Schait, “we worked on establishing the History of SEQ project by securing a grant [from the SCEF] under Mr. O’Connor’s leadership and guidance... the club didn’t have a ton of members then, but the ones that did consistently show up were genuinely committed and interested.” Lastly, she noted that SEQ looked into “restoring a house on Beaver Dam Creek that had the potential to be some sort of meeting place, but it was pretty run down.”

Unknown to Frankel until this interview took place, the Post-Morrow-owned cottage on Beaver Dam Creek (the “Tooker’s House”), right next to the often photographed bridge, is presently being rehabilitated by the combined efforts of Post-Morrow and SEQ. Its future use as a meeting place relies on funding efforts for its true restoration.



Drawing by Tyler Healy (BHS '07) of the Beaver Dam Creek Bridge

Advisors

In the fall of 1970, Mr. Art Cooley, a biology teacher, assisted in the start of Students for Environmental Quality (“SEQ”) when a group of his Bellport High School (“BHS”) students persuaded him to be their club advisor. Apparently it did not take too much persuasion, as Cooley was already well established in local environmental circles. In 1965, he had helped organize a group of people concerned with the destruction of salt marsh wetlands in Suffolk County. This group named itself the Brookhaven Town Natural Resources Committee. Soon after, in 1967, he co-founded the Environmental Defense Fund with Dennis Puleston. The founding of SEQ in 1970, therefore, seemed a natural extension of his interests.

According to Cooley, “Students for Environmental Quality was organized because students craved an organization that would pursue an issue they were most interested in, specifically the pollution of Swan Lake with used oil from a local car dealership. They felt that this organization would give them more legitimacy than just a single person. In time, it served as the vehicle for students to investigate other issues, learn about them, and plot a course of action. Eventually students learned how to write, how to present testimony at hearings, how to lobby in Albany and, in the process, learned how democracy and advocacy works in our country. It was an invaluable lesson.”

In the foreword to the Second Edition of *The Carmans River Story* (first published by SEQ members, Pamela Borg and Elizabeth Shreeve in 1974), Cooley quoted Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, who, when researching his 1859 book on *Democracy in America*, said, “As soon as several Americans have conceived a sentiment or an idea that they want to produce before the world they seek each other out and, when found, they unite. Thenceforth they no longer isolate individuals but a power conspicuous from the distance whose action serve as an example; when it speaks, men listen.”

Continuing this thought, Cooley related that “in one sense the idea of coming together is as old as human culture; in another sense, few students had realized the strength of this idea. The environmental movement of the mid twentieth-century activated many, mostly college students. SEQ was one of four high school organizations of its kind.”

Cooley proudly recalled SEQ accomplishments, including a number of environmental firsts: “Over the years they played a major role in passage of five pieces of legislation – four New York State laws and one Suffolk County law. Two State laws helped protect the Carman’s River and its watershed. Two [laws], one County and one State, established a deposit law – first in Suffolk County and then in New York State. The fifth law protected harbor seals in New York State...”

Cooley put these accomplishments into a unique perspective, “This is an incredible record by any measure, but I think what else the students learned was as important, if not more important. In each of these cases they had to write position papers, research papers, and gather public testimony. Since these documents were not for the teacher but for the public, they put more effort into them. And, when those documents were well crafted, they had an influence well beyond the age of the authors. More than once I saw the Suffolk County legislators pay close attention when a student was talking. It was very rewarding.”

Cooley retired from BHS in 1989. He remained active in the environmental field and he continued working for Lindblad Expeditions (as mentioned above by Graves). In Cooley’s own words, “I started working for Lindblad Expeditions (then called Special Expeditions) in the summer of 1987 when I was still teaching. By 1989, when I retired, I was free to go on other summertime itineraries. Ultimately, I worked for Lindblad as a naturalist and expedition leader for about twenty years, traveling to Antarctica, Svalbard, Alaska, Indonesia, the Mediterranean, coast of Western Europe, around Britain, East and Southern Africa, the Seychelles, South America, Central America, the Azores and islands of the Southern Atlantic.”



