

'We are custodians of the land:' Ducks Unlimited recognizes Thunder Bay, Ont. man for volunteer of the year

John Stewart has been named DUC Volunteer of the Year in Ontario

A Thunder Bay, Ont., man is being feted for his decades of work with a national conservation organization.

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is celebrating John Stewart's work with the group, which started back in 1958, according to a written release.

Stewart was just 10 years old, working as a trap boy at the York Trap and Skeet Club in Toronto, when he got his start.

"I believe in what I'm doing," Stewart said. "That's not work."

Stewart moved north to Thunder Bay to be closer to nature in 1979 and met his wife, Lynda, and her two young children.

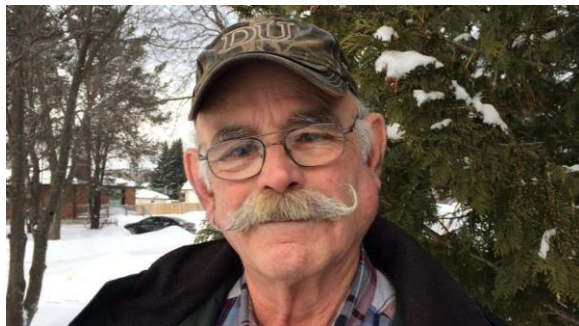
Since then, Stewart has been a member of the Thunder Bay Trap and Skeet Club, helping collect prizes for their annual fundraiser and raising more than \$10,000 in donations every year.

"Every year he sets a goal of \$10,000 in donations, and he exceeds that amount every year," DUC's senior manager of events and volunteer, Rob Watson said in Thursday's media release. "He knows a lot of people and knows how to get the job done."

Stewart has also received the Pewter Teal Sponsor Award for personally contributing between \$5,000 and \$10,000 to Ducks Unlimited, and in 2017, he raised a total of \$33,600 in sponsorships for the group.

"We are the custodians of the land," Stewart said. "When we start changing things, we change them for everything."

Thunder Bay, Ont. resident, John Stewart, has been a volunteer with Ducks Unlimited since he was 10 years old. (Ducks Unlimited Canada)



John Stewart has never worked a day in his life for DUC. Not one day.

"I believe in what I am doing," says John. "And that's not work."

For this long-time DUC volunteer, wetland conservation is simply a way of life. The unique and generous ways he gives back to the land, water and wildlife he loves has earned him the title of [DUC's Volunteer of the Year](#) for Ontario. This is his story.

As a youngster growing up in Toronto, John saw wetlands filled in to make way for construction and the shorelines of Black Creek cemented over in an attempt to manage the water.

"I used to go and catch frogs and turtles down there," he says. "Now, I don't recognize the place."

John's journey with DUC began when he was a trap boy at the York Trap and Skeet Club, where he was enlisted to help with DUC fundraisers. At 10 years old, one of his first duties was to help deliver prizes at a 1958 fundraising dinner held at the country home of renowned business tycoon, E.P. Taylor.

In 1979, John moved north to Lake Superior where he could listen to the land and hear great horned owls call late into the night. It was also the place where he met his wife, Lynda, and her two young children. John shared his passion for wildlife and the environment with them – a gift that's now being passed on to the next generation in their family.

When John joined the Thunder Bay Trap and Skeet Club, he was approached by a fellow member who asked him to collect prizes for the local DUC fundraiser. John has been a tireless supporter ever since, receiving the Pewter Teal Sponsor Award (for personally contributing \$5,000 to \$9,999) in 1993.

"My sponsors have donated almost \$200,000 to the Thunder Bay dinner just in the last eight years," he says proudly.

In 2017 alone, John raised \$33,600 in sponsorships for DUC.

“John agreed to come on-board for one year to help resurrect the Thunder Bay Committee – that was nine years ago,” says Rob Watson senior manager of events and volunteer relations for DUC in Ontario. “Every year he sets a goal of raising \$10,000 in donations, and he exceeds that amount every year. He knows a lot of people and knows how to get the job done. But like John will tell you, to him it’s not work.”

Still, John finds time to do more. He manages DUC’s sealed bid auctions, makes hundreds of nest boxes and has hand-crafted eight cedar-strip canoes and two kayaks for DUC raffles. One year, John’s canoe was so popular that it furnished one-third of the evening’s entire income.

Simply put, John believes in giving back.

“We are the custodians of the land,” John says. “When we start changing things we change them for everything.”