



# Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition

Huntington, WV

[www.ohvec.org](http://www.ohvec.org)

Winter 2022

Dear Friend,

We write to inform you that after 34 years dedicated to protecting the people and environment of West Virginia and the surrounding region, OVEC has made the decision to close its doors.

We hope you will join us in reflecting on our decades of community activism and take pride in how you helped make little OVEC a big force for positive change in our region. As our founder Dianne Bady often reminded us, we may not have won every battle, but what we accomplished has made a huge difference in people's lives.

Our first victory came in 1987 when, as an all-volunteer group, OVEC stopped a toxic waste incinerator planned for an already-polluted low-income community near Ironton, Ohio. Since then, OVEC has successfully taken on some of the most powerful polluting industries in the region.

To all our volunteers, members, donors, funders, and allied groups—thank you! We are grateful and privileged to have had your passionate support that has enabled a string of successes both small and large.

In this letter, we detail some of the accomplishments we achieved together. We'll also give you some recommendations on other West Virginia groups you could join if you aren't already a member. That's one way the many dedicated folks—like you—who shaped OVEC can continue to make positive change in our region.

Sincerely yours,

*The OVEC Board of Directors*

# A Note from OVEC's Recent Co-Directors



We are proud of the work feisty little OVEC has done over the decades. Our assorted campaigns often gained national and even international attention. Students have told us how our work influenced their own studies and career paths. Writers, artists, filmmakers, and teachers have been inspired by and documented our work. (Photo above: In OVEC's office, a bookcase holds some of the numerous books that feature our work and photos, alongside the 2015 Jean and Leslie Douglas Pearl Award, given by the Cornell Douglas Foundation.)

Our reputation was not built on any one individual, but upon the years of collective effort of passionate folks like you. We have been privileged to carry out our mission alongside dedicated staff, board members, volunteers, and loyal members and donors. We have had long-term support from allied organizations and philanthropic foundations.

We hope all of you feel our deep gratitude for your part in all that OVEC has accomplished. And, we hope you will join us in supporting the efforts of other existing and new local and regional environmental and social justice groups striving to improve our region.

To the future,

*Vivian Stockman and Tonya Adkins*

Vivian started as an OVEC volunteer in 1995, Tonya in 1998. Vivian came on staff in a communications role in 1998, Tonya came on staff in a grant-writing and development role in 2003.

Vivian became executive director in 2019. In 2021 they became co-directors.

# What Future Do We Shape?

Although OVEC's run is over, we know that your passion still runs deep for the vision, values, and issues that have been central to OVEC's mission. Plus, the need for environmental and social justice is currently intensified and existential.

If you aren't already doing so, we hope you will support West Virginia groups that are working on issues that matter for the people, democracy, and the planet.

Here are just some of the groups with whom we have partnered for decades. Sign up for their action alerts, join, donate, and volunteer to help them carry on their excellent work:

**WV Citizen Action Group**  
[wv.cag.org](http://wv.cag.org)

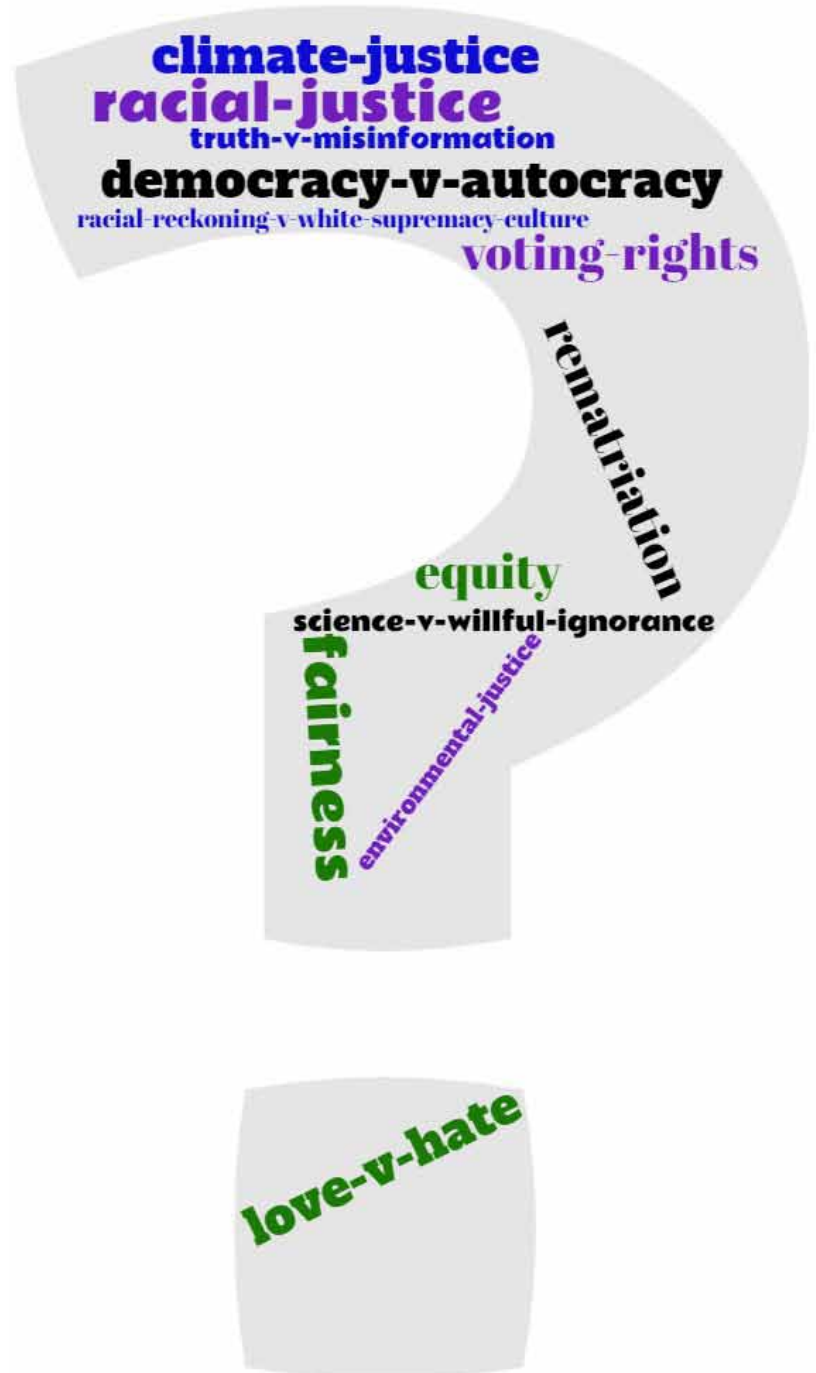
**WV Citizens for Clean Elections**  
[wvoter-owned.org](http://wvoter-owned.org)

