

Commissioner Virginia E. Haines: John C. Bartlett Government Leadership Award By Pat Johnson

Ocean County Commissioner Virginia E. Haines has earned the highest award presented at the Salute to Ocean County: A Celebration of Arts & Heritage, the John C. Bartlett Jr. Government Leadership Award through her dedication and support to the people of Ocean County.

She is retiring next year after a decade as a member of the Ocean County Board of Commissioners where she served as Director of the Board in 2019 and Deputy Director in 2022. She is currently liaison to the Ocean County Department of Human Services and the Ocean County Board of Social Services.

During her five years as chairwoman of the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission and liaison to the Ocean County Parks and Recreation Committee she worked to make many county playgrounds all-inclusive and as a member of the board of the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund she helped preserve thousands of acres of open space and farmland. To date, the county has preserved 33,000 acres of open space—some developed for recreation, others left in their natural state.

“We are working on our 28th park that will be located in Manchester –about 300 acres dedicated to passive and active recreation for young and old.”

A lifelong resident of Ocean County, Haines grew up on the grounds of the first Ocean County Park—the former John D. Rockefeller Estate in Lakewood. Her love of the outdoors, history and of place is chronicled in a video that can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xULPkHtsids>.

“Lakewood is a very historic town. In 1850 when



Ocean County was created there were very few downtowns and Lakewood was a resort. We had the (George Jay) Gould Estate (later Georgian Court University) and the Rockefeller Estate.” Haines’ family goes back 300 years in the area that became Ocean County.

Haines has spent most of her adult life in the service to her constituents. She was a state Assemblywoman for the 10th Legislative district from 1992 to 1994, was clerk of the New Jersey Assembly and worked as a Legislative Aide for state Senator Robert Singer. When Christy Whitman was governor, she appointed Haines Executive Director of the New Jersey Lottery from July 1994 to February 2002. She served on the Toms River Township Committee in 2002. Haines also served as the National Republican Committeewoman for New Jersey for 20 years until 2024 and had served as a co-vice chair of the Republican National Committee Northeast Region since 2013. She also served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 2008, 2012 and 2016.

Haines gives credit to the late Freeholder John C. Bartlett for starting her political career. Bartlett is a man much admired for his 39 years as Freeholder, his dedication to

the county, especially to the Parks and Recreation Department and to preserving and promoting the County's rich history. Haines worked as Bartlett's secretary for six years.

"I don't think that there's anyone I would have received a better education from," she said. She also credits Hazel Gluck, the first female elected Ocean County Freeholder as inspiration. Haines was only the second female Freeholder (now Commissioner) in the county.

"John Bartlett was always dedicated to Ocean County and made sure we did the right thing for the people of Ocean County--something that was instilled in me. I always want to do the best for Ocean County, I love the county and it means an awful lot to me. But its time to retire-- It's been ten years. I loved every department I was liaison to and believe that those who are there and those who come after me will continue to do what is right for the people of Ocean County."



Forked River Mountains with former OC Parks Director Mike Mangum



World War I Commemoration



Daughters of the American Revolution



Colonial musicians, Ministers of Apollo



Parks leadership Mary Jane Bavaia and Mike Mangum at Cedar Bridge Tavern Historic Site.

Preservation of the Cox House in Barnegat, rejuvenation of the Ocean County Park and the continuing creation of Cedar Bridge Tavern as a historical showplace (started by Bartlett) are just some of the highlights of Haines tenure on the boards.

The Cedar Bridge Tavern located in Barnegat is on the National Historic Registry and is a popular stop for school children and families. "There is always someone there to explain the history to them," said Haines.

"We just purchased land on Old Halfway Road, close to Cedar Bridge Tavern to expand that park."

Haines will close out her time as Commissioner while serving as liaison to the Ocean County Department of Human Services and the Ocean County Board of Social Services Social Services.

"When I first came on in 2016 -2018 I was on the social services committee. It's a board I believe everyone should be on so they can see what we provide to help so many people--seniors and veterans. And even so, some fall through the cracks and we have to open other avenues for people with issues like drugs, alcohol and health issues. We have wonderful partners that work with the Mental Health Board. This is a great county and we will continue to provide the services we need and if we need more--we will do that too."

"I thoroughly enjoyed my time in all of my capacities that I served the people of Ocean County and the State. It's been a pure honor to do it. I'm grateful to the voters that put me in to be their legislator. I just do my best on any of the boards I am on and I will continue to do that."

In retirement she will continue to serve on the Ocean County Mental Health Board, the Ocean County Historical Society Board and as Regent of the Joshua Huddy Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Haines also serves on the Ocean County College Foundation board, a position she has held for over twenty-five years.