



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



Volume 19, number 6

November 2016

**There is no November meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild.** Stop by the guild table at the Arts of the Angler show in Danbury, CT on November 5 and 6 and the International Fly Tying Symposium in Somerset, NJ, on November 19 and 20. See the ad at the end of this issue of the *Gazette*.

## Tyers Needed

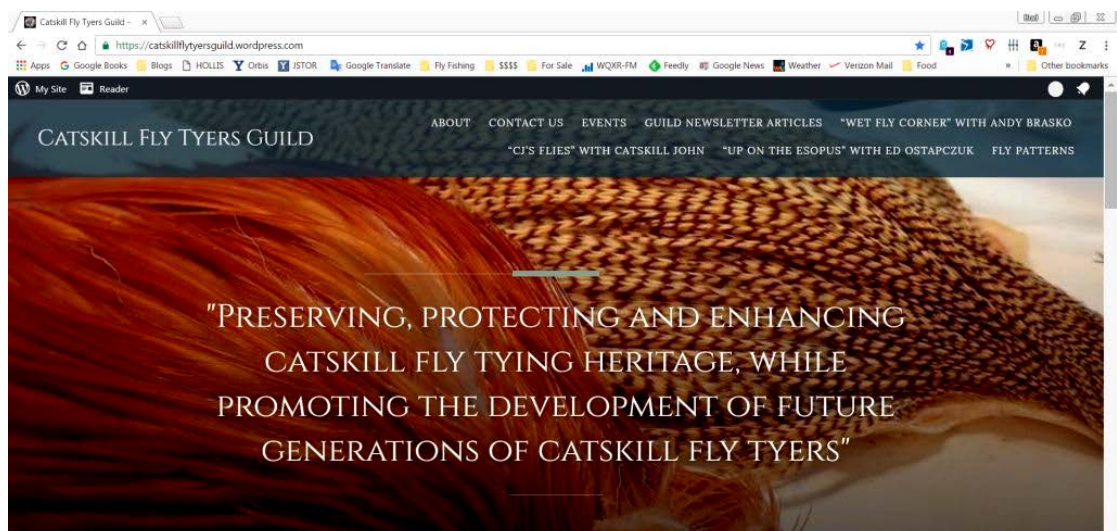
If you'd like to tie for the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild at the International Fly Tying Symposium on November 19 and 20, 2016, or The Fly Fishing Show on January 27, 28, and 29, 2017, both in Somerset, NJ, contact John Kavanaugh at [flymank@optonline.net](mailto:flymank@optonline.net), call his cell at (973) 219-7696 and leave a message with your contact information, or contact him via his Facebook page.

## Meeting Program Demos Needed

Got a hot fly or a slick technique you'd like to share with other members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild? Have you made an interesting presentation to your local club that you would like to repeat for the guild at a future meeting? Contact the program chair, Gary Moleon, [myvettech@yahoo.com](mailto:myvettech@yahoo.com) or 201-921-8136. Help us make guild meetings the place to be on the third Saturday of each month.

## Catskill Fly Tyers Guild: The Blog

Many guild members have noticed that Facebook has made the Catskill Fly Tyers page unreadable unless the viewer has opened a Facebook account, which some don't want to do. As an alternative, Nicole March has created a Catskill Fly Tyers presence on the blog site Wordpress. Just go to <https://catskillflytyersguild.wordpress.com>. At the bottom of the main page, you'll see an option to follow the site, in which case you'll receive e-mail notices of new posts. The site contains reports on events, older *Gazette* articles and book reviews, columns by Andy Brasko, "Catskill John" Bonasera, and Ed Ostapczuk, and much more. Many thanks to Nicole for doing this. Check it out.





*CJ's Flies*  
With "Catskill John" Bonasera

## Winter

The State of New York hung the CLOSED sign on my stream a few weeks ago. Many of the Sullivan County streams close in the fall for various reasons, and mine holds the distinction of closing early and opening late. For this tributary of the Delaware, the early closing gives the spawning run of browns in the fall a chance to get in without being bothered by anglers and the spawning spring rainbows a chance to get out, again without fishing pressure.

This is also the month I winterize and close down the summer place in preparation for the winter. It's my eighth year performing this seemingly simple task, yet for me, it's still very stressful. I never really know if I got all the water out of the plumbing, and I'm always worried that a tree may land on the roof and about any of the things that could happen that potentially delay a painless reopening in April.