**WV Environmental Council**  
[wvecouncil.org](http://wvecouncil.org)

**WV Highlands Conservancy**  
[wvhighlands.org](http://wvhighlands.org)

**WV Interfaith Power & Light**  
[wvipl.org](http://wvipl.org)  
*(long-time OVEC organizer Robin Blakeman co-founded this group)*

**WV Rivers Coalition**  
[wvrivers.org](http://wvrivers.org)



## Change Your Charity

If you donated to OVEC via Kroger Community Rewards and/or AmazonSmile, please go to their websites to change the organization to which you are donating. WV Rivers Coalition is one group set up to receive donations via Amazon Smile and the Kroger program (search the relevant web pages for “WV Rivers Coalition”).

# A Note from Janet Keating, OVEC ED Emeritus

While OVEC has dissolved, many of the remarkable relationships and friendships and all the shared successes (big and small) will abide. I am deeply grateful to OVEC and all of you, whatever your role, for giving me the privilege and opportunity to serve others and to use my skills and God-given talents to help bring about positive change in West Virginia, our region and beyond.



*Photo: The late Dianne Bady, OVEC's founder, in her garden. As retired OVEC Executive Director Janet Keating notes in this letter to members and supporters, Dianne not only nourished her garden—she planted seeds of activism around the region.*

OVEC not only has been instrumental in impacting the political landscape, but also changed many lives, my own included, for the better. For decades, I witnessed so much courage, conviction, and dedication as active volunteers, many who had never imagined themselves as leaders, attended/spoke at peaceful protests, testified at contentious public hearings at the state legislature or in Washington, D.C.—telling their heartfelt stories which were key to changing hearts and minds on critical environmental issues. OVEC helped people own and express their personal power. Know that each of you who contributed in your own way has made a lasting difference. You share in all of OVEC's successes and lasting legacy.

I remember a particular staff meeting where everyone was feeling overwhelmed by all the issues, the push-back from opponents in industry, gnarly politics, etc., when Dianne Bady spoke up. She reminded us, that while at times our work felt overwhelming and seemingly impossible, that all over the world, there were organized circles of folks, who like OVEC, were standing up, speaking out on environmental issues and standing their ground. OVEC was merely one of thousands of groups adding to the collective, global good. There is so much hope in knowing that!

Indeed, over the decades OVEC has planted so many seeds. Now may we see them grow and flourish as the good environmental work continues, whatever form it may take.

With deep gratitude,

*Janet Keating*



*Janet*

Janet started with OVEC in 1992 as a project coordinator. She served as OVEC's co-director with Dianne Bady from 2003 until 2007, when she became executive director, a position she held until her retirement in 2016. Janet and Allen Johnson co-founded Christians for the Mountains, another group that could use your support.



# What About OVEC's Website?

As OVEC's members and partners have learned of our closing—often with shock and sadness—many have inquired about the fate of ohvec.org, our website.

An email from Christians For The Mountains Coordinator Allen Johnson captures the concern folks have: “The OVEC website is a treasure trove of information on environmental justice for our region that we often access. Please, I hope the body of knowledge of OVEC's website can continue in some way. (I'm willing to host the archives if you need a place for it.)”

*OVEC has been such a positive and successful influence upon our region, an inspiration personally to me, and support when needed for my organization.*

*OVEC has always stood ready to encourage and help us and numerous other partners. The legacy of OVEC will continue positive ripples for the good in Appalachia and elsewhere for generations to come. Thank you.*

- Allen Johnson, Coordinator,  
Christians For The Mountains

Thank you, Allen. We don't need to take you up on that offer just yet. OVEC's website will remain live for years to come, thanks to the efforts of webmaster Don Alexander, former OVEC staff members, and others who will work as volunteers to keep the website functioning. That way, our newsletters, photos, and other information will still be accessible to activists, students, teachers, researchers, writers, artists, and others.



