

# THE MAGIC OF SAN AT 20

BY JON M CAPACASA

I am delighted to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Schuylkill Action Network (SAN) and to offer perspectives as a co-founder of this magical partnership in early 2003. I can recall, quite clearly, how the idea for the SAN began. Howard Neukrug and the PWD Watershed team briefed me and the EPA and PA DEP staff on the findings of a landmark Source Water Protection Assessment for the Schuylkill River basin sources in February 2003. After seeing the clear challenge of a “bottom of the watershed” water system to curtail pollution threats in a 130-mile watershed, I agreed to put EPA’s full support to start a watershed partnership and to join the PA DEP and PWD as a core set of partner agencies. And so started the growth of SAN to over 300 partnering agencies today.

In a world of sound bites and short attention spans, one must vigorously applaud the 20-year run of the SAN focused on making this watershed and its drinking water “better than before.” Its vision statement reads:

**“Clean water and a healthy Schuylkill River watershed accessible for all.”**

I was honored to serve as the Executive Steering Committee Chair for the first 13 of SAN’s 20 years striving to fulfill the vision through concrete action and sustainable solutions. Along with the key workgroups and growing partnerships, SAN has maintained a strategic vision and focus on the largest threats to health and welfare and a commitment to work in partnership way with groups of all kind.

Jon M Capacasa is the former Director of the Water Protection Division for EPA Region III and 13- year Chair of the SAN Executive Steering Committee.



Kelly Anderson and Jon M Capacasa connect at a past SAN Annual Meeting.



Chris Anderson explains green stormwater infrastructure improvements to a tour group.

SAN's work has yielded permanent improvements in the watershed and its infrastructure such as:

- Permanently preserving thousands of acres of watershed area as a buffer to pollution and development and in so doing the agricultural heritage in the region
- Leading the way on green stormwater management using infiltration and natural systems to trap flows and pollution
- New capture and treatment structures preventing pollution runoff from farm fields and acid mine seeps
- Permanent enhancements to wastewater treatment such as Reading and Exeter and other towns; and curtailing wildcat sewers
- Creating and sustaining a new Delaware Valley Early Warning System to effect timely coordination and preventive response actions for downstream sources from accidental spills and other pollution events.

And many more.



Larry Lloyd shares words of wisdom.



The SAN gets its inaugural funding.

SAN has not shied away from the toughest sources or the historically intractable issues hampering progress in environmental improvement. The many project-level success stories of curtailing acid mine drainage flows through new diversions or treatment systems for abandoned mines stand out to me as key examples of SAN's commitment to innovate and tackle the toughest jobs.

My great thanks to the Executive Steering Committee partners, SAN Coordinators and many volunteers who have put the "People magic" into this special organization. They have put forth investments large and small – both financial and "time and talents."

I like to compare SAN to providing funding for other, major long-term goals - like a college education for one's child or investing over time to buy your new home. These goals of education and housing do not happen through short-term or occasional attention to meeting the goals. They happen through a dedicated plan of action for incremental investment over many years. SAN has excelled at maintaining its focus on our strategic vision and organizing around it. And keeping "action" as our middle name and core value.

The tens of millions of dollars of investments in solutions - some incremental and some game-changing - have made the SAN a model for the nation. {And we were the proud recipients of the first national Source Water Protection Award and Governor of PA's awards.}

Let's sustain the magic of SAN as an organization of people who cherish this resource - and to sponsor actions to achieve a sustainable and resilient watershed. We pledge not to return to the days of ridicule of "Schuylkill punch" or allowing the watershed to be an industrial dumping ground. Ben Franklin famously said: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." At this 20-year milestone, we can take credit for many pounds of prevention being applied in the Schuylkill River watershed averting the need for a ton of cures, while committing ourselves to continue this important work.

Congratulations to the many SAN partners in this effort which is a model for the nation!



Jen Adkins and Carol Collier



Kate Keppen, Eric Grindrod, Lyn Rodino, Larry Lloyd and Kim Fies at the 10th Anniversary Meeting.



Virginia Vassalotti, Krista Seng and Kate Hutelymer pose next to the SAN Constitution

[Click here](#) - or scan for more photos from the 20 years of the SAN in our memory lane slideshow