The 2016 fishing season was an unusual one for me. We had a terrific spring opener, and it's the first year since I started fishing that I landed a bragging-size fish on Opening Day. Historically, at least in my history, catching trout on April 1 is quite a feat. Conditions are almost always far from optimum, with very cold water, sometimes with ice mixed in, air temperatures that require winter clothes, and with iced guides, wind, snow . . . you name it. This spring, we had good flows, rain when we needed it, and the fishing was pretty good all the way into June. Then the conditions took a turn for the worse, and the rest of the year was dry, the streams went away, and the fishing on the freestone waters all but ended. As I write this, we are still under a drought warning, something that the Department of Environmental Protection initiated over a month ago. New York City's precious reservoirs are at a serious low right now.

The upside of the regular season ending is reflection. It's a time to reflect on the places you went, the fish you caught and lost, the patterns that worked, and the ideas you got to improve for next year. I sometimes think I have this game almost figured out, but then I have an outing when I feel like I just started fishing that morning. You could do this for a hundred years and still not know half of what there is to know.

I cleaned some of my gear today, put a thin coat of wax on my go-to fly rod, cleaned and dressed the fly line, and lubed the reel. I have a bunch of slots to refill in the fly boxes and have a small hole to patch in my waders. I have some ideas about tweaking a bunch of patterns a little to match some situations I came across this year. I bought new materials that I haven't even used on a fly yet!

Winter also is the show season and a great time to hold small tying sessions with friends. All in all, even with the low water we encountered this summer and fall, it was still a good year. If you're getting out on the stream sometimes, catching a trout or two, learning something new or seeing wildlife you haven't seen, it's a good trip. I look forward to next year, but still enjoy the winter, even if I am not fishing.



*Looking Back Upstream*

## Dry-Fly Hackle: What a Long Strange Trip It's Been

By John Merola

My odyssey through the land of dry-fly hackle started around 1970. I had become a member of the Southern New York Sportsmen's Association and entered their essay contest for youth members. I guess I was a better writer back then, since I found myself headed to Camp DeBruce Environmental Education Camp in the Catskills on a scholarship granted to the winners of the contest.

“The cabbage is roughly the consistency of the human head,” said the firearms safety instructor as he walked some paces away from the cabbage he had placed on a stump. He fired a shotgun and exclaimed “Coleslaw!” After this unforgettable demonstration, we were led up to one of the buildings for a fly-tying demonstration.

The counselor had the materials laid out on the table. While the demonstration was in progress, I saw an older gentleman standing in the doorway. He was brought in and introduced to us “This is Mr. Roy Steenrod.” I wish I knew then what I know now!

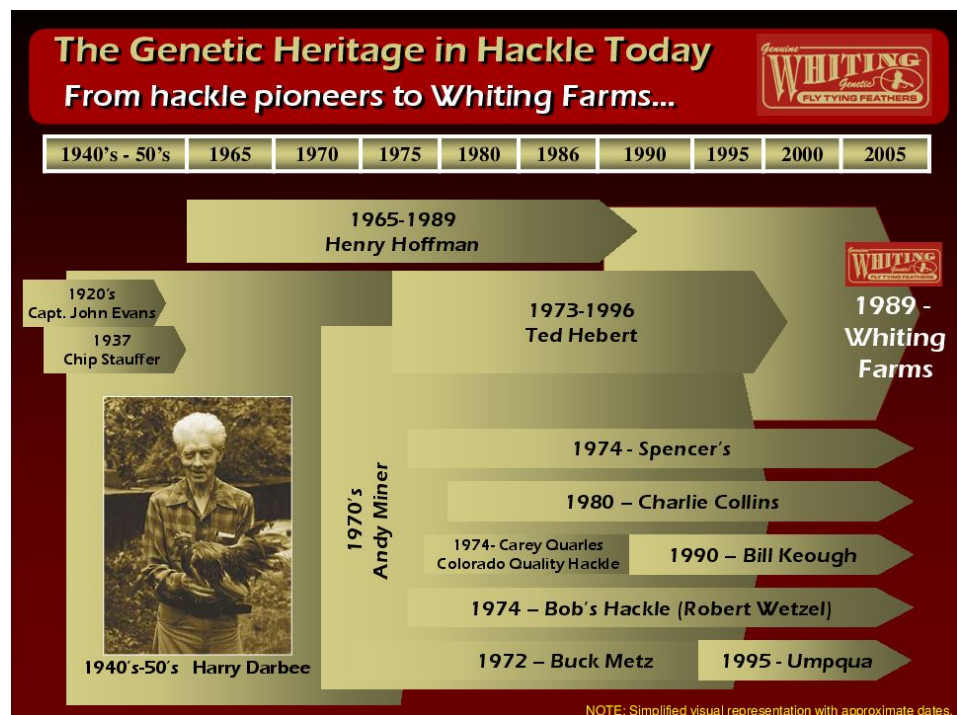
The end result of all of this was a raging desire for me to get better at fly tying and obtain materials. I found myself scouting the ads in the back of *Field and Stream* and began ordering from Reed Tackle, in Caldwell, New Jersey, and the Fireside Angler, in Melville, New York. I was tying mostly Bergman-style wets with the materials I had been able to get, and I had some loose hackle in cellophane packets. Soon it was time to jump into the deep end of the pool and get a rooster cape.

