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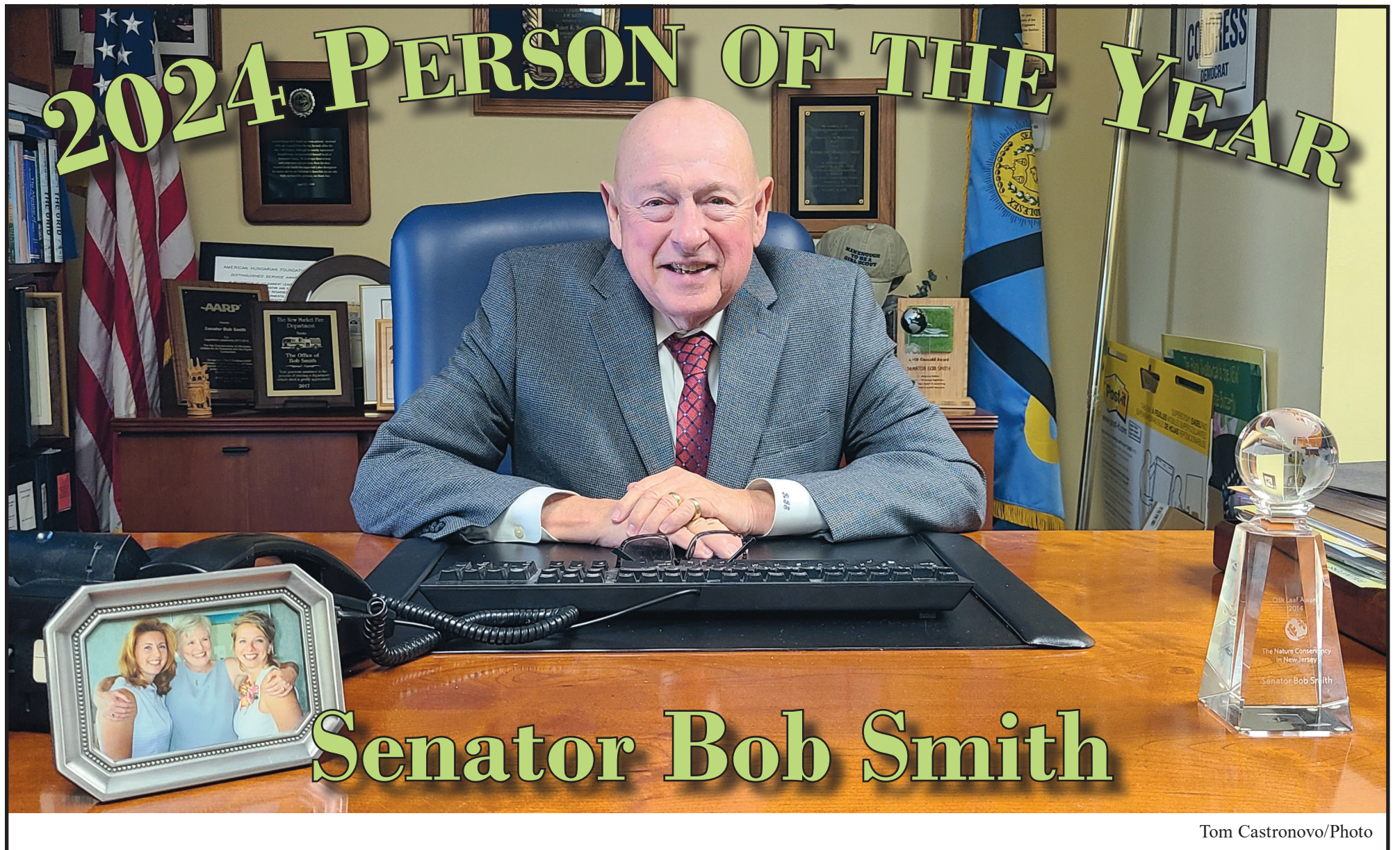


SCAN ME

January 2025

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Tom Castronovo/Photo

By Tom Castronovo
Executive Editor/Publisher
Gardener News

Gardener News proudly bestows our 2024 “Person of the Year” to New Jersey Senator Bob Smith, for his courage, dedication, leadership, and vision in protecting the agricultural, environmental, horticultural, and

landscaping communities in the Garden State.

Smith has been serving in the New Jersey State Senate since 2002, where he represents the 17th Legislative District. Smith serves in the Senate on the Environment and Energy Committee (as Chair), the Judiciary Committee, and the State House Commission.

Previously, Smith served in the New Jersey General Assembly from

1986-2001, He served as Deputy Minority Leader from 1994-95, and Parliamentarian from 1988-89.

Below you can see why Senator Smith is clearly an unwavering advocate in protecting all the residents of this great Garden State through his sound commitments by introducing and supporting educated legislation to keep us all healthy and safe, now and in the future.

The following is a partial list of bills he sponsored that were signed into law.

