

Van Patten recognized at national Sea Grant conference

By JUDY BENSON

Crowning her 30 years of distinguished service to Connecticut Sea Grant, Margaret “Peg” Van Patten received the first-ever Communications Service Award in October during the 2017 Sea Grant Extension Assembly and Communicator Conference in Astoria, OR.

“Peg is not only a communicator but also a scientist,” said Nancy Balcom, associate director of Connecticut Sea Grant, in announcing the award. “She earned her master’s degree studying kelp, a native brown seaweed. Her work contributed to the development of culture techniques for kelp, which has become a new aquaculture industry in the Northeast.”

When Van Patten’s career began, her office was equipped with just a typewriter and a telephone. By the time she retired, she was developing websites and editing video.

“There were always opportunities to learn and grow,” she said. “Sea Grant is all about bringing people and science together in a way that solves coastal problems. I loved being part of that – that’s why I now call myself a Sea Grant volunteer.”

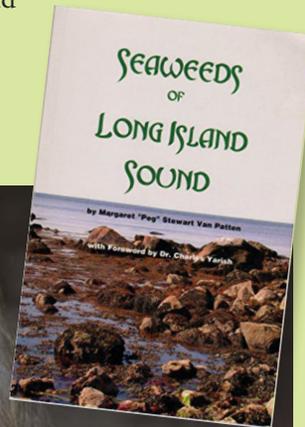
Van Patten served as a one-woman communications program, overseeing media relations, print and electronic publications and was the creator and editor of the award-winning *Wrack Lines*

magazine. She described that part of her job as “a dream come true.”

Drawing on a broad scope of talents, Van Patten also taught public relations classes at the University of Connecticut, mentored students in science writing, coordinated the International Beach Cleanup efforts in the state for more than a decade and worked with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in organizing and training volunteers for the national Phytoplankton Monitoring Network in Connecticut. She also developed

a draft crisis management plan for the national Sea Grant Network and still found time to give workshops to various audiences about seaweed identification and uses, which she continues to do in retirement. She is also the author of a 2006 guidebook still in wide use, “*Seaweeds of Long Island Sound*.” Her enthusiasm for sharing her seaweed expertise was evident during a lesson she gave to teachers in September at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison.

“There were many challenges in my work but it has been tremendously rewarding,” she said. “I’m tremendously honored to be selected to receive this new award from my peers, who are a group of exceptionally talented professionals.”



Margaret “Peg” Van Patten tells about Irish moss during a lesson about Long Island Sound seaweed to a group of teachers at Hammonasset Beach State Park. Photo: Judy Benson