



Virginia Valiela

2019 HERITAGE AWARD RECIPIENT

Virginia Valiela has been involved in community projects in Falmouth for 50 years.

In 1970, she organized a town-wide paper drive in celebration of the first Earth Day. The event was so successful it led to the formation of the Falmouth Recycling Committee and, ultimately, the town-wide recycling program that exists today.

In 1981, she was appointed to the Board of Public Works, the first woman in Falmouth to hold that position. In 1986, she was elected to the Board of Selectmen, the second woman to hold that office. Falmouth voters re-elected Virginia six more times before her retirement in 2007. During her 21 years of service, she focused on several major issues, including the clean-up of soil and groundwater contamination at the Massachusetts Military Reservation. By forming a coalition with Mashpee, Sandwich and Bourne Selectmen, they were able to resolve the pollution problems impacting the entire Upper Cape water supply.

Virginia was also instrumental in constructing a regional transfer station to ship solid waste off-Cape by rail, preserving Highfield Hall through an action of eminent domain by the town, and transitioning the structure of town government from three full-time Selectmen to five part-time Selectmen operating under a Town Charter.

Her commitment to the environment continues. Since leaving the Board of Selectmen, Virginia has worked on the town-wide problem of excess nitrogen from septic systems in our coastal ponds and estuaries. She is currently vice-chair of the Water Quality Management Committee.

The Valielas love old houses and historical landscapes. They live in one of the old Nye Family farm houses in North Falmouth, circa 1840. The kitchen was originally the Nye Family slaughter house. When the room was renovated and the ceiling removed, the meat hooks were still in place on the cross beam.

