

NEW PALTZ | MOHONK CONSULTATIONS

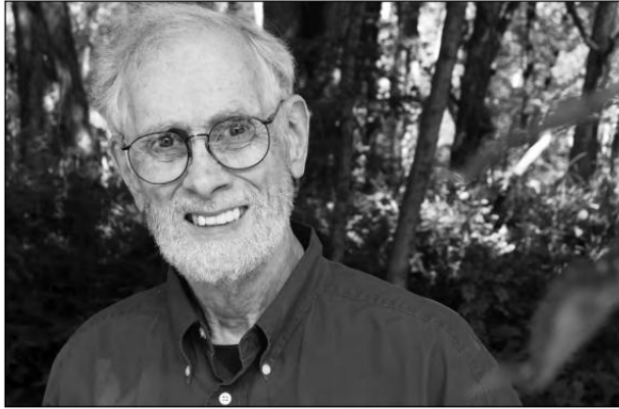
Talking it over

New Mohonk Consultations chair Marty Irwin plans peace conference for November

by Erin Quinn

FOR MORE THAN a century, Mohonk Mountain House has served as a gathering place for local, national and international leaders to focus on ways of promoting peace, environmental protection and civil rights. Founded in 1869 by the Smiley family, this year marks the 150th anniversary of the Mountain House. In honor of this milestone the owners have teamed up with Mohonk Consultations to offer a weekend-long peace conference from November 1 through 3, titled "Creating and Sustaining Peace."

Mohonk Consultations' tradition of creating gatherings designed to invite the exchange of ideas through dialogue began a hundred years ago with the Lake Mohonk Conferences on International Arbitration between 1895 and 1916: a series of public dialogues credited with being one of the forces that gave rise to the United Nations. The beauty of the natural surroundings of Mountain House, perched upon a pristine sky lake in the bosom of the Shawangunk Ridge, coupled with the Quaker tradition of inclusiveness has provided the perfect setting for people of all political, religious and ethnic backgrounds to meet, exchange perspectives, possible solutions and common ground of being part of a global ecosystem and wanting all life to thrive.



Marty Irwin is the new chair of Mohonk Consultations.

LAUREN THOMAS

Although the conferences have been taking place for a century, the not-for-profit volunteer group Mohonk Consultations was founded by third-generation family member Keith Smiley in 1980. This created a governing, democratic mechanism whereby the Mohonk Consultations Board of Directors could work collaboratively to help gather people of diverse backgrounds to discuss critical issues facing the Hudson Valley and throughout the world, while at the same time inspiring grassroots solutions to these problems.

"We offer a conference every year," said Brad Berg, the long-term chair of Mohonk Consultations who is now turning over his position to Martin Ir-

win, a lifelong environmentalist, local volunteer and member of the New Paltz Town Board. "As well as Environmental Distinguished Achievement Award and a Sunday forum," Berg added. "But this year we're teaming up with Mohonk Mountain House for a three-day event that will allow their guests to register and participate and have several keynote speakers, breakout sessions, networking opportunities. What we want to do is to allow people to become educated, inspired, network with one another and then act."

Both Irwin and Berg enjoy volunteering with Mohonk Consultations because of the model it has created over the past century. "We've learned that the Smiley family was more interested in having a place that people could meet and discuss issues of local and global concern than they were a fancy hotel," said Berg. "Their tradition of bringing together different political, religious, education and economic leaders, as well as members of the media and inter-

national representatives, can really be traced directly to the formation of the World Court and United Nations. They had meetings here in an effort to try and avoid World War I. That dedication to peace-seeking efforts and finding common ground is so critical."

Some of the hallmark conferences over the years addressed preserving family farms, community-supported agriculture models, how to control sprawl, protecting fresh water, crime prevention and the creation of an environmental hotline, as well as addressing hunger in the Hudson Valley and finding more ways to create farm-to-table channels to food pantries and families in need.