## What About OVEC's Assets?

As this letter is written, the board of directors has not yet determined all costs that will be associated with closing OVEC. Once all costs are paid, OVEC's remaining fixed and liquid assets will be distributed to 501(c)(3) groups with similar missions, according to our bylaws and state and federal laws.

Plans are underway for dispersal of a major fixed asset—our beautiful office building located in West Huntington. The board plans to deed the office to RenewAll, Inc, which is in charge of the 14th Street West revitalization plan. The plan includes keeping young people here, promoting the arts and cultural heritage protection, and a conservation-minded “reuse corridor.”

RenewAll would open the building up as a community meeting place—something OVEC had wanted to do with our space. (For instance, prior to the pandemic, the Fourpole Creek Watershed met in the room in the photo above.) RenewAll also works with the City of Huntington on assessing buildings' energy efficiency (our office is a model for that) and protecting historic buildings—both of which are good for the environment!



In April 2017, OVEC, the MU Native American Student Organization, Organizing for Action, and the WV Citizens Climate Lobby organized a Peoples Climate March in Huntington, WV, as part of an international day of action. Building trust and working in coalition was always central to OVEC's work.

## What About OVEC's Legacy?

It's clear that many of you who have been associated with OVEC over the years are in mourning over OVEC's passing. We hope that taking the time to reflect upon some of our accomplishments will help folks process the news of our dissolution. It was an amazing run, and we have no doubt our legacy will be lasting.

None of us truly know the depth of the impact our work has had on urgent issues in our region—and not only on the environment. Staff members have often been surprised to receive notes or engage in conversations in which we learn how OVEC's work changed the course of people's lives.

For instance, upon learning of OVEC's dissolution, West Virginia native author and long-time OVEC member, Ann Pancake, noted that OVEC changed her life the day we met her up on Kayford Mountain. Ann wrote a novel about mountaintop removal, *Strange As This Weather Has Been*, and her sister Catherine Pancake created a documentary, *Black Diamonds*.

Ann—like so many others who have learned of OVEC's closing—expressed sorrow that we've closed our doors, appreciation of our work, and asked what she could do to help. As a writer-in-residence at WVU Humanities Center, Ann noted the importance of making sure our materials are archived.

Mary Hufford, Associate Director of the Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network, had the same thought. Mary's association with OVEC also goes back decades. When OVEC won the Leadership for a Changing World Award, Mary wrote the ethnography on OVEC. (To read this, enter at least part of the title: "Waging Democracy In The Kingdom Of Coal: OVEC And The Movement For Social And Environmental Justice In Central Appalachia" into an Internet search engine.)

In an email, Mary wrote: "OVEC's footprint on the history of Central Appalachia is large and hugely regenerative." Mary is teaching this year at OSU and offered to check about archiving our materials there.

*OVEC has made absolutely invaluable contributions to the region over decades. We are so indebted to all that you have done. You have had a huge impact—and all that good will continue.*

- Betsy Taylor, Executive Director,  
Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN)

Ann offered to network OVEC with WVU's Regional and WV History Center (see: [wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu](http://wvrhc.lib.wvu.edu)) which collects, preserves, and provides public access to materials that show the history and culture of West Virginia. They have extensive environmental collections in their archives.

A board and staff committee set up to decide what to do with OVEC's archivable materials felt it would be best to keep any physical items here in West Virginia, so we are working with the WVU center to send our materials there. Going forward, we imagine there will be opportunity for former staff and volunteers to work with OSU, Marshall, and other universities in providing digital archives.

In first reaching out to the WVU center's Lori Hostuttler to gauge their interest in our archives, Ann wrote, "OVEC dissolved a few weeks ago after 34 years of environmental organizing work. I don't know if you're familiar with them, but they were most likely the most successful environmental organization in WV history. They are also, as far as I know, the second-longest running environmental organization in WV, after the Highlands Conservancy. I can't even express to you how important I think these archives are."

In replies, Lori wrote, "The WVRHC is most definitely interested in the OVEC collection. I do know of the organization and am sorry to hear that they have dissolved. Even without knowing the contents, I know that the OVEC archive is very important and essential to document the ever-constant struggle to preserve the environment and health of West Virginia and West Virginians."

Lori also wrote, "The history of resistance to environmental destruction in WV and Appalachia is an important collecting area for us. It is history that too many would like to be forgotten."

The archives will help assure that our work is not forgotten. We believe the seeds our work has sown, the groups we have helped establish, and the individuals we have helped inspire will also safeguard the legacy of OVEC, not in memories alone, but in actions that will continue having a positive influence on our region for decades to come. That is a legacy in which all OVEC members can take immense pride.

# But, What Happened?

For some of you this letter announcing that after 34 years OVEC has reached the end of its stellar run is shocking, sad news. Others of you who are engaged on certain social media channels probably got an inkling that something was up. Many of you, knowing OVEC well for decades, realized there was more to the story than what was being presented on social media.