P.L. 1989, c. 241 Establishes a Green Acres Properties Subcommittee in the State House Commission to expedite review and approval of purchases of land by local government with Green Acres funds.

P.L. 2004, c. 120 “Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act” created rules for smart (Cont. on Page 11)



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Warren County Farmer Richard Gardner being sworn into his term on the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture; Linda Walker, Executive Assistant at the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, holding the bible; and New Jersey Senator Douglas J. Steinhard.

New Member Takes Seat on State Board of Agriculture

Warren County farmer Richard Gardner was sworn into his term on the New Jersey State Board of Agriculture by Senator Douglas J. Steinhard from the 23rd Legislative District during the Board's November 2024 monthly meeting.

Gardner, representing the hay and grain industry, owns and operates Spring Ridge Farm in Asbury which consists of 225 owned and rented acres. His farm grows hay, corn, soybeans, barley and oats, while also raising 90 head of commercial beef, 1,000 broilers yearly, and 25 to 30 hogs for private customers.

Gardner is a fifth-generation farmer who has dedicated decades to agriculture and public service in New Jersey. Along with retired Agricultural Agent Everett Chamberlain, Gardner started the Warren County Livestock Association in 1981 and has been an active member of the Warren County Board of Agriculture since 1988, where he has served as President, Vice-President, and Secretary, and is still an active member. Gardner has been a member of the Rutgers Board of Managers, which included a trip to Washington, D.C. to lobby for full funding of the Land Grant Mission. Since 1994, he has been a member of the New Jersey Beef Industry Council. He is also a member of the New Jersey and American Farm Bureau, a 50-year member of the Livestock Cooperative Auction Market Association of North Jersey, where he is the director, and was co-chair of the Garden State Grazing Coalition from 1999-2005. He also holds a degree from Delaware Valley College.

Gardner joins other board members with the county and commodity groups they represent in Board President Bob Blew, Cumberland, nursery; Vice-President Lisa Specca, Burlington, vegetable; Kurt Alstede, Morris, fruit; David DeFrance II, Hunterdon, nursery; John Hart, Mercer, hay and grain; Stephen V. Lee IV, Burlington, fruit; and Joel Vierick, Gloucester, vegetable.

The State Board of Agriculture comprises eight members who serve for four years. By law, at least four of its members must represent the top commodity groups in the state, which are nursery, vegetable, fruit, and grain.

2024 Person of the Year

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growth and land preservation in the Highlands region, which is the source of half of the state's drinking water, and also created the Highlands Council, a new agency to oversee land preservation and development, and tasked with creating a regional master plan.

Preserving Parks for Future Generations

In 2006, a ballot referendum sponsored by Senator Smith was passed by New Jersey voters to allow a portion of the revenue from the corporate business tax to be dedicated toward the acquisition and development of open space lands for conservation and recreation. This amendment gives parks the funding they desperately need by putting existing tax revenue to good use without raising taxes.

P.L. 2006, c. 72 Appropriates \$15 million from "Garden State Farmland Preservation Trust Fund" for farmland preservation purposes in Highlands Region.

P.L.2009, c 256 Establishes Forest Stewardship and Forest Certification Programs in DEP; establishes Forest Stewardship Incentive Fund.

Green Acres Blue Acres

On November 3, 2009, voters passed the ballot initiative sponsored by Senator Smith to make an investment in open space preservation. This allowed programs such as the Green Acres public recreation and conservation program, farmland preservation, the Blue Acres program for flood plain and watershed land, and historic preservation to continue. New Jersey voters understood the importance of this initiative and recognized that our state could not afford the consequences of failing to make the investment in our future. Open space preservation is absolutely vital to preserving our quality of life.

Open Space, Farmland & Historic Preservation

On November 4, 2014, voters overwhelmingly passed the constitutional amendment sponsored by Senator Smith creating a stable source of funding for open space, farmland, and historic preservation. Since 1961, New Jersey voters have passed 14 out of 14 ballot measures supportive of funding for open space, farmland and historic preservation. New Jersey has one million acres to protect for our clean water, economy and quality of life.

P.L.2017, c. 136 Establishes State food waste reduction goal of 50 percent by 2030.

P.L. 2018, c. 64 Revises the "New Jersey Smoke-Free Air Act" to prohibit smoking at public beaches and parks.

P.L. 2019, c. 93 Directs the Department of Agriculture to establish a public awareness campaign for food waste.

P.L. 2019, c. 442 Establishes the NJ Climate Change Resource Center at Rutgers University.

P.L. 2020, c. 117 Prohibits provision or sale of single-use plastic carryout bags, single-use paper carryout bags, and polystyrene foam food service products; limits provision of single-use plastic straws; appropriates moneys from Clean Communities Program Fund for public education.

P.L. 2021, c. 170 Establishes dual-use solar project pilot program for unpreserved farmland; allows land used for dual-use solar project to be eligible for farmland assessment under certain conditions.

