Fowler introduces Patuxent advocate

‘River keeper’ new grassroots post

BY ANDREW CHILDER
STAFF WRITER

Frederick Tutman is our river’s keeper. As a river keeper for the environmental Waterkeepers Alliance, Tutman hopes to turn his grassroots position into a podium to advocate for the Patuxent River.

Tutman received a resounding endorsement Tuesday from former Maryland Sen. Bernie Fowler, a long time champion of the Patuxent River. Fowler introduced Tutman to the board of county commissioners Tuesday morning.

"Fred has a lot of promise," Fowler said. "Of all the people I have known, he stands tall."

Tutman has spent years working on river-quality issues as past president of the Patuxent River Civic Association.

"It provides a similar forum," he said. "The authority is that of any citizen who has a stake in the watershed around them."

On the job only two months, Tutman is one of 125 river keepers in the nation.

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Folk singer Tom Wisner, right, serenades the Calvert County Board of County Commissioners Tuesday after Bernie Fowler, left, introduced new Patuxent “river keeper” Frederick Tutman. Tutman will be an advocate for the Patuxent River.
River

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keepers nationwide and he is still settling in to his new post. The river keepers are an offshoot of the Waterkeepers Alliance, a national organization dedicated to restoring endangered waterways.

"A lot of the work I do is to catalyze groups on site. I'm a citizen of the river," he said. "... With all the stakeholders involved, the river often doesn't have a voice. That's a river keeper's job."

Tutman said he relies heavily on the federal Clean Water Act, which allows citizens to petition the government for stronger environmental regulations when water quality standards are not being met.

"The very fact the river has degraded means something is out of balance," Tutman said. "When we see degradation something's gotten out of skew."

Fowler's annual Patuxent River wade-in, admittedly unscientific, has become an effective public relations device, drawing the attention of state and federal representatives in a position to make a difference. The down home note provided by Fowler measuring river quality by the depth at which he can see his white sneakers in the river works with citizens and their representatives in government alike.

"There's a lot of hope in our hearts and minds, but that is not sufficient to clean the river," Fowler said. "... Voices like mine won't be around forever. Youngsters won't have any concept of what the river and the bay were like."

Schools have become one of the most effective means of advocacy, Fowler said.

"The criteria are being strengthened all the time. It's really starting to be effective with the young children."

Fowler said he remembers a time "when an oyster man could catch 40 bushels a day. When a crab man could catch eight sugar barrels a day."

The blame for the river's decline has been unjustly placed on farmers, Fowler said.

"The farmers are being wrongly accused of derailing this river. We don't have 25 percent of the agriculture we used to have," he said. "We've got wastewater treatment plants expanding like they're going out of style, 51 percent over the last decade."

Marc Lieber, who chairs the Patuxent River Commission on which Tutman also serves, praised Gov. Robert Ehrlich's (R) plan to restore the Chesapeake Bay, dubbed the flush tax.

"It's the beginning. We need to do more," he said.

"What we really have been pushing for is the urban areas. The next challenge will be how to prevent pollution from coming from urban areas."

"I don't think time is on our side," Fowler said. "If we don't do something soon, the river will be accepted as it is not as it was. ... If we can show the Patuxent River can be cleansed it may be a benefit to the Chesapeake Bay. We'll show this is how you clean up an estuary."

Former Maryland Sen. Bernie Fowler, right, introduced Frederick Tutman, center, to the Calvert County Board of County Commissioners Tuesday. Tutman, who serves on the Patuxent River Commission with Marc Lieber, left, has been named "river keeper" for the Patuxent, lobbying to clean up the waterway.

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