The closing of OVEC has hit a lot of people extremely hard, and we are sure you wonder how it could come to this. As dedicated OVEC members you really do deserve to know what happened. However, since so much of it involves personnel issues, we are not free to divulge that information. Sadly, by the November 2021 board meeting, what had unfolded led the board to vote 10-1 to dissolve the organization because we were no longer able to carry out our mission.

As people have learned of our closing, we've received an outpouring of messages expressing sorrow mixed with kindness and support. How much OVEC meant to our members and

supporters is another way in which we can all take pride in our work even as we mourn OVEC's passing.



We have also heard some worry over who will fill our role and engage in our mission now. Whatever comes next, please know that OVEC wouldn't have been OVEC without you. Our mission will live on in the seeds of social justice and environmental stewardship we sowed—or in OVEC's case it's more accurate to say in the acorns we planted. We have no doubt your passion will continue to tend new seedlings, with more saplings and mighty oaks to come.

## Tell It!

As noted, volunteers plan to keep our website accessible for quite some time, and that includes plans to keep the blog somewhat active. Your experience is part of our legacy. If you have a remembrance, a lesson learned, or an appreciation of OVEC you'd like to publicly share, email a note (up to 1,000 words) to [info@ohvec.org](mailto:info@ohvec.org) by the end of March 2022, and we may post it on the blog.



# A Sampling of What You Helped Make Possible

It all began in 1987, when OVEC formed to fight a proposed huge BASF toxic waste incinerator near Ironton, Ohio, a low-income, heavily polluted area. After eight months of successful petition drives and organizing, the incinerator proposal was cancelled.

In 1997, after a years-long effort, OVEC won a huge victory, stopping what would have been the largest dioxin-producing pulp and paper mill in the country from being built in Apple Grove, WV.

This was followed by another huge win in 1998 when OVEC's ten years of unrelenting pressure on environmental regulators and politicians resulted in the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. EPA leveling the then-largest fine in their histories (\$38.5 million) against Ashland Oil, requiring that Ashland bring all its U.S. refineries into compliance with environmental regulations. This victory brought better air quality for people living in the communities near the

Catlettsburg, KY refinery and across the river in WV.



*Media outreach was one critical component to our mountaintop removal (MTR) work. Here, a British journalist with Channel 4 gets an eyeful of MTR on Kayford Mountain before meeting with Larry Gibson. Photo: Vivian Stockman*

We also had some amazing legal victories working in coalition with allied groups and with the dedicated, passionate, and brilliant attorneys at Appalachian Mountain Advocates, Public Justice, Earthjustice, Sierra Club, and the Center for Biological Diversity, all of whom provided their services pro bono. The legal victories in mountaintop removal-related lawsuits have helped protect endangered species and forced polluting coal companies to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to

clean up toxic releases and contribute to land and stream restoration projects. Settlements from these cases have also provided extensive funding for the West Virginia Land Trust to protect important riparian land from further development. The most recent example of how our legal efforts have contributed to healing the land and mitigating environmental degradation came with the announcement in spring of 2021 of the WV Land Trust's 4,800-acre public recreation area and demonstration site for post-mining reforestation and stream restoration.

There is so much more. See our website for a deeper dive into our work. Check out our newsletter, press release and action alert archives, our blog, and be sure to see: [ohvec.org/ovec-30-yrs-highlights-part-1](https://ohvec.org/ovec-30-yrs-highlights-part-1).

Appalachian Headwaters, which granted the tract to the Land Trust, initially received it as part of a settlement agreement in a stream pollution lawsuit against Alpha Natural Resources filed by OVEC and two other environmental groups; our members and staff provided legal standing for the lawsuit.

Appallingly, our state and national governments still allow mountaintop removal coal mining. Nonetheless, OVEC's efforts have helped protect some very special places in our state. For example, we worked with residents in Ansted, WV to stop mountaintop removal mining near Hawk's Nest State Park. In 2018, after years of coalition work, organizing, and legal wrangling, OVEC and our allies were ecstatic when Blair Mountain was placed back on the National Register of Historic Places. This historic site of the largest labor uprising ever in the U.S. should now be better protected from more mountaintop removal mining.

Other OVEC victories have improved quality of life for residents by keeping out-of-state garbage from being shipped into their communities, reduced public exposure to abandoned chemical dumps along the Guyandotte River in East Huntington, and protected the drinking water supply of rural residents by obtaining a moratorium on underground injection of toxic coal sludge. We also organized and worked with affected residents in Mingo County to pressure lawmakers to provide municipal water for hundreds of residents whose water was

already poisoned by underground coal sludge injection.

In 2014, toxic coal-cleaning chemicals leaked from an aboveground storage tank into the river near Charleston, WV, poisoning the water supply of more than 300,000 residents. Working in coalition, OVEC helped organize rallies, marches, and meetings where



*Above: Shortly after the 2014 water crisis began to unfold, OVEC members and board members, representatives of the Charleston NAACP and the Unitarian Universalist Clean Water Task Force led a march to the West Virginia American Water facility near the Elk River.*

citizens could hold politicians and regulators accountable. In response to intense citizen outcry, legislators passed Senate Bill 373 that imposed the first-ever regulation of above-ground storage tanks. As we write this, the 2022 WV Legislative Session is underway, and backward-sliding aboveground storage tanks bills are sure to be part of legislators' slate of anti-environment, anti-people bills. That's one reason we urge you to make certain you are on the action alert lists of the groups listed on page 3.