"For me, the greatest issue facing us today is climate change," said Irwin, who has worked for years to support the Town of New Paltz Clean Water and Open Space Protection Commission, including its efforts to create the Millbrook Preserve, as well as serving on the Wallkill Valley Land Trust and the Wallkill River Watershed Alliance. Irwin said that he is honored to serve as chair of Mohonk Consultations, a post that he took over only a few months ago. "I grew up totally engaged in the natural environment. I was a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout, and my family was always out hiking and fishing and canoeing and camping." He said that he feels that people need to come together to address climate change because it impacts all life. "I care about clean water and clean air and having enough food and water for life to sustain itself."

Berg concurred. "We are going to have to step out of our own lives and work on solving the greater problems that threaten all of our lives," he said. "Some of these keynote speakers have done such incredible things, and we want them to show us models that work, get people talking to one another, have them network and then go back home to wherever they live and hopefully take action towards peaceful and sustainable change." Although Berg is stepping down as chair after a seven-year stint, he remains on the board and has worked to bring this dynamic group of speakers together for the three-day peace-seeking conference.

Irwin said that the culture of Mohonk Consultations is embodied by the Smiley's strong Quaker tradition of inclusiveness, consensus, environmental activism, "the recognition of the interdependence of all life on Earth" and volunteerism. "I decided to get involved with this organization because I believe so strongly in its mission. Having attended so many conferences and Distinguished Service Awards events at the Mountain House, I believe that parlor is sacred," Irwin said, referring to the century-long tradition of dignitaries and farmers and religious leaders and politicians all convening in the ornate room to try to deescalate tensions, build peaceful relationships and collaborate on ways to enhance agriculture, nutrition and environmental stewardship.

Keynote speakers Philip Hellmich and Dr. Sakena Yacoobi will address the emerging art of science and peace, and the importance of educating girls and women in cultures that attempt to silence and marginalize them. Panels and breakout sessions will focus on the nuts and bolts of programs and methods that local communities can use to help foster peace and communication where there are divides and breakdowns between various factions. "If people cannot figure out how to get along with each other, then we will not be able to solve serious problems in the world - and those problems are growing," said Berg.

If people are going to come together to address critical issues that face our community, our culture, our environment, our world, there are few places more restorative to the soul and inspiring to the human spirit than Mohonk Mountain House. To learn

NEW PALTZ | PLACE



LAUREN THOMAS

The Testimonial Gateway Tower.

Work proceeding in the Mohonk Preserve Foothills

MOHONK PRESERVE IS has announced that work is proceeding on the organization's first new trailhead in 25 years in the Mohonk Preserve Foothills. The Preserve's contractor, Trinity Construction, is now onsite and work is expected to continue through May 2020 on the Testimonial Gateway Trailhead, which will include off-road parking, an entry booth, kiosks, restrooms, electric vehicle charging stations, landscaping and signage.

Intermittent resurfacing work is also commencing on the Lenape Lane Carriage Road from the Testimonial Gateway Tower to the Lenape Lane Bridge. Stabilization work on the Testimonial Gateway Tower will also be resuming soon, including work on the roof, windows and selected masonry by contractor Yankee Construction.

As an active work site, the Testimonial Gateway Tower area is now closed from Route 299 and Gate House Road to the beginning of the Pin Oak Alley and construction fencing and flagging are in place. No unauthorized access is permitted. Intermittent closures may also occur along Lenape Lane Carriage Road during resurfacing.

Mohonk Preserve reminds visitors to avoid all active work areas, construction vehicles and equipment and respect all posted closures.

For more information on the Mohonk Preserve Foothills project, visit <https://www.mohonkpreserve.org/what-we-do/land-protection/mohonk-preserve-foothills.html>.

more about the upcoming conference or about Mohonk Consultations and its mission and board members, or how to register and get engaged, go <https://mohonk-consultations.org>.

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