

2016 J. Roy Houston Conservation Partnership Award

Larry Larese

“You set goals, you face roadblocks, and you work hard to finish.”



Larry Larese’s modest assessment of his 39 years as Westmoreland County’s top economic development planner belies the magnitude of his accomplishments. But it perfectly reveals the man, whose unassuming, find-a-way-to-do-it style makes him so instantly likeable and extraordinarily successful.

Larry’s legacy – a long, well-balanced list of practical development and conservation accomplishments – grew organically from the needs of the people of Westmoreland County. In fact, he says his proudest moments have



Giving a speech at one of the first Earth Day events in the early 1970s.

been those in which he was “able to help people have a better life.”

Larry got his first chance to do that very early in his career when he helped bring municipal water service to the communities of Salina, Truxall, and Fitz Henry, which in the early 1970s still had either no reliable source of drinking water or had one that did not meet minimum safe-drinking standards.

Born and raised in Export, Larry knew firsthand the impact of the coal industry on our natural resources and he served twice on the board of the Turtle Creek Watershed Association, helping with its work to clean up streams polluted with abandoned mine drainage.



In the early 1980s, when unemployment in the county hit 16%, Larry set out to grow jobs by creating industrial parks with sites that were easy for companies to build on. Today, there are 16 industrial parks throughout the county that are home to 142 companies employing 9,500 workers.

Larry made sure conservation was a major part of the industrial parks, adding landscaping,

innovative stormwater management features, and permanently setting aside 25%-30% of the land in each park as open space because “companies also want the things that contribute to a good quality of life.”

The District’s conservation campus is actually on one of the first county industrial park sites, and we are located there thanks in large part to Larry, who also oversaw the reclamation of four



major brownfield sites in other places in the county.

Larry undertook Westmoreland County’s first comprehensive plan in 2006, and when focus



groups revealed that the public’s number one desire was to retain the rural character of Westmoreland County, he helped to form the Westmoreland Land Trust which, in eight years has conserved 235 acres of open space in six distinct Westmoreland County communities.

Larry’s perseverance overcame significant obstacles to create one of the county’s first trails, the Five Star Trail, and he was influential in the growth of the Regional Trail System.



Most recently, Larry continues to be a great friend to conservation even in his retirement. He has been extremely helpful in two conservation projects on the Westmoreland County Community College campus that are investing upwards of a half million dollars to improve Cherry Creek.



Westmoreland Conservation District