



## Bottled water foe lauded for dedication

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It was an early gathering of a group worried about water in West Michigan, especially Mecosta County. The talk turned to choosing a leader.

"One of my friends said, 'Terry should be president. She's a librarian. She has organizational skills,'" Terry Swier recalled.

"I thought, 'A president delegates. ... I can delegate,'" she said.

The soft-spoken Swier has done more than gently give orders.

Four years later, Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation, known as MCWC, has 1,800 members. It filed a lawsuit against Nestle Waters North America, the No. 1 water bottler, eventually winning the first phase of the state's most significant environmental dispute of the new century.

Swier, 60, voluntarily travels the state, speaking about water issues that go beyond the debate over pumping millions of gallons southeast of Big Rapids.

Now the Michigan Environmental Council, a Lansing-based coalition of environmental groups, is honoring her with its annual Petoskey Prize, which carries a \$5,000 check for the winner's favorite organization.

"Absolutely speechless. A fantastic honor," said Swier, who will receive the award Oct. 5 in Detroit.

"It shows we know what we're talking about. It gives MCWC more clout," she said, "though I knew we had clout."

Lana Pollack, a former state senator who heads the Michigan Environmental Council, said the prize goes to people in the trenches.

"It's amazing what a grassroots organization can do," she said.

"They did not have the unified support of a lot of people who care about Michigan's water. They had to prove that they were not tilting at windmills," Pollack said. "She was taking on a multinational corporation -- retirees, housewives, folks were doing this."

After a 20-day trial, a judge last year ordered Ice Mountain to stop bottling groundwater that would otherwise feed wetlands and a stream called Dead Stream. He said the constant pumping spoiled the rights of property owners along the stream.

The case now rests in the state appeals court, where Ice Mountain, joined by Gov. Jennifer

Granholm, has persuaded it to allow the company to continue pumping while Judge Lawrence Root's rulings are reviewed.

Even Ice Mountain acknowledges Swier's effectiveness, although the company insists it is doing no harm.

"We may agree to disagree on the crux of the issue, but she has been a passionate advocate for her cause. She's been a tremendous coordinator," spokeswoman Deb Muchmore said.

Swier and husband Gary moved to Mecosta County's Horsehead Lake in 1999, on property that has been in her family for three generations.

The lake is north of Ice Mountain's wells and bottling factory. But that didn't diminish the couple's interest in the plan to capture and sell local groundwater. They went to a meeting in 2000 to hear an Ice Mountain representative.

"We're not scientists. I don't think I knew what an aquifer was. I probably did, but it wasn't one of my vocabulary words," Swier said. "All of us shook our heads and decided we needed to do some research. MCWC was formed the next week."

The group's interests have grown beyond the Ice Mountain case. Swier goes around the state telling people how Michigan virtually has no restrictions on large-scale water withdrawals.

Granholm has proposed new limits, but the legislation is stalled in the Republican-controlled Legislature. Swier's group wants tougher restrictions than those offered by the governor.

She will give her \$5,000 award to MCWC, which definitely needs the money. It still has \$400,000 in bills related to the lawsuit. And the legal dispute is far from over.

"We have bake sales, garage sales -- whatever we can come up with," Swier said. "I don't ever see an end to this organization."

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