



The Sound School

60 South Water Street, New Haven, CT 06519

Connecticut Harbor Management Association

17th Annual Banquet

A Special Tribute to George "Doc" Gunther

Monday, June 10th, 2013

The Woodwinds, Branford, CT

Harbor Management Commissions, Harbor Masters,
Associate Members, Municipal Officials, Friends

Comments from Tim Visel, Coordinator

The Sound School Regional Vocational Aquaculture Center

Thank you for the opportunity to speak for a few minutes about someone who changed so many lives - It is a pleasure to speak about George "Doc" Gunther. Known to many as just "Doc" -- and let's be honest for anyone in the marine field--we all knew that that Senator Gunther held it in his hands or had his thumb print or gave it a thumbs up on most of the marine legislation for decades. Others will talk about other areas, I will speak to education and citizen participation issues that were important to Doc, and public service since his first Board of Education days.

In 1978, I was just out of college, a kid as he would call me (and I was); we were at the time in the middle of Coastal Zone Management Plans and its Legislation process which had been at the times very difficult. I had been asked by the Senator to join several meetings about coastal use rights - particularly shellfish, boating, navigation and land owners. Doc pushed hard to have a Coastal Resources Council - a citizens and industry advisory council-- and had been an important legislative interest of his fishers, boaters and those interested in the health of Long Island Sound. He had long felt that a user group mechanism was important to Connecticut's Coastal Commercial maritime interests. Therefore, it is no surprise that Doc had been contacted in August of 1971 by Governor Thomas J. Meskill; Senator George Gunther would chair the Coastal Zone Management

Committee. The Committee was charged to investigate the state's capabilities for planning and managing coastal resources.

Following several meetings and public hearings, the Committee prepared and submitted a final report, and in 1973 sent a bill to the legislature that would have created a 15 person Coastal Resources Management Council, charged with coordinating a coastal resources planning and management program for Connecticut. Initially defeated because of a moratorium contained in it, this measure has subsequently not been endorsed for a variety of reasons, including the continuing preparation of Connecticut's coastal management program under the federal act at the time. It would have eleven revisions and Doc felt strongly about an advisory board of citizens and resource use groups. That would hold up the process for years.

Though the Coastal Area Management (CAM) unit was placed within DEP, it operated under a unique arrangement. From its inception the CAM staff had been directed by an independent Advisory Board. The Board was established following the concept of the interagency task force; that of providing a broader perspective to the CAM program than DEP's developing environmental mandate. The Board was originally composed of representatives from eight state agencies and the six coastal regional planning agencies. In 1976 to more fully involve the public in program policy matters, the Board was expanded to include ten citizen members

who were chosen to reflect a balance between environmental, social and economic interests. The Advisory Board was disbanded however, upon passage of the 1980 Coastal Zone Act. Doc had tried to prevent that - long a believer in letting the public have a say in matters that directly impacted them.

I hope that you won't mind my reference to him as "Doc" - years of habit.

During vacations from college in 1979, 1980 and 1983 I had the experience of working with Doc at the capital as an intern with the University of Connecticut Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service - and one of the tasks was creation of a Coastal Resources Council, and winter flounder studies. I learned much from Doc and the legislative process at that time thanks to Lance Stewart of UConn. A Coastal Embayment Board (Citizens and Coastal interest) was designated in 1983 as well as the otter trawl line. He got a little short with me during the legislative hearing; I supported the Citizens Embayment Board in the morning, but opposed the trawl line in the afternoon. Only after I did I learned they were both Doc's bills. At this time I learned about the voice vote amendment process. My eight weeks in two years with Doc was amazing and I learned much from him and his interests in the environment and the political process also.

I would return to the legislature again in 1980-1982 and for short period in 1983 asking this time for his help with aquaculture education. In 1987, when the State Department of Education was considering Aquaculture High Schools we put Doc in a yellow school bus for a trip to Rhode Island and New Bedford, MA (which years later he would blame for his back troubles). The long trip resulted in his support of four such high school programs and with help from then majority leader Richard Schneller, allowed for legislation in 1988 for the first Bridgeport Aquaculture School. Without his support these schools would not have been accomplished. It took decades but now three have been built. Thousands of high school and middle school students have been educated about the ecology and fisheries of Long Island Sound with help from Doc. I worked with Doc many times with the lobster/trawl issue in 1980s, again in 1990s the Iroquois pipeline, and most recently the lobster decline. He would attend the Lobster Advisory Committee "V Notch" meetings at The Sound School and would always growl at me "not you again." A Long Island Sound Assembly invite had me to a CPTV television broadcast in 1993 and I melted under the lights, asking for water for me, he complained that it now was impossible to have the debate if I passed out; we debated nitrogen removal for an hour. When his brother passed away a

few years ago he showed up with a truck full of anchors rope and fenders for us, shook my hand and said I know you will use it.