# Some of Our Internal Milestones and Awards

## 1991

In April, OVEC publishes our first newsletter. It, and all newsletters since, are archived on our website: [ohvec.org/newsletter](http://ohvec.org/newsletter).

## 1992

OVEC receives \$75,000 in grants and hires three full-time staff persons—Dianne Bady, Janet Keating and Kim Baker. Laura Forman and Maryanne Graham are hired in 1994.

## 1997

OVEC holds first-ever public forum on mountaintop removal coal mining, at Marshall University, where Larry Gibson speaks.

Citizen Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste (now CHEJ) inducts OVEC into its National Grassroots Hall of Fame.

## 1998

We launch our world-wide website, [ohvec.org](http://ohvec.org) (yep, the “ovec” without the “h” was already taken). Our photos of mountaintop removal coal mining are now more easily available to journalists, students, organizers, activists, and others.

## 1999

OVEC receives the National United Methodist Social Justice Award.

Vivian Stockman, who started with OVEC as a volunteer on the pulp mill issue in 1995 and who came on staff in 1998, receives the WV Environmental Council’s highest award—the Mother Jones Award.

## 2001

OVEC staff members Dianne Bady, Janet Keating, and Laura Forman win one of the Ford Foundation’s inaugural Leadership for a Changing World awards, with a prize of \$130,000. They are chosen from more than 3,000 nominees!

## 2003

Dianne Bady receives the West Virginia Citizen Action Group’s Excalibur Award.

## 2004

Janet Keating receives the Mother Jones Award, WV Environmental Councils’ highest award.

## 2006

OVEC organizer Abraham Mwaura wins a Generation Next Award for West Virginia’s up and coming young leaders, sponsored by the Charleston Daily Mail.

## 2007

OVEC receives the Appalachian Studies Association e-Appalachia award for our outstanding website. On one day in August, after the New York Times ran a front-page article mentioning our work, our website had thirty-seven thousand hits!

OVEC board member Larry Gibson was chosen as a CNN Hero. A segment focusing on Larry’s fight to save his home place from mountaintop removal was broadcast three times on CNN in August.



## 2008

OVEC board member and lead volunteer Chuck Nelson receives the WV E-Council's Laura Forman Grassroots Activist award.

## 2010

Carol Warren, OVEC's faith-based liaison and point person on election reform, receives the WV Holiday Commission's Martin Luther King, Jr. Living the Dream award as an Advocate of Peace (one who has advocated for non-violent social change).

## 2015

OVEC receives the second annual Jean and Leslie Douglas Pearl Award, given by the Cornell Douglas Foundation to organizations "who are dedicated to improving the lives of others and to providing a sustainable Earth for future generations."

OVEC Executive Director Janet Keating is named one of Environmental Working Group's Women of Courage.

OVEC is presented with the 8th annual FOCIS award from the Catholic Committee in Appalachia. In part, it's given to groups exhibiting a tradition of service and an appreciation of Appalachia.

## 2020

OVEC Executive Director Vivian Stockman receives the Women of Appalachia Project 2020 Appalachian Advocate Award. It is given annually to a woman who has dedicated herself to enhancing the well-being of Appalachian culture, Appalachian women's health, Appalachian families, or Appalachian land issues.

# Dreaming Big, Having Fun

*by Dave Lavender, Huntington-based journalist and former OVEC board member*

I'm currently reading Jose Andres' book "How We Fed An Island," about how he and a handful of chefs and volunteers pulled together a grassroots movement to help feed Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. Andres says of that effort, "We were dreaming big dreams because the desperation seemed so overwhelming. You should never feel guilty about feeling ambitious when you're trying to help other people. If you don't dream, the reality will never change."

I'm pretty sure that in OVEC's decades-long run—which lasted longer than most marriages—those dreamers fighting for a healthier Appalachia always seemed outnumbered and overwhelmed. But from the first days of holding Ashland Oil's feet to the fire to do right environmentally to the successful fight against the pulp mill and then the continuous battle against the ravages of mountaintop removal, OVEC slew Goliaths in courts and cleared a new route for environmental groups to push for change. OVEC has not only made an immeasurable impact on our region's health and wellness but has also set a blueprint for what other grassroots organizations can do with only a handful of stubborn people dreaming big dreams. As a kindred spirit and musician, I loved the fact that through its many years, OVEC took Emma Goldman's quote to heart: "A revolution without dancing is a revolution not worth having." And so, I will deeply cherish the many wild and free nights of the Treehuggers' Balls that filled everyone's spirits to fight for a better day—for one more day.



# Thanks to the Board

The OVEC board had to deal with so much in OVEC's final months. So many heavy tasks befell them. When they voted to dissolve OVEC, the board members were in tears. We do not envy you your positions, and we thank you for seeing us through.