SEQ meets with past advisors, Mr. Loewen and Mr. Cooley, at Post Morrow.

He eventually relocated to California where he presently resides. When SEQ contacted him regarding this History of SEQ project, he forwarded a set of loose-leaf binders containing information from SEQ's early years.

Additionally, in the fall of 2005, Cooley met with some of SEQ's members during one of his visits back to Long Island. As in his former "advisor" days, he continued to listen to the students about what they saw as current environmental issues. His sage advice, repeatedly referred to by former members during this project's interview process, is summarized as follows: identify meaningful environmental issues; prioritize the problems; research the issue(s); start small/accomplish local, "early" goals; then pursue larger, secondary goals. Sage advice indeed!



Having assisted Mr. Cooley in the role of club advisor during the 1980's, Mr. Tom Dunton inherited the advisorship of SEQ upon Mr. Cooley's retirement in June 1989. For the next four years, Mr. Dunton continued to guide the club he had come to know very well, along with assistance from co-advisor, Mr. Richard Boes.

"What attracted me to the club was the environmental activism. Mr. Cooley, the founder of SEQ, would always invite me to attend the lobbying excursions to Albany for the Bottle Bill, and he would discuss environmental issues dealing with land use, recycling and groundwater pollution. The club was always filled with a mixture of bright and enthusiastic students. Some people were more involved than others, but there always was a place for someone regardless of their background. Kids felt comfortable coming to the weekly meetings. At times, students would make presentations before the school board or town council to promote some environmental issue. All members would go and observe the workings of these two levels of government. During my years the biggest issues were the landfill and groundwater pollution."

As far as what SEQ could be focusing on now, Mr. Dunton stated, "Today, SEQ could be looking into energy conservation and green schools. Why doesn't every school building have its own windmill or photovoltaic field to generate electricity from the wind and sun? These renewable resources might reduce the need to build the gas fired power plant by Caithness in our neighborhood."

True to Dunton's suggestions as to what SEQ could be working on today, we are pleased to say that the club continues to reiterate the values of "energy conservation" and a "green society". Likewise, it continues its hands-on approach to improving local land appearance, water quality, recycling and the scientific collection of data to educate us and plan future actions.



Mr. Marv Loewen assumed the advisorship of SEQ in September of 1994. Having known both Cooley and Dunton very well, and being fully aware of the types of students SEQ tended to attract, the transition was rather seamless. Working with then-President and senior Juliet Berman, Loewen helped revitalize club membership. During his tenure, membership numbers increased once again, as a whole new wave of environment-conscious students saw the value of this distinguished club.

During Loewen's years as advisor, SEQ continued doing local cleanups of nearby roadways and on the Post-Morrow-owned land at the end of Bay Road in Brookhaven. Also, SEQ got itself involved with water quality testing of Beaver Dam Creek and Bellport Bay. As noted by members above, another highlight for SEQ during this time included weekend stays on the Mashomack Nature Preserve on Shelter Island, during which members cleared marshlands of phragmites and cleaned up debris that had washed up on shoreline sections of the preserve. These visits were established with the help of Mashomack Nature Preserve employee and local Brookhaven Hamlet resident, Mr. Michael Scheibel.

Additionally, Loewen cited the importance of SEQ hosting the South Shore Estuary Symposium at BHS. For two consecutive years (1997-1998), SEQ members contacted other Long Island high school environmental clubs and arranged for a full day of guest speakers and the obvious sharing of ideas and information.

Summarizing these rewarding years, Loewen recalled, "I have fond memories of the time I spent with students on SEQ activities. As teachers and advisors, we always hope to have lasting effects on students and through SEQ it was gratifying to see some students I worked with use their SEQ experiences to focus their educations and, in some cases, to secure environment-related employment." He specifically mentioned Sean Pilger and Bridgid O'Connor as examples of former SEQ members who continue working in environment-related fields.



