

2023 Citation for Long and Valued Service to the Assembly

Nancy Baglan - August 2023

[Click here to see a video of the presentation at the August 6th church service.](#)

"The Congregational Summer Assembly." Friends at home ask you why you go to this place in northern Michigan from Colorado...Massachusetts...New York...California...Washington.

You try to describe it but always feel you don't quite have the right words. Over and over again, after rapturous descriptions of lakes and woods, tennis courts and golf courses, sunsets and sunrises – you finally say "it's the people." And it is the people who make it the remarkable community it is. As the sign on the white board says "We heart our volunteers."



There are volunteers who extend their professional knowledge to contribute to the Assembly and there are volunteers who willingly take on mundane tasks that just need doing. But today we are recognizing someone whose guiding principle has been "If you have an interest in something, even if you don't know anything about it, go for it!!" Because she lived by that and set her mind to learning about her interest we have a much richer environment here – NANCY BAGLAN.

Like many recipients of the Citation for Long and Valued Service, Nancy insists "I haven't done anything special. Other people have done so much." Of course, many people have done many things – but let me tell you a bit about Nancy.

Her background was in the physical sciences – in chemistry/physics/math, and she was working in a research lab at Washington University in St. Louis where her husband Bob had entered medical school (at age 30 after several years of teaching physics at Vanderbilt). He went back to school and she went back to work – now with 2-year-old twin daughters, Kathy and Julie. And it was that decision that brings us to today.

In the adjoining lab at Washington University was a co-worker whose husband had a family connection to the CSA. Claire's description of the Assembly sounded good to Nancy and Bob, so in 1978 she called the Assembly office to find out if there were any rentals. As a result, they rented the Harbison's cottage in June of that year, and even though it was cold, they loved it and kept coming back, finally realizing this was a lifetime commitment. In 1989 they bought the Hutter cottage at the top of Fuller Avenue.

As for many of us, pre-retirement summers allowed limited time for vacation so her volunteer work seemed pretty much limited to pulling lots of garlic mustard. But retirement allowed them to spend full seasons here in Pilgrim and she began volunteering in earnest. In 2005 she joined the Ecology Committee where she learned about invasive species and the environmental threats they pose. Because Nancy is a scientist she has always looked to science and accurate information to guide her in her work, so when she became chair of the Ecology Committee she audited two Ecology courses at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She worked with Julia Nerbonne and the Harris World Ecology Center on a program of environmental education for young children and a scientific assessment of our woods. Their report was published in 2009 and in the years that followed Nancy tried to follow up on their recommendations.

While Nancy tends to give others well deserved credit for their work, a significant reason some of the projects got started is because of her ability to seek out and collaborate with organizations outside the CSA and to draw people into the possibilities of what can be done.

Just a few of the Ecology Projects that have been undertaken, with support from the Pilgrim Fund, the Women's Association, and the CSA Board include:

- The Ecology Fun program - which has seen large numbers of children enrolled each year
- Internships for college-age students
- A Junior Ecology Intern program for students aged 12-16 – from both Frankfort and the CSA
- A community cleanup at Crystal Beach to remove invasive plants, teaching others how to identify common invasives

- Replacement of invasive species with native plantings in an area of CSA forest
- ID Guides to “Summer Birds of the CSA,” “Native Wildflowers at CSA,” “Invasive Species at the CSA”

If you look along the left side windows of the Meeting House you will see the winding path along the Native Species Garden. At Nancy’s suggestion this was taken on as a project. It’s lovely and educational – and when I first arrived this summer, 11 years after it was planted – I saw Nancy out there watering the plants and refreshing labels. If you have enjoyed the sunny Butterfly-Pollinator Garden on the M-22 side of the Assembly building you should know that Nancy asked Carolyn Thayer to work with the junior ecology interns to develop that 10 years ago. True to her focus on having the young people learn from their activities, the maintenance staff pulled out all the old woody shrubs that had grown there and the kids planted the garden of colorful flowers that are butterfly magnets.

Nancy has formed more than 20 different partnerships outside the CSA. No one who had the chance to take part in the popular bird banding activities will forget what they saw and learned from the experts brought in from the Benzie Audubon Club. This summer dozens of snakes were brought to the Community Room where children and adults had a chance to learn, see, touch, and hold.

When Bob became ill Nancy cut back on her intensive involvement, but she has never cut back on her interest or her active lifelong learning. And she continues to live by the motto of the true volunteer: “Just Start – Be Involved!”

Nancy – thank you so much for what you have done to teach and show us what we can do to protect and enhance our natural surroundings – and especially for helping create programs that have engaged our children in that learning. I know that whenever my brother’s kids, now in their 20’s, arrive at the Assembly they go to visit the maple tree they planted near the Lake Michigan courts when they were junior interns.

“If you have an interest in something – go for it!”