## Special Thanks

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to Maryanne Graham. Until her retirement, Maryanne was the only person to ever carry out the duties of OVEC's administrative director. She started back in the days when we had tens of dollars, as our founder, the late Dianne Bady, liked to say. She worked behind the scenes to make certain OVEC's finances were handled with the utmost integrity, our books balanced to the penny, and our records kept impeccably for the annual audit. Her job became increasingly hard as we added staff members (with payroll, taxes, health care, expense tracking), processed more donations from folks like you, tracked more memberships, developed bigger budgets, and managed more grants from private foundations.



Above: At left, face toward camera, board chair Mike Sullivan mans an OVEC table during a Marshall University Earth Day event.



Above: Left, Janet Keating, right Maryanne Graham, at the November, 2016 "Appalachia Stands with Standing Rock in Opposition to Dakota Access Pipeline" event held outside the Army Corps of Engineers office in Huntington, WV. Hundreds attended this event, one of many held around the world at the time. This one was organized by RAMPS (Radical Action for Mountains' and People's Survival), Marshall University Native American Organization, OVEC, and Kanawha Forest Coalition.

In the midst of the pandemic, Maryanne trained the person hired to replace her as she retired in September, 2020. Barely able to catch up on her knitting, gardening, and healthy vegetarian cooking, Maryanne joined the board and became its treasurer in early 2021.

When her replacement abruptly left in mid-2021, Maryanne stepped right back in to her administrative director role, making sure all things financial were taken care of as we sought her new replacement, whom she also trained. Now, as OVEC goes through dissolution, Maryanne is making certain everything is handled properly and professionally. Quite frankly, we'd be in a real mess without her. Thank you, Maryanne!

# How We Worked\*

*\*There's so much more to how we managed to do this. One thing we always depended on was the passionate, caring folks who became our members, volunteers, board, and staff. We became friends, and sometimes we became chosen family. And like family, we disagreed and even fought. But, we always tried to circle back to having fun, even in the face of the deadly serious work of defending our air, water, land, and communities.*

## Building Coalitions

From the start, OVEC recognized that there is power in numbers. We utilized grassroots organizing to build our membership and recruit volunteers, and worked to broaden our outreach and sway public opinion with educational events and media outreach. To dramatically increase our power, we needed to build alliances with other organizations. OVEC became a leader in coalition building. Developing trusting relationships was central to that coalition work.

Because we recognized the power special interests have over politicians, whose help we need for all kinds of reforms, by 1997 we had become founding members of PERC—the People's Election Reform Coalition. PERC formed to document the campaign contributions by industry to our state's politicians, providing citizens with quantifiable data to illustrate the overwhelming influence of industry's political influence on political policy within the state. PERC gradually morphed into the pro-democracy/fair courts/judicial independence group WV Citizens for Clean Elections.

Starting in 1997, OVEC's Janet Keating was instrumental in the formation of the Alliance for Appalachia, a multi-state group of organizations, including Coal River Mountain Watch, working to stop mountaintop removal mining. In 2015, OVEC organized a statewide meeting for 31 organizations working on various aspects of deep shale oil and gas development. We went on to spearhead the formation of the Appalachian Gas Working Group that included allies from six surrounding states working on shale gas and pipeline issues.

For decades, OVEC worked in coalition with the Huntington-Cabell Branch of the NAACP. We promoted and attended the branch's annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Day memorial march and program, worked on voter-registration drives, co-hosted "meet the candidate" events, tabled together at the state legislature, supported their annual fundraising event, and have worked together on events such as National Night Out, which provided low-income kids with backpacks and school supplies.

## Justice for All

Since OVEC's inception, we have worked to ensure our words and actions support the inherent value and dignity of everyone. OVEC's by-laws were written with a non-discrimination clause, and over the years we have worked consciously to increase our diversity, which we define in broad terms along the lines of race, ethnicity, age, physical ability, gender

identity, and sexual preference. Our ongoing learning started in the 1990s when we worked with CORA (the Commission on Religion in Appalachia) to offer a series of anti-racism trainings to our members and the general public.

In 2001, while serving as chair of OVEC's board of directors the late John Taylor wrote an essay (now on our blog at ohvec.org) titled "Why We March—Martin Luther King Jr. Day." His essay set forth guiding values for OVEC for the coming decades, and it is the appalling truth that his points are just as timely and relevant today:

*It is crucially important for all "justice" organizations to bear very public with witness to their beliefs on racism in this period of deep national divisions on race relations...*

*We must start with the recognition that we are a racist country. How could it be otherwise? Our original economic base functioned with the genocide of the native peoples and the theft of their lands, followed by five hundred years of slavery and Jim Crow laws. We, and all of our institutions, have been unavoidably tainted and hurt by this history. This is emphatically not a question of individual fault. If all our hearts were somehow "purified of racism" tomorrow, the gigantic problem of our national political and economic institutions would remain...*

*There are no guarantees of survival, let alone success, for individuals, organizations, movements, states, nations or even the human race. Our movement is an overwhelming white middle-class movement. If we are to have any hope of achieving our goals we have no choice but to cross the "color line" and all other "lines" that are holding us back...*

*We believe we took that first step across the (lines) on 15 January when we marched for Dr. King. We must continue. We must do everything we can to join our skill, energy, and will (and we have plenty!) to all who are striving to create decency and well-being in all aspects of our lives and in the life of our planet.*