Becoming SEQ's fourth advisor upon the retirement of Mr. Loewen in June of 1998, Ms. Lois Etzel explained how her background enhanced her involvement. She specifically noted that she studied ecology in college and that this coursework was what led to her increasing interest in the environment. She became a science teacher and mentioned that she wanted to instill this same "lifelong love" with the environment in her students; she "wanted to get kids involved."

In recalling some of SEQ's activities, Ms. Etzel stressed the club's recycling efforts – paper, cardboard, batteries, cans, bottles and even some members using BHS kitchen scraps to continue the compost pile used for the vegetable garden in the new Atrium. She recalled that Mr. Dunton used the deposit money from bottles brought in by students to purchase birdseed for the feeders in the Atrium.

Trips included the continuation of weekend stays out at the Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island, initiated by the club under Loewen. Other environmental hikes and whale watching trips were mixed with the volunteer work at local beaches and the Wertheim Refuge, as well as working with the DEC cleaning out non-native phragmites from local creeks and rivers.

Regarding fundraising, Ms. Etzel credited Mr. George Ruland with helping the club members paint canvas bags with the SEQ logo, which members then sold to local shoppers to reduce disposable bag waste. Additionally, she recalled how member Tiffany Russo helped design T-shirts with environmental friendly messages, which were then screen printed and sold by the club.



Having worked with all the previous advisors, Mr. George Ruland had the unique experience of actually sitting in on SEQ meetings for many years before becoming the fifth advisor for two years, from September of 2002 until his retirement in June of 2004.

Mr. Ruland recalled the continued involvement of SEQ with the South Shore Estuary Reserve Council, "with Andrew Dunbar and Nikki Frankel serving on its Community Action Committee. We also did area cleanups, including canoeing on and cleaning up the Beaver Dam Creek.

Mr. Ruland added that SEQ continued the efforts of earlier members, by decorating and manning a spooky room for the BHS Safe Halloween event. This tradition continues today. Safe Halloween is presently noted to be the community service activity organized by our Student Council that attracts more student involvement than any other activity at BHS.

A man of few words, Mr. Ruland was extremely proud of his efforts to continue the legacy of his previous advisors and SEQ. A science teacher by “training”, he continues to be a life-long hiker, hunter, and fisherman- and lover of all things natural. “I thoroughly enjoyed the type of person SEQ attracted... and I am glad to have encouraged the next generation to continue caring for Mother Earth.”



Upon Mr. Ruland’s retirement, Mr. Daniel O’Connor became the sixth advisor of SEQ. “As the present advisor of SEQ, I am totally honored to continue the work that began in 1970! I personally know all of the previous advisors, and I have come to know many of the previous members. Although I did not start teaching in South Country until September of 1982, I have lived in this community since 1980, and I have been reading about SEQ and its accomplishments since then.

I have always had a love of nature and an awareness of mankind’s impacts on it. As a history teacher, I was first more cognizant of the sequential impact humans have had on the environment; subsequently, through my own pursuit of “hobbies” and continued reading and contact with academia, I now consider myself an advocate for our environment.

I continue to canoe, kayak, swim, surf, sail, ski and hike. Most of my “free” time is spent outdoors. I am immediately attracted to anything related to the environmental, and I am passionate about sharing my opinions and obtaining those of others. SEQ ‘found’ me, and I hope that I have done right by it!

Since my daughter Bridgid’s (BHS ’98) first involvement in SEQ, I was involved as well. I supported her and her friends and helped with cleanups and attendance at Town of Brookhaven meetings regarding our local landfill, “Mount Trashmore.” I preached the values of school recycling despite the ups and downs of South Country’s administrative changes, and explained to SEQ members the limits of our efforts due to contracted agreements with ‘carters’ of our district’s wastes. Encouraged,

then frustrated, I continue to be a ‘guarded optimist’. I thoroughly agree that we are, as a society, making definite inroads regarding environmental issues, but I am alarmed by the slow pace of change. As a teacher of history, though, I am fully aware that many changes take more time than we want.