For decades Doc strove to bring balance to the resource use and environmental protection to Long Island Sound. That balance unfortunately is frequently absent from today's discussion but Doc would always represent those whose jobs depended upon a clean and healthy Long Island Sound. That ranged from seed oysters sports fishers to keeping navigational channels and ports clear and safe. He will be missed by many especially me. At times he was the only legislator to mention the Sound's economic co benefits --for those who don't know what economic co benefits includes --it is fishing, boating and marine trades. It's a shame that we don't just call it what it is, Doc often did - you knew exactly where he stood. Who could ever forget his opposition to polluters - you just didn't want to be there. For much of my lifetime Doc held the marine policy legislation in his hands. Much of the legislation we have today is because of his efforts and the educational programs he helped establish.

Doc's Educational Efforts - This is just the ones I know and the list I'm certain is not complete.

- 1978-88 Frequent attendee and speaker to fisheries forums at UConn Sea Grant - Avery Point, Groton

- 1979 Shellfish Industry meetings - Harford, Milford, Madison
- 1980 Coastal Management Act Discussions
- 1981 (LISA) Long Island Sound America, Kaye Williams, Captain Cove - Support of Oceanic Society - Stamford
- 1983 Coastal Embayment/State Aquaculture Commission - NOAA Shellfish Lab Expansion
- 1985 Supports expansion of UConn to Sea Grant College status
- 1986 Funds Pilot program at Ledyard Vo Ag Center for Aquaculture study
- 1987 Aquaculture Curriculum Special Act - State of Board of Education Tour Rhode Island, Massachusetts when Ray Bovitch and Stuart Ingersoll testify in the legislative hearing - Senator Gunther was present supporting aquaculture schools
- 1988 DEP Marine Headquarters in Old Lyme (Old Salmon facility)
- 1989 Long Island Sound Assembly - created much by participant language by Doc
- 1989 Amends legal definition of Agriculture Education to include Aquaculture and Marine Employment (Dick Schneller)
- 1989 Bonding and Special Act for the Bridgeport Aquaculture Center (42 million expansion last year). Helped lease discussions at Captains Cove (Kaye Williams)

- 1992 Saves Agriculture Education System (Bill Dyson)
- 1993 Attends Ground Breaking and Dedication of Bridgeport Aquaculture Center
- 1993 Bonding Special Act for New Haven Aquaculture Center
- 1994 Transfers land for Old Saybrook Maritime Center (Bill Dyson) - Middle School Marine Science Program
- 1998 Supports Sound School IMEP Regional Shellfish Effort (Bill Dyson)
- 1998-2000 Transfer land from UCONN (Noank Lab) to Bureau of Aquaculture - Becomes Groton Regional Shellfish Cooperative (Bill Dyson)
- 2003 Attends New Haven Aquaculture Center dedication
- 2004 SSEA Special Marine Education Legislation Science School (Bill Dyson)
- 2005-06 Lobster V Notch Program - High School Students Bridgeport, New Haven, Groton high school marine programs
- 2006 Works to continue the fund for the Groton Marine Science Program (10 continuances 20 years) with Joe Comprone, UConn Avery Point Director
- 2007 Lobster Advisory Board member which meets at New Haven - Ella Grasso Tech Bridgeport and Sound School DEP Cooperative effort with lobster fishers

- 2011 Groton Marine Science Magnet School opens some 24 years after the May 18, 1987 tour. Doc was key to the concept and support of all these schools

Thousands of secondary - post secondary and middle school students have and will benefit from the educational systems he sponsored, co sponsored or supported.

My thanks cannot adequately note Doc's lasting educational contribution to our state and his support of Connecticut's students.

Fair Winds and Smooth sailing, Doc.

Tim Visel

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