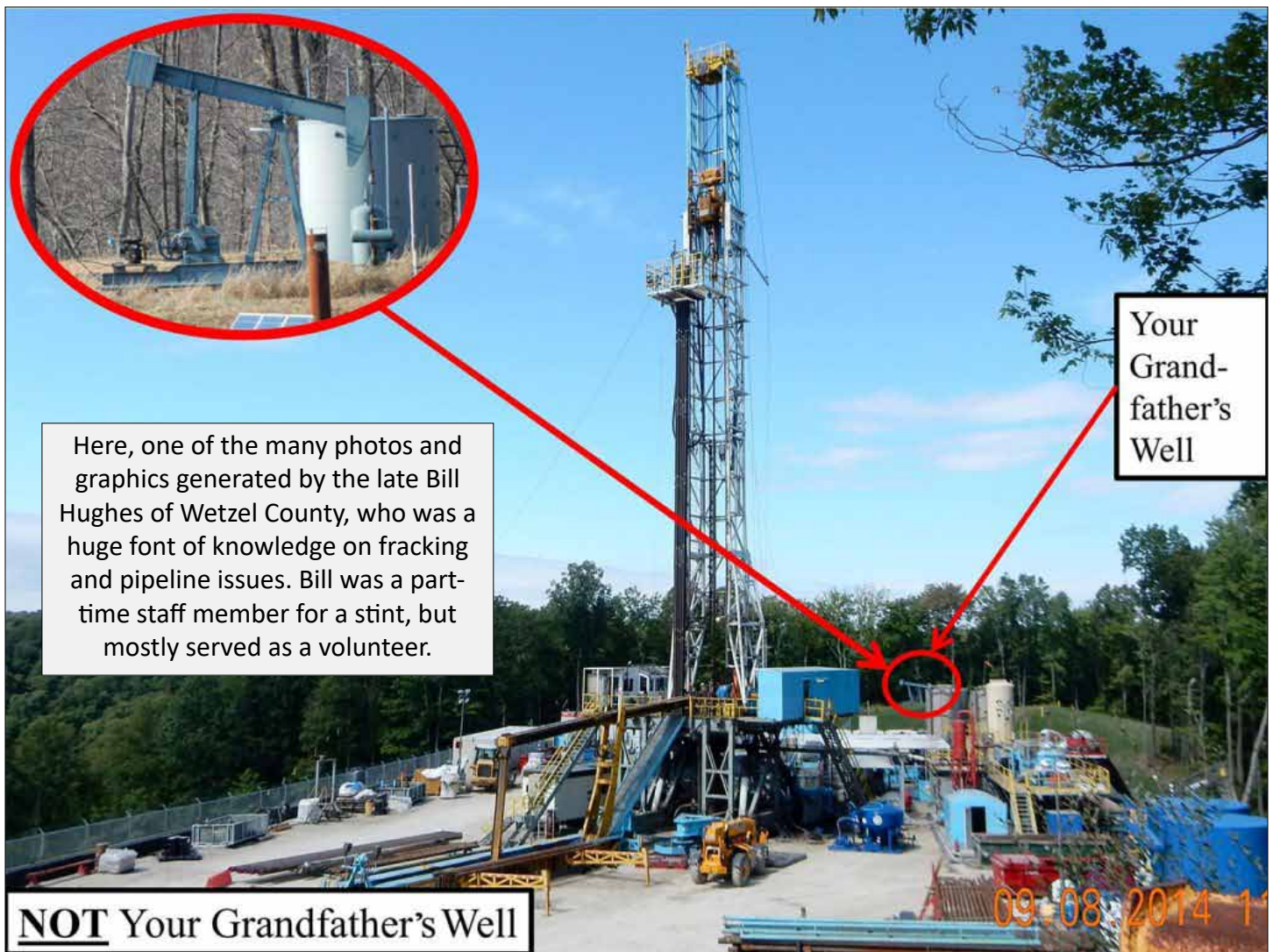
## **Research and Connecting the Dots**

As we tackled the ugly (as in environmental destruction), we envisioned the beautiful (as in environmental justice), and we backed up the need for a cleaner, greener, more just world with research.

That was the way we started out, thanks to OVEC's founder Dianne Bady, who was an avid reader, especially of all things concerning the environment in our region. One of her greatest gifts was her ability to see where things might be heading. She was an intuitive whose work evolved organically. She had a knack for discerning the zeitgeist.

Dianne was at a Lucy Braun Association meeting speaking about OVEC's pulp mill victory when people approached her about mountaintop removal and asked if OVEC might get involved. Dianne immediately saw the enormity of the issue and started us on that journey.





In the early 2010s, although mountaintop removal had not ended, oil and gas development in North Central West Virginia began to capture the attention of many in the environmental community as well. By the mid-2010s, we began shifting much of the focus of our work to shale-gas-related issues. Dianne Bady was one of the first to connect the dots regarding the Appalachian Storage Hub (ASH), the massive petrochemical/plastics complex slated to stretch along the Ohio River from Pittsburgh, PA to Catlettsburg, KY. OVEC began educating folks about how massive it would be and the harm it would bring to our region. Since 2016, OVEC has hosted community forums, provided information about ASH at community meetings, attended and provided comments at permit hearings, provided organizing and media trainings, and worked with allies to organize protests at ASH-related industry conferences.