I asked my father to take me to the Fireside Angler; we were living in Douglaston, New York, at the time, so it was a ride of about forty minutes to get there. I still remember walking into what was essentially the mail-order distribution area. It was set up with metal shelving and cardboard boxes to hold the various items. I was greeted by Eric Leiser, who after being shown my sad attempts at quill-winged wet flies told me in a nice way that I could do better. That same day I left with a Plymouth Rock grizzly neck and several imported necks my father was nice enough to purchase for me. I would follow Eric up to the Fly Fisherman’s Bookcase and Tackle Service when he sold his share in Fireside Angler.

On August 4, 1973, I purchased a copy of Eric’s first book, *Fly-Tying Materials*. He inscribed it to me as follows: “‘The angler though tired never tires.’ Best wishes for a full life of tight lines and the time to enjoy it all.” Thank you for that blessing Eric. It seems to have worked so far.

The book included a section on photo dyeing to get the color dun, and in fact, photo-dyed dun was what you were able to get at this point. Mike Valla fully chronicles Eric’s journey from the Fireside Angler, to the

Bookcase, to River’s Gate in the January/February 2011 edition of *Eastern Fly Fishing* (which you can get as a download for \$4.99), so I won’t re-create the wheel here. Around this same time, down in Pennsylvania, Bucky Metz had gone into the large-scale breeding of roosters specifically for fly tying. Good friend and fellow guild member Doc Katz recalls getting his first Metz capes from Fly Fisher’s Paradise while he was a graduate student at Penn State around 1973.



The chart graciously supplied to us by Whiting Farms ([www.whitingfarms.com](http://www.whitingfarms.com)) shows the development of genetic hackle. Harry Darbee rightfully stands as the forefather of many of the beautiful duns that have made their way to us. Mike Valla’s *Tying Catskill Dry Flies* has a beautiful chapter on the history of hackle breeders, including a nice part on Doc Fried. I recall Dave Brandt telling me at the CFFCM show when the book was coming out that it was “Delicious!”

After completing my graduate studies, I moved to New Haven, Connecticut, in the summer of 1986. This was the beginning of my really starting to acquire quantities of great hackle. My first Metz blue duns came from the late Dom Piscitelli of Piscitelli's Rod and Gun in a fantastic package deal he put together for me. I also had joined the Housatonic Flyfisherman's Association at this time and met some great fly tyers who helped me along, in particular John "Moose" Bellows and Paul Uhlan, who are currently striper fishing together in heaven, I have no doubt. The late Gabe Macare's Mill River Fly Shop had a good selection of Metz, and I would buy a cape here and there on my way to HFFA meetings, since I now had a driver's license and my own money. I was able to take a few intermediate classes with Dick Talleur at the Mill River Shop right before he was to become one of the first professionals to take up the Whiting banner.

While Metz was busy supplying many more fly tyers with good hackle, Henry Hoffman was developing his flock of Super Grizzlies, which would be ultimately taken over by Dr. Tom Whiting, as shown in the chart. I recall Dick Talleur relating a story in writing of how he was able to get a few Hoffman saddles in a back-room deal while he was at Blue Ribbon Flies. Not many people got their hands on Hoffman saddles until Dr. Whiting took over. I bought my first Hoffman saddles at The Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, New Jersey, at the Blue Ribbon Flies table around 1990. Most, if not all of the duns originally available in the Whiting Hoffman line were dyed.

Now we are approaching the turning point in the availability of natural blue duns by the everyday fly tier . . . the acquisition by Dr. Whiting of the Hebert/Miner genetic stock.

