

## **Meet Leo Laferriere (Published VWA newsletter September 2012)**

If you're sitting in the room during a VWA board meeting and hear, "How will we pay for that?" you can be sure it's the voice of Leo Laferriere. As a past Commissioner of VT Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation (1979 to 1985), with the responsibility for managing a seven million dollar budget, we'd all expect nothing less. Leo is a former bank trustee (director) and an auditor in his hometown of Waitsfield, so fiscal oversight comes quite naturally.

Leo's forestry career began more than fifty years ago in 1958, following graduation from Syracuse University, NYS College of Forestry and a two-year stint in the US Army Military Police Corps. He worked as a State Land Forester and Addison County Forester for VT FPR until 1964 when he made a four-year foray into private consulting, working with clients who owned and managed more than 37,000 acres under sustained yield production systems. For the decade prior to his position as Commissioner, he worked as the general manager for New England Land Associates, dba Ward Lumber Company, managing 30,000 acres of timberland and a sawmill in Central Vermont. Due to a severe market downturn, the mill closed in 1970. During this time, Leo earned an M.B.A. from Northeastern University, Executive MBA Program.

In 1985 Leo returned to private consulting and continues to offer these services as a member in good standing of both VWA and the Society of American Foresters (SAF). He has been a past representative for New England & New York on the SAF Council and past chair of New England and Green Mountain Division of SAF.

Leo's entry into the world of forestry was really what we might today call an "Aha moment." In early summer following his junior year at Spaulding High School, he and a friend were shooting "baskets" (the basket was actually a bushel basket nailed to the wall of the barn), when the friend asked Leo what he planned to do after graduation. Leo really didn't have an answer but when his friend offered that he was planning to attend the University of Maine to study forestry, it was as if Leo had never heard the word "forestry" before, and in this instant everything suddenly fit together and he chose his future.

In addition to fiscal oversight, Leo brings extensive policy experience to the VWA board. His keen attention to detail and insistence on clarity concerning all board positions often gains him the "unenviable" task of critiquing position papers. His ten years on the VWA board is just a small slice of community service. Leo's service as a founding director and past president of the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation spanned nearly thirty-five years; for more than thirty years, he was a trustee of the Northfield Savings Bank and a member and past president of the Bank's Foundation for nearly a decade.

The long and diverse list of commissions, committees, and boards speaks to the depth of Leo's community commitment. He has served on the Governor's Commission on the Future of State Parks; Community Council for VT Public Television; VT Forest Resource Plan Steering Committee; VT State Parks Long Range Planning Committee; Vice-Chair of the Forest Resource Advisory Council; Vice-Chair of the Governor's Task Force on Wood as a Source of Energy;

Chair of the Governor's Forest Taxation Study Committee; Chair of the Northeastern Forest Fire Protection Commission; and the Town of Waitsfield as Selectman, Chair of Board of Adjustment, Planning Commission Member and representative to the Harwood Union Board of School Directors and to the Camel's Hump Forest Reserve Commission.

Leo was born in Barre and raised on a small farm in Barre Town where the family had one cow, one pig, chickens, two ponies, a dog, and cats. His first work as a consultant was in the Mad River Valley in 1964, where he later met his wife and settled in Waitsfield in 1969. He is the town Tree Warden, a member of the Conservation Commission and a member of the Vermont Forest Stewardship/Forest Legacy Committee. Leo and his wife have two daughters and four grandchildren.