

Donald B. Jones (1911-1994) was a determined preservationist committed to saving the land and historic landmarks. The Donald B. Jones Conservation Award is presented annually to an individual who embodies Donald B. Jones' passion and D&R Greenway's mission to preserve and care for land and inspire a conservation ethic. As D&R Greenway recognizes its 30th Anniversary, it was a unanimous decision to present this prestigious award to Alan M. Hershey.

Alan Hershey epitomizes D&R Greenway's focus on Land for Life, now and forever. Although he was one of our organization's very first supporters in 1989, his love for the land around him began decades before that. In fact, his active stewardship of our natural resources began with his birth family. Growing up in Pleasantville, New York, Alan developed his love for the outdoors from his father, who took Alan and his older brothers on hiking, camping and canoe trips to the Adirondacks, Quebec and Nova Scotia. As a teenager, Alan hiked and biked throughout Europe and Mexico, and after majoring in political science at Amherst College, he earned a master's degree in public affairs at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School.

In 2004, here in the Princeton area, Alan created and attracted an enthusiastic group of trail builders. He secured funding and led the effort to create a website, njtrails.org, to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors. His trail crew now includes more than 200 volunteers, ranging in age from 16 to 90, who work every weekend from September to May, clearing routes, digging trails into hillsides, building bridges and stone steps with hand tools, and moving boulders with crowbars and nets.

Alan always reminds his crew that "It's not about how strong you are, it's about smarts." They respect his words, and also learn from the stories he tells of his illustrious career at Mathematica Policy Research, where he was a senior fellow. The very first trail his team built was at the Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate mountain. At least one trail crew volunteer remarked on how Alan carefully planned everything before a single tool was lifted, making sure that teamwork will go smoothly and that the trail will last for many years.

Alan says his interest in land preservation came from living in Europe because when he returned home he became frustrated by all the no trespassing signs. At the time, he complained to New Jersey Future's Tom O'Neill, who told him he'd heard about a new group forming, D&R Greenway Land Trust. Alan joined the board six months later, and served as treasurer for more than a decade and a half. When he became Board Chair, he made the organization's Land for Life capital campaign his number one priority (and continued even after he left the board).

Alan's heartstrings remain tied to Maine where he and his two brothers inherited the family "camp" on Abrams Pond. In 2016, while walking with his wife, Phyllis Frakt, through the woods along the shore of Abrams Pond, he had an epiphany: that he wanted to channel his investments into preservation of that beautiful land, so others would be able to enjoy it. He purchased 135 acres of lakeshore property that links the lake to a large state wildlife management area and donated it to the Frenchman Bay Conservancy. Alan decided not to

name the area for himself, but to call it Abraham's Woods, after one of the region's early settlers in the 18th century.

Alan has been connected to his communities all of his life. He often notes that many people come to build trails to find peace in their lives. They realize the physical activity in nature -- being out there and working with other people to move a big stone or dig a trail into a hillside -- is a unique opportunity. Not only is it good for the mind and spirit, but it's good for the body. One of the crew members, a retired cardiologist, told Alan that trail building uses all the major muscle groups which is good for the heart. Alan packs a first aid kit but says he's only used it for skin abrasions. The only requirement for trail building, he says, is you have to be willing to get dirty.

When he's not building trails, Skyping with his grandchildren, or hiking, Alan can be found in his fine woodworking shop, designing and building Shaker-influenced furniture, or in his garden, where he grows vegetables and ornamentals and prunes his trees. In addition to his legacy work here at D&R Greenway, he serves as treasurer for the board of the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail Association and vice chair of the Mercer County Open Space Board.