Andy Miner, Jr., was the "Johnny Appleseed" of the hackle world, according to Dr. Tom Whiting in his excellent article on poultry breeding, available for free from the Whiting Web site. He notes that Metz, Keough, and Collins all founded their production with Miner stock. Dr. Whiting acquired the genetic line that he trademarks as Hebert/Miner hackle in 1996. He explains that this designation is to "delineate that its origin was from Andy Miner through Ted Hebert." This line is promoted by Dr. Whiting as the traditionalist's choice. Incidentally, the four breeders mentioned here constitute the bulk of my hackle collection, which I estimate is 60 percent Whiting Hoffman and Hebert/Miner and 40 percent Metz, Keough, and Collins, combined. One of the primary impacts of the Hebert/Miner line was to make natural duns available to a greater number of fly tyers. Being a traditionalist myself, I can confess that I have examples of Hebert/Miner duns in at least six different shades.

Bill "Bugs" Logan did a very nice article on the colors of hackle available today called "Cool Shades" (*Fly Tyer*, Autumn 2016). He calls the dun color selection a "vast gray area." He shows ten shades of solid dun and ten shades of barred dun. Of the ten shades of barred duns, eight are from Charlie Collins. This is not surprising, since Charlie has very beautiful barred colors in his flock. To paraphrase Charlie from a recent conversation, "There are things the little guys can do that the big guys can't and things the big guys can do that the little guys can't." The twenty-first century tyer has a selection of hackle available that we would never have even dreamed of in the earlier years of fly tying.

Whether to buy capes or saddles is a question that has been asked by many fly tiers. My answer is "both," but there is an expense associated with doing it this way. For more on this subject, take a look at Tim Cammisa's video "Fly Tying: Differences Between Saddle Hackle and Capes," available on YouTube.

In reality, the fly-tying hackle market is a niche market. We saw just how much of a niche market it was when the hairdressers decimated the availability of grizzly dry-fly saddles, as well as other colors. My friend Dave Goulet, former proprietor of the Classic and Custom Fly Shop on the Farmington River, tells me that this started in 2010 in California. More than a few fly tyers took advantage of this situation by cashing out some of their saddle collection. Once the hair fad was over, some of the saddles found their way back into the marketplace. I fairly recently bought a nice dun saddle from a hairdresser on eBay for thirty dollars.

So with so much beautiful hackle available today, how do you go about assembling a nice collection without having to liquidate your retirement account? I look to a hackle co-op with my

friends. I have had the opportunity over the past decade to get very good deals on larger quantities of necks—six or more. We split the cost, then we split the necks. We have become very accurate at cutting rooster necks in half with a razor blade, then we do a round robin, each choosing a half neck in turn.



Charlie Collins Rooster-Neck Poker. "I'll see your dun and raise you a golden grizzly."

They also sell half saddles this way, which might be a good way to add some saddle hackle to your collection. Whiting sells tailing packs, too. Their coq de leon tailing packs are very beautiful but, also top dollar as far as tailing goes.

So get together with some friends, buy a bunch of hackle, and split it up. Isn't sharing ideas and materials with friends a good part of what this is all about?

As we near the end of this journey through over four decades of hackle, I look back at all the fun times and friends I have made over the years through fly tying and fly fishing. My first fly tying demonstration at DeBruce in the presence of Roy Steenrod leaves me as an adult whose favorite dry fly is the Catskill-style Light Hendrickson. The kindness and generosity of my father, John A. Merola, and my early mentor, Eric Leiser, have left me as an adult with a lifetime hobby.

To my friends in the Catskill Fly Tiers Guild, the Housatonic Fly Fishers, and the Farmington River Anglers, thanks for all the years of companionship. To my friends who are no longer with us, Paul, Moose, Ed, and all the others who took me under their wings as a young adult, I miss you all and ask that you reserve me a place at your celestial tying table.

## The Black Gnat: A Classic Wet Fly

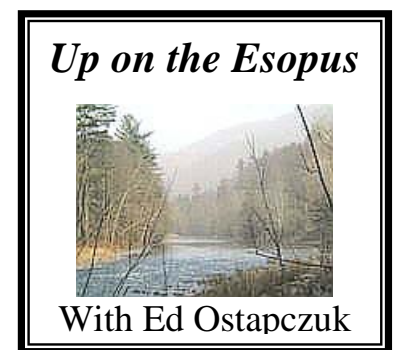
Several angling-authors attribute the Black Gnat to Dame Juliana Berners, back about the time Christopher Columbus "discovered" America. In fact, John Waller Hills affirms this detail in *A History of Fly Fishing for Trout*, while Terry Hellekson's epic work *Fish Flies* adds that the Black Gnat is "an old English pattern that has been altered in many ways through the years." Most folks associate the pattern with the insect order Diptera, and some, like me, tie the wet fly using black chenille. But not everyone.

