



Dark Sky Hero – Susan Harder Case Study

Reducing the intrusion of light on residents and the night sky was a goal Susan Harder set out to accomplish many years ago. Her hard work has not gone unnoticed by those who share her goal. In 2008 she received an Executive Director Special Award from the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA), whose New York state chapter she has led since that year. In 2010, the Sierra Club Long Island Group recognized Susan's efforts by honoring her as "Environmentalist of the Year." The New York Senate also applauded Susan's achievements, stating in a legislative resolution:

"...As President of the Dark Sky's New York Chapter, Susan Harder has been responsible for many important progressive, innovative, environmental contributions to the citizens of this great Empire State; and WHEREAS, In her official acts, Susan Harder has focused her efforts on educating Long Island municipalities and the Long Island Power Authority to implement policies and enact regulations to control light pollution; and WHEREAS, Through Susan Harder's extensive labors, many Long Island communities including Brookhaven, Riverhead, Southold, Southampton, and East Hampton, have now enacted dark sky lighting codes; and WHEREAS, This indomitable woman, eager in her efforts and driven in her initiative, has distinguished herself in her career and her community involvement; the citizens of this great Empire State have profited greatly from her dedication and service..." (K216-2011, Thiele)

Susan's undertaking of reducing light pollution had seemingly small beginnings during the 1990s. As a resident of New York City, she was familiar with excessive artificial lights through her own personal experience with light trespass into her apartment. Enduring light pollution as a city dweller was a source of frustration, but it was a burden that many seemed to tolerate as part of living in a large city. However, experiencing light intruding into her country home in East Hampton, New York, was intolerable. A neighbor's outdoor floodlights were disturbing her sleep at night. For two years she left messages for the neighbor to no avail.

A fortuitous turn of events led Susan to discover the IDA. During a discussion with a community member, Susan learned about the nonprofit group created to address light pollution's effect on dark skies. As a retired art dealer, she had been fully unaware of the growing concern of light pollution—as well as its effects on health and the environment—to organizations like the IDA. After becoming aware of the broader issue and impacts, she immersed herself in learning about light pollution. Her concern grew as she learned about how light affects humans and wildlife such as birds, bats, and algae, and about how sky glow obscures the night sky. She joined the IDA and formed the Dark Sky Society based in Long Island.



As a full-time dark sky advocate, Susan has succeeded in passing legislation to enact lighting regulations that reduce pollution. Although many municipalities continue to implement her recommendations, others are reluctant to make changes. Despite difficulties in encouraging people to change behaviors, Susan continues to educate officials, industry representatives, and citizens on the use of more efficient lighting. She enjoys helping others understand light pollution and the steps they can take to make a difference. All of these actions make Susan, and those who follow in her footsteps, a Dark Sky Hero.

