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OL Resident Wins Major Agriculture Journalism Award
By: Olwen Logan



Writer, radio personality and Old Lyme resident Suzanne Thompson (left, front) stands with Connecticut Agriculture Commissioner F. Philip Prelli (center) and Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell (right) after being presented with her Connecticut Agriculture Journalism Award at the State Capitol.

For one day each year, the State Capitol is filled with displays representing the diversity of Connecticut agriculture and samples of products. This year's treats ranged from milk smoothies and cheese to apples, organic greens, bison chili and clam chowder, as well as spring flowers for planting.

Last Thursday, March 18, was Agriculture Day at the State Capitol in Hartford and more than 40 organizations and agencies from around the state celebrated farming's contribution over the years.

"Connecticut is celebrating its 375th Anniversary this year and an essential part of our heritage, what makes Connecticut unique, has always been Connecticut agriculture," said

Governor M. Jodi Rell. "The motto of our yearlong celebration is 'Industrious, Inventive and Enduring.' To me, that sums up the spirit of Connecticut farming."

Among the milestones of Connecticut Agriculture over the past 375 years that Rell cited were:

- The first farmers market was established in Hartford in 1643. Now there are over 120 markets in 97 towns;
- The oldest fair in Connecticut is the Brooklyn Fair, established in 1809
- The first commercial peach orchard in the country was the J.H. Hale Orchard, established in Glastonbury in 1875.

Connecticut Agriculture Commissioner F. Philip Prelli commented, "Agriculture Day provides an excellent snapshot of agriculture in Connecticut, highlighting its progress and diversity. Agriculture is an economic generator in our state and this day allows us to honor individuals who have contributed significantly to these advances in our industry."

During the event, the Governor and the Commissioner presented Agriculture Journalism awards selected by the Connecticut Agriculture Information Council and Old Lyme resident Suzanne Thompson was one of the 11 award recipients recognized for outstanding coverage of Connecticut agriculture.

Thompson's *CT Outdoors* column published in *The Lyme Times* and sister Times weeklies of New London Counties was selected as *Best Series in a Weekly Publication* between April and October 2009.

The column, which ranges from news about Connecticut grown agricultural products and producers to advice for home gardeners from UConn and other experts, as well as musings about the results of her own lawn and gardens, also appears online at TheDay.com.

Many of Thompson's print/blog columns are generated by interviews with guests on her weekly *CT Outdoors* radio show on WLIS 1420 AM and WMRD 1150 AM. A number of Lyme, Old Lyme and Old Saybrook residents have been her guests since the show started in 2006. Thompson also writes garden features for *Elan* magazine—the current edition contains two of her articles.

Asked by LymeLine how she felt about her award, Thompson responded, "It means so much to a writer when someone praises your efforts," continuing, "Connecticut agriculture isn't an oxymoron. There are so many interesting stories to tell about farmers who are innovating to survive, growing specialty crops, setting up farmers markets and CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) arrangements with customers. People care where their food comes from and they want more information."

Originally from Kansas, Thompson grew up gardening and earned bachelor's degrees in journalism and horticulture, and started out as a radio-TV reporter in the Midwest, before working on Capitol Hill and in corporate communications positions. Her family moved to Connecticut in 2002 and she started the radio show and local features writing after her daughter Lian arrived.

Thompson is also an active member of Old Lyme's Duck River Garden Club.

Back at the State Capitol, the halls were also teeming with Future Farmers of America members and the Connecticut Grange, including Dan Mutchler of Old Lyme, member of Lyme Grange #147, who was handing out samples of another Connecticut tradition, Hartford Election Cake. Find the recipe at www.CTStateGrange.org.