

Cynthia Coritz

2026 John C. Bartlett Government Leadership Award

By Pat Johnson



Coritz at Bass River State Forest. Photo credit: NJ State Park Service, Taylor Milello.

Cynthia Coritz has been awarded the John C. Bartlett Government Leadership Award. The award is given to an individual who has demonstrated the highest professional and ethical standards in the Ocean County Cultural Community as they champion the arts and history in the county's vital tourism industry.

When asked about receiving the Award, Coritz replied, “I was fortunate to have met Mr Bartlett many years ago and his love of history, parks and educating the public was very evident.”

Coritz has only recently retired from her 33 years of service in the state Division of Parks and Forestry. Locally, Coritz served as the Superintendent of Island Beach State Park, Double Trouble State Park, Bass River State Forest and Barnegat Lighthouse State Park.

During her time at Bass River she was instrumental in the research and presentation of the history of New Jersey's first state forest. At Barnegat Lighthouse, Coritz managed the staffing and educational projects among other responsibilities. Some programs were in conjunction with Ocean County Parks Department and the Friends Group.

“It was great career,” she said.

Coritz grew up in Hamilton Township in Mercer County, and after high school went to the State University of New York in Syracuse NY to attend the College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She took a dual degree in Natural Resource Management and Wildlife Biology.

“I graduated in 1988 and I ended up working fairly quickly right out of college.”

Her first job was for six months working as a forestry technician in Montana for the US Forest Service, a job she remembers fondly. When she came back to New Jersey she returned to a previous job working for a temp agency and was hired as a receptionist for the Department of Commerce Commissioner. She was there for a few months when luck shined on her. Through a chance encounter with a woman who asked about her degree, she was introduced to the state forester and staff of the Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM) in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Through that connection to ONLM, she went to work as a seasonal employee.

“I was in the right place. Then when the hiring freeze lifted, I got to work in the Office of Natural Lands Management in Trenton. That was from 1990 to '95 and it was really advantageous because they sent me to all the parks that had natural areas. So I was out in the field talking to superintendents and park rangers—I got to talk to many people in the parks department from Batsto all the way up to Stokes State Forest.”

Then she learned of superintendent positions that had opened up and applied for the position at Island Beach State Park. “Not being a beach person, I was more of a forest person, but I’m also a birder so it was fascinating to learn the ducks and waterfowl and shorebirds.

“Several parks around the state have two superintendents –so I was lucky to work with another superintendent to learn the ropes. We managed Island Beach, Double Trouble and Barnegat Lighthouse. My supervisor assigned me to Barnegat Lighthouse; it was a smaller area where I could learn to make my own decisions.”

Coritz was there from 1995 to 2000 and at Round Valley Recreation in Clinton New Jersey for two years. Around 1997 she was asked by the Ocean County Parks Department if they could have bonfires on the beach with a night climb of Barnegat Light. “So we worked it out. They have been so popular. Now the Friends of Barnegat Lighthouse State Park run the night climbs.”

“Then in 2003 Bass River opened up,” said Coritz. “It wasn’t long after that I moved down to Tuckerton.”

The Pine Barrens has its own unique environment. “Wow, 30,000 acres of land – it was a change. But I loved the woods - the cedar swamps, the pine plains were fascinating. Bass River has unique and rare plants like Pine Barrens gentian and pitcher plants and I was always learning. Hikes in the pine plains were always well-attended,” she added.

Bass River was the first state forest and it was also the site of a Civilian Conservation Corps camp during the Great Depression.

“People think the park started with the CCC in the 30’s but it actually began in 1905 and run by a park commission,” said Coritz. “At that time, a lot of the area was burnt over. So the commission hired a young forester named Gifford Pinchot who made recommendations to reforest South Jersey. The Commission purchased land and set up tree nurseries. They tried everything, Douglas fir, white pines, spruce. On the south shore of the campgrounds is a cabin built by the CCC for the caretakers office. During the 100th

anniversary of the park in 2005, we set it up as the Superintendents office and author Peter Osborne, who wrote books about the CCC, dressed up and gave a talk. We also contacted a gentleman who was a member of the CCC and we named a trail for him, the Nisky Trail.”

Besides the pine plains and the CCC camp, the forest is also home to the Keith line that separated East and West New Jersey in 1686. “We gave tours where 5 townships came together at the Keith line in Warren Grove.”

Coritz was able to work with Joe Trujillo of the Outdoor Club of South Jersey in maintaining a trail along the south side of the lake, now named for him.

“And we celebrated the 20th anniversary of our section of the Batona Trail with the club.”

Around 2007, Coritz was asked if she could again add Superintendent of Barnegat Lighthouse State Park to her Bass River duties. She did this until 2021. “I said yes because I love the Lighthouse.”

Coritz spent most of her work life facilitating wonderful experiences for an untold multitude of tourists and residents of South Jersey.

“You grow to love it and there is something new everyday. That’s what kept it interesting,” said Coritz.

Above:
CCC Boys John Nisky
and Renard Wiseman at
BRSF, October 2006.
Below:
BRSF Interpretive
Center.
Photo credit: BRSF

