

HOUSATONIC CELEBRATED

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Group marks 75th year, pays tribute to river

BY RUTH EPSTEIN
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KENT — Frank Delaney's toast to the Housatonic River brought cheers and laughter to those celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Housatonic Valley Association.

The dining room at Bull's Bridge Inn was packed Thursday evening as guests gathered to mark the occasion and pay tribute to the river, which often is described as one of the area's greatest natural resources.



DELANEY
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Highlighting the event was Delaney's presentation called "River Words." The author, former BBC broadcaster and Kent resident was introduced by Tony Zunino, president of the HVA board.

After listing Delaney's impressive credentials, Zunino said, "more importantly, he truly cares about the environment. He and his wife support all types of conservation and preservation efforts."

Delaney told the audience it's lovely to be associated with the river because of the role it plays in people's lives. He called it a universal natural feature over which man may have little control, "but just let Donald Trump try to build a wall around the Housatonic River!"

While there is no cost or fee to have the river flowing through the area, he urged



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Joe Ruggiero of Southbury, the civilian leader of the Source to Sound Paddle Trip put on by the Housatonic Valley Association, receives the Source to Sound Hero Recognition award from HVA's Dennis Regan during the 75th anniversary celebration of the association Thursday in Kent. Tony Zunino, board president, looks on.

his audience not to take it for granted.

Delaney spoke of the importance of rivers to him growing up in Ireland and the many stories associated with them. He longingly referred to the Shannon River, noting he wrote a book with that title.

His great fondness for the Housatonic stems from the same feelings he has when seeing the Shannon flood its banks. Delaney described one winter in which the Housatonic threw up huge pieces of ice onto the roadway.

Delaney read from works of other authors who wrote about rivers, including Mark Twain, who rarely described the Mississippi, except in an excerpt from "Huckleberry Finn."

He also quoted from W.E.B. Du Bois, who spent his younger years in Great Barrington, Mass. Du Bois' words spoke disparagingly of the Housatonic, saying it had

turned into an ugly thing, with bridges crossing it and denuded river banks.

"Let's tell Mr. DuBois not any more, thanks to three letters in the alphabet: HVA," Delaney said to cheers from his audience.

Borrowing from the idea used by poet Stephen Vincent Benet's "American Names," Delaney ended his presentation saying he challenged himself to write a poem with words rhyming with Housatonic. His efforts were rewarded because the audience roared with laughter after each verse. He came up with lines ending in "sonic," "chronic," "laconic," "histrionic" and "ironic," among others.

During the event, Susan Whalen, deputy commissioner of the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, said she was pleased to have taken part in a portion of the HVA's Source to Sound Paddle Trip. Growing up in southern Berkshire

County in Massachusetts, she said she lived on the banks of the Green River, a tributary of the Housatonic.

"That was before the Clean Water Act, and I remember seeing the water in shades of orange, blue and green," Whalen recalled. "My childhood nightmares were about the Housatonic River. I never, ever thought the river would be clean enough to paddle."

She praised the many partners who have made that happen. "We have to continue that mission, continue that passion," Whalen added. "We have to do all we can to educate children about how important the resource is. I encourage you all to get a kid to the river."

Joe Ruggiero of Southbury, a civilian leader on the paddle trip, was presented with the Source to Sound Hero Recognition award.

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