

Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group Honored

For Immediate Release

Oct. 23, 1998

Contact: Greg Michaud
217-785-3819
(Hearing Impaired) 217-782-9143

Springfield, Ill. -- The Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group, formed by Illinois EPA in 1990, was honored as a SOLEC 98 Success Story last night during a conference in Buffalo, New York.

The State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC) is sponsored jointly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Canada to exchange information under the binational Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. It has been held every two years since 1994.

Only three "Success Story" awards were presented -- two for U.S. efforts and one for a Canadian project -- to recognize "distinguished achievement in Great Lakes ecosystem improvement."

Waukegan Harbor was one of 42 "Areas of Concern" in the Great Lakes designated by the governments of the two nations in the 1980s, and the only one in Illinois.

The Citizens Advisory Group took a leadership role in preparing a Remedial Action Plan for the harbor, which once had the largest known concentration of PCBs and PCB-contaminated sediments, before dredging removal operations began in 1991.

The group, along with Illinois EPA, and the city of Waukegan has also addressed other problems such as open dumping of litter, garbage and tires. More recently they have been working to identify older commercial properties that are candidates for redevelopment.

A significant milestone was achieved in February 1997 when signs warning residents not to eat fish from the harbor were removed after nearly two decades.

"The SOLEC 98 Steering Committee and the Canadian and the United States Consuls General extend their sincere congratulations to all those who have participated in the Waukegan Harbor environmental activities. Successful efforts such as yours serve to inspire and encourage others to assume responsibility and take an active role in the improvement of the Great Lakes ecosystem," the award stated.

"People have been working hard for eight years to improve the quality of Waukegan Harbor. We are grateful to receive this award," commented Mary S. Walker, harbor manager for Waukegan Port District and a charter member of the Citizens Advisory Group.

The award was accepted on behalf of the advisory group by the chair, Susie Schreiber.

"This is an example of what can be accomplished when citizens get together to help resolve environmental problems," said Illinois EPA Director Mary Gade.

SOLEC commended the Waukegan Harbor Citizens Advisory Group for sustaining strong public participation and partnerships, fostering broad stakeholder involvement and demonstrating its effectiveness. The Internet home page developed by the Group was one of the specific accomplishments cited as well.