Most encouraging are the present members of SEQ. I am in my fifth year as advisor, and I am happy to report that the spirit of what led SEQ to exist is, indeed, very much alive and well. Present members continue to strive for education and results via impulse, discussions, research and the ability to prioritize one’s efforts. We do not claim to save the world, only to do our part towards saving it!



Mr. Dunton, Mr. Ruland, Ms. Etzel, Mr. Boes and Mr. Loewen, the SEQ past advisors with the exception of Mr. Cooley, and present advisor Mr. O'Connor; BHS, Spring, 2007.



A Tribute to Dennis Puleston

Given the enormous impact Dennis Puleston had on Cooley and, subsequently, on SEQ, we felt it only proper to include a “tribute” to Puleston in our writing of the History of SEQ.

If you never met Puleston, or if you really wanted to know the beginnings of his life story, one should read one, or both, of his published autobiographical books, *A Gull's Way* and *Blue Water Vagabond*. The information in those books would at least let you know of his early years; most



Dennis Puleston (left) and
Art Cooley (right).

importantly, they would enlighten you as to how Puleston came to love nature and deeply respect the need for its continued health.

For those who actually met Puleston after he relocated here in 1948, you already know the impact this man has left on everyone who had an interest in the relationship between land, water and its inhabitants - animal, plant

and human life. From the wonderful vantage point of his family farm in Brookhaven Hamlet, he studied the surrounding environment piece by piece and eagerly shared his knowledge and enthusiasm with others - including Cooley and the early SEQ members. He also was a master illustrator. He worked extensively on environmental issues and concerns. He co-founded the Environmental Defense Fund with Cooley and SEQ, an organization that prospers today and is perhaps the best example of the passion for the environment that these two individuals shared for over forty years.

For Puleston's Memorial Celebration, held at his home on June 16, 2001, Cooley wrote a collection of stories about him, “Dennis Stories,” which captured the spirit of this extraordinary man and the remarkable things he did.

Closing Comments

By Mr. Daniel O'Connor

The very first recognized Earth Day was April 22, 1970. On that day approximately twenty million Americans attended festivals around the nation. It was meant to celebrate environmental awareness and to hopefully shock the political and media worlds into respecting the environment, and its protection, as a major issue related to all of us. Not surprisingly, SEQ was founded that very same year, along with the Federal EPA and the NYS DEC.

Neil Buffett, a graduate student at SUNY Stony Brook, recently wrote a research paper titled *A River's Place: High School Student Activism and Environmental Protection On Long Island, 1956-1974*. In his paper, Buffett discusses "the modern environmental movement" and its post WWII groundswell that led to greatly expanded individual and group efforts to logically research and propose solutions to various environmentally-sensitive problems. According to Buffett, as our population and economy grew, suburban sprawl challenged our local, state and federal government agencies to keep up with the paralleling planning and regulatory problems. Research, discussion, debate, compromise and political activism all had their roles in shaping results.

It was within this context that SEQ saw its purpose. I believe that the founding members realized their unique position as educated young adults who were caught up in the wildly changing socio-economic time period, which is generally associated with the 1960's-1980's. As Neil Buffett poignantly said, "Unlike their parents and other adult neighbors, these young environmentalists were neither homeowners nor taxpayers. This allowed SEQ members to develop their own environmental consciousness, which was unhindered by questions of property rights and tax assessments..."