P.L. 2023, c. 20 Extends Right to Farm Act protections to certain shellfish aquaculture activities.

P.L. 2023, c. 60 Requires school districts to provide instruction on prevention of Lyme Disease and other tick-borne diseases in grades kindergarten through 12; requires DOH to publish certain guidelines concerning ticks.

New Jersey Senate President Nicholas P. Scutari and the *Gardener News* 2009 Person of the Year said, "Senator Smith has championed environmental protection for decades, with an over 40-year career spanning municipal government in Piscataway, service in the General Assembly, and over twenty years in the Senate. As Chair of the Senate Environment and Energy Committee, he has been at the forefront of efforts to protect our environment and natural resources, and one of the main architects of laws that promote our clean energy transition and fight pollution. His tireless dedication to making New Jersey a national leader in environmental protection and clean energy has made him an indispensable voice in our Legislature for years, and will continue to for years to come."

Al Murray, the 2015 *Gardener News* Person of the (Cont. on Page 22)

2024 Person of the Year

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Year and former New Jersey Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, said, "Senator Smith has always had a passion towards protecting New Jersey's environment and natural resources. Through his leadership, our citizens enjoy a state brimming with natural beauty, safe drinking water, and a clean environment. Horticulture is one of the many industries that have benefited through programs sponsored by Senator Smith. Being awarded Person of the Year is a fitting tribute to give recognition for all of his accomplishments."

New Jersey Farmer Raj Sinha, and the 2021 *Gardener News* Person of the Year, said, "I would like to congratulate Senator Smith on being the 2024 Person of the Year! Being a past recipient, I know what an honor it is to be recognized by the *Gardener News*, and I would like to thank Senator Smith for his dedication to Agriculture and for his strong support of NJ farmers."

New Jersey Senator John F. McKeon who represents the 27th Legislative District said, "I have had the privilege of knowing Senator Bob Smith for over 20 years. He has been a mentor, role model and partner in making a

difference in New Jersey as we face the existential crisis that is climate change, the preservation of our natural resources, and as we wage a war against plastic waste. I can think of no one more deserving to be named *Gardener News* Person of the Year."

New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association Executive Director Gail Woolcott, said "Senator Smith is a strong advocate of the environmental landscape, as are the members of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. We always enjoy meaningful dialogue with him and discussion about responsible changes in the industry. I consider him a friend and congratulate him on this well-deserved acknowledgment," said Woolcott.

Here are a few bills that Senator Smith has recently introduced into the legislature and are moving through the committees. A Leaf Blower Bill that prohibits sale and use of certain gas-powered leaf blowers; provides CBT credit for purchase of electric leaf blowers that replace gas-powered leaf blowers. A Pollinator Bill that directs DEP to establish a leasing program for State-owned land to be used and

managed as pollinator habitat. He has also introduced a Bill that directs Department of Agriculture to advertise and promote State aquaculture products through the Jersey Fresh Program; establishes annual \$100,000 appropriation; appropriates \$100,000.

Smith received a B.A. degree in History in 1969 from the University of Scranton, an M.S. in Chemistry in 1970 from the University of Scranton, an M.S. in Environmental Science in 1973 from Rutgers University, and was awarded a J.D. in 1981 from the Seton Hall University School of Law. Smith taught environmental science and chemistry at Middlesex County College for 15 years. By profession, Senator Smith is an attorney. Smith served as Mayor of Piscataway, New Jersey from 1981 to 1986, served on the Piscataway Township Council from 1977 to 1980, its Planning Board from 1975 to 1986 (as its Chair in 1976) and on the Piscataway Environmental Committee from 1971 to 1975.

This paper now wholeheartedly salutes New Jersey Senator Bob Smith for his outstanding ability and passion for protecting and watching over all

facets of the Garden State's agricultural, environmental, horticultural, and landscaping sectors. *Gardener News* also celebrates his exceptional leadership and dedication to his passion and spirit.

Gardener News began the annual "Person of the Year" cover story in 2008. *Gardener News* will annually bestow our "Person of the Year" award to a person who performs exemplary outstanding service to the agricultural, environmental, horticultural, and landscaping communities.

Editor's Note: Tom Castronovo is executive editor and publisher of *Gardener News*. Tom's lifelong interest in gardening and passion for agriculture, environmental stewardship, gardening, and landscaping, led to the founding of the *Gardener News*, which germinated in April 2003 and continues to bloom today. He is also dedicated to providing inspiration and education to the agricultural, gardening, landscaping, nursery, and outdoor living communities through this newspaper and *GardenerNews.com*.

Happy New Year to All!

Full Moon

● **January 13, 2025** ○

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Executive Editor/Publisher Tom Castronovo

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January 2025 Columnists

Tom Castronovo	Brian Schilling	Bruce Crawford	Hubert Ling
Lesley Parness	Peter Melick	Andy Lagana	Andrew Bunting
Gail Woolcott	Bob Andrzejczak	Joe Atchison III	Bert Kuhn

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