Due in part to the public resistance OVEC helped organize, and our involvement in legal challenges to construction permits, a key component of the ASH complex, the PTTG cracker plant, has been stalled indefinitely. In August 2021, an article in the Marcellus Drilling News revealed that the petrochemical plant that was planned to be built across the river from Moundsville, WV is on indefinite hold until the company can find a partner to help finance the project. Although we can't be certain, it's looking less and less likely that this will happen, and residents will be spared from the harm of one more polluting factory.



# An Appreciation of Vivian Stockman

by Tonya Adkins

Over the years, Vivian Stockman has been involved with nearly every aspect of OVEC's work, serving primarily as the communications specialist for more than two decades, working on our newsletters, action alerts, press releases, and website (shout out to website-dude Don Alexander). She was frequently in the field with journalists, taking them to meet people impacted by fossil fuel industries. She also provided skills trainings for community members, helped organize special events, and was involved in developing close relationships with many of our members, as well as our funders.



Vivian Stockman takes a stand and also an earful of coal-truck horn. Photo by Linda Frame.

Vivian highlighted the crucial need for environmental protection through her photographs—both of the environmental damage we fought to stop and the natural beauty we worked to save. Her images have been published in national publications including the New York Times, Washington Monthly, Orion magazine, World Watch magazine, as well as numerous other newspapers and magazines, books, documentaries, and on websites.

Vivian's hard work and effectiveness was always evident. As someone once said, she could have a job done while everyone else was still sharpening their pencil. And as anyone who has spent time with her knows, she is hilariously funny, and kept us laughing as we went about the hard and sometimes emotionally draining work of demanding social and environmental justice for our region. She often used this humor as an effective messaging tool, dressing as "King Coal" or "Shelly Moore DeCapitate" and livening up the crowd at OVEC events with her warmth and wit.

Along with her people skills came a large measure of courage. On a TV news show she debated notorious coal baron Don Blankenship. Then there was the time she single-handedly stopped a coal truck driver from positioning his rig near a protest outside DEP offices; he apparently had intended to use his horn to drown out community members who were speaking about the destruction of mountaintop removal.

Since 2019, Vivian has served as executive director and co-director of OVEC. In the face of adversity, she maintained her compassion and grace. We truly can't thank her enough for all she has done for OVEC and the people we have served.

# An Appreciation of Tonya Adkins

by Janet Keating, OVEC ED emeritus

My right arm or my write arm? Tonya Adkins has served in an essential role as development director (and then co-director) for OVEC for many years. Becoming an active volunteer in 1998 because of her love of the mountains and the people and her disgust with mountaintop removal, Tonya was recruited by Dianne Bady, who began mentoring Tonya as a part-time grant-writer. With a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Master of Arts degree in sociology and cultural anthropology, plus her experience as a public-school teacher, Tonya was an ideal fit when she was hired as OVEC's development associate in 2003.



Above, foreground, left to right: At an OVEC meeting, Tonya Adkins with her guitar, standing, Janet Keating, and then-OVEC organizer Abe Mwaura, also with guitar.

The combination of Tonya's extraordinary writing skills, her background, and professional experience has served OVEC exceptionally well. She wrote countless successful proposals for nearly two decades (bringing in millions over the course of her employment), so that OVEC's budget and staffing grew. Her grasp and deep understanding of OVEC's work and her natural warmth were invaluable to me as a colleague. She often joined me on calls with foundation program officers to fill in any gaps during those interviews.

While grant-writing was her major focus, I could count on Tonya to assist me in contacting board members or any other number of tasks—searching out locations for conferences, ordering food for those meetings, or leading projects. With her deep commitment to the work, diligence, and knowledge of our region, Tonya is an outstanding role model for other young women. While she rarely sought the limelight, as a talented bluegrass musician, she also shared her special gift at organized events or at staff retreats to the audiences' delight. Like many who worked for OVEC, Tonya often put organizational needs before her own; her work was a calling.

Beyond our professional relationship, Tonya will always be a treasured friend. I have sought her advice and knowledge when it comes to farm living. I love her no BS perspective and authentic caring nature. She captivates as a storyteller, she's such a good listener, and her laughter is infectious. Pure and simple, truly OVEC would not have become the major force for good that it became over more than three decades without Tonya Adkins.



# So Many to Thank

In this final letter to OVEC members and supporters, we look back on more than three decades of our work together. That said, so much of what we did, how we did it, and who helped do it is left out of this remembrance. We want to say to each of you, our amazing cadre of volunteers, board members, members, staff, contractors, and supporters: Thank you... please know that your part was essential!





# And More to Do

Many of you have expressed intense regret that OVEC has closed, because we are needed now more than ever. It certainly feels like the arc of the moral universe has lengthened, and its bend toward justice seems appallingly slowed—backsliding even. But in these trying times, new groups and movements are in need of your help. We hope you'll take the same passion you've shown for OVEC to new endeavors, and help make sure the fight for justice does not falter.