The interviews of former SEQ members and advisors conducted over the last three years, along with the related research necessary to clarify the comments of these interviewed and some admitted uncertainty regarding specific details, have proven the valued part SEQ has played in the lives of these people and the greater community. In today's parlance, SEQ qualified as being a non-governmental organization ("NGO"). Cooley forwarded to us the following comments on NGOs that

respectfully places SEQ in some exceptional good company: “SEQ was formed in 1970. Environmental Defense was formed in 1967. The Nature Conservancy in 1951. The development of non-governmental organizations was one of the greatest democratic developments of the last half of the 20th century. By existing and advancing their agendas, they injected into the political discourse new ideas, new concepts, and new positions. Those NGOs that had good ideas prospered and became stronger, becoming integral parts of the political landscape. Some of the outstanding environmental organizations have long and deep Long Island roots. It may be hard to explain why here, but the burgeoning population growth with the attendant disappearance of wild areas, was one of the major factors. The quality of our environment spurred on Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense, Post-Morrow, Friends of Wertheim and, of course, SEQ. It was an exciting time... and productive.”

Today, besides having completed this History of SEQ project, SEQ continues to work directly with these NGOs. Over the last several years, we have worked with Post-Morrow, Ducks Unlimited, and the Town of Brookhaven in the removal of non-native phragmites from the eastern side of Beaver Dam Creek and the planting of several types of native grasses to help restore the estuary. Over the last two years we have renewed our commitment to volunteering for the Friends of Wertheim. Also, in the fall of 2007, SEQ assisted the Nature Conservancy in the distribution of “informational flyers” in their unsuccessful bid to have the voters in the Town of Brookhaven approve “Proposal 3.” This piece of legislation would have created the Brookhaven Community Preservation Fund (“CPF”), which, by placing 2% real estate tax on future buyers of real estate, would have allowed the town to protect more open space.

Additionally, SEQ continues its association with the South Shore Estuary Reserve Council (“SSERC”), which began back in the 1990s when the two organizations cooperated for the South Shore Estuary Symposiums. It was this cooperation with the SSERC and its Citizens Advisory Committee that led to SEQ to work with Post-Morrow to host the significant, well attended, all-day conferences to discuss common concerns of the “South Shore Estuary”, from western Nassau County to Shinnecock Bay in Suffolk County. These conferences were held at BHS in 1997 and 1998. Hopefully, SEQ will host or participate in another, especially given its current involvement. SEQ is presently assisting the SSERC, and all of the cooperating governmental agencies and NGOs, with the development of the Beaver Dam Creek Watershed Management

Plan. With training in the use of hand-held GPS units, we are verifying locations of road drainage sites and storm water outfall pipes within the designated watershed boundary.

In concluding this “history of” project, it is important to note the significance of former U.S. Vice President Al Gore and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change being named co-winners of the Nobel Peace Prize in December of 2007. This acknowledgment and the recommendations of the December 2007 United Nations Climate Conference in Bali, Indonesia are encouraging signs that the world community is pressuring all nations to confront the realities of global warming and the challenges of reducing emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Lastly, special thanks are extended to the following individuals and associations:

- The South Country Education Foundation, for the grant monies funding the printing of this project and for their patience concerning the extended time period necessary to complete it.
- Mr. Tom Williams and the Post-Morrow Foundation, for providing some historical information, which they had archived.
- Mr. Art Cooley, who has been the central person in terms of verifying so many details of SEQ’s past accomplishments.
- Mr. Neil Buffett, for sharing his research paper entitled *A River’s Place: High School Activism and Environmental Protection on Long Island, 1956-1974*.
- All of the former SEQ members and advisors for sharing their thoughts and cherished memories.
- Mr. Daniel O’Connor, current SEQ advisor, for managing this project.
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- Ms. Jayne B. Johnsen-Seeberger, BHS Librarian, for help with the high school’s yearbooks, archives and webpage.

Copies of this project will be available online via the Bellport High School website: <http://www.southcountry.org/highschool/bhsindex.htm>.

Student Interviewers

- Brown, Erica '07
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- Kendrick, Kevin '07 (*)
- Kulesza, Joanna '09
- Kusa, Rebecca '08
- O'Connor, Katherine '10
- Pokorney, Rachel '08
- Russo, Aubrey '08
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- Woodle, Maddy '09

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