Legendary Pennsylvania angler Jim Leisenring used "large black feathers such as turkey, raven and crow secondaries" to make "killing bodies for tiny Black Gnats," tied with crimson or claret silk. However, in Freshet Press's 1971 reprint of Rube Cross's two books as *The Complete Fly Tyer*, this Catskill tyer included a pattern that was all black.

In *The Practical Fly Fisherman*, A. J. McClane noted: "The Black Gnat is as old as angling itself. There is a question whether this pattern imitates anything in particular or everything in general." McClane went on to write: "Early British angling historians tell us that the Gnat imitates a member of

Another excellent way to add to your collection is to buy Charlie Collins's commercial grab bags and split the lot with a friend. While Charlie doesn't guarantee what colors you will get, I haven't got a bad one yet. His tailing packs also fill the void for tailing material that has come about as a result of spade hackle not appearing on necks the way it used to. Buy some at the International Fly Tying Symposium coming up soon. Dave Brandt, in his excellent DVD, *Tying Catskill Dry Flies*, points out that he looks for necks that still have good hackle for tailing. I do that too, particularly at table sales and shows. I have found older Metz number 3s that have a ton of spade hackles on them.

On the Whiting front, I recently purchased one of their "Introductory" hackle packs when Cabela's had them on sale and was pleased with it. Can you ever have enough black, brown, grizzly, and dun capes? (There are four half capes in this pack.)



the order Diptera.” Also: “There are numerous variations of the Black Gnat. . . . This somber ‘bug’ is widely used throughout out the United States.” In *Trout*, Ray Bergman wrote that the fly is “especially effective in the Northern brook trout country where black flies make life miserable in the early season,” and “this old-timer will always come in handy at some time or other if you give it a chance.” The pattern was included in Bergman’s list of essential wet flies.

It’s interesting that Dave Hughes, in *Wet Flies*, remarked, “The Black Gnat is an excellent solution when winged ants and the general run of terrestrial beetles trundle around near the water, and often plummet into it.” Hughes continued: “The black wet fly is usually a better solution than any dry fly when these insects are out.”

Per Eric Leiser’s *Book of Fly Patterns*, below is the pattern I favor, tied on a size 14 wet-fly hook. This pattern is consistent with the one listed in Mike Valla’s *Classic Wet Fly Box* and Bergman’s *Trout*.

Hook: Wet-fly hook, size 12 to 16  
Thread: Black  
Tail: none  
Body: Fine black chenille  
Wing: Slate mallard quill  
Hackle: Black hen



This past summer, I “rediscovered” some Black Gnats hidden in my wet-fly book for many years, if not decades. I didn’t fish them in any traditional manner, but rather hung the wet fly some six inches below a dry fly while pursuing brook trout on the upper reaches of the Neversink. In the well-shaded, dark, chilly waters, I found wild trout very responsive to this nondescript generic pattern representing nothing special, but everything a trout might eat. During one outing, small black ants were active, and Dave Hughes was proven correct in his assessment of this wet. Trout took to it like kids unleashed in a candy store.

In the next issue of the *Gazette*, I plan to reexplore some outstanding questions about Catskill fly tyer and fisher Ed Sens, perhaps the best unheralded Catskill trout fisher of the early twentieth century. Refer to your June and August 2013 issues and stayed tuned.

## Obituary: Jack Pangburn

Jack Pangburn passed away on September 20, 2016. He was a respected fly tyer of world-class standing, having won the open fly-tying competition sponsored by Partridge of Redditch, UK, the Mustad Scandinavian Open in Elverum, Norway, the World Tuscany Open, and a world fly-tying competition in Sansepolero, Italy. His original patterns and art appeared regularly in Amato’s *Flyfishing and Tying Journal*, and he posted on several Web sites. The November 2007 issue of the UK’s *Fly Fishing and Fly Tying* featured an article with artwork. His artistic work also was featured in the New York State 2002–2006 fishing regulations guide, and he wrote and illustrated a new book: *Deer-Hair Fly-Tying Guidebook*, published by Amato Books. Another book, *Waet Fli Fenix: Rebirth of the Wet Fly*, is in production. He was an Orvis fly-tying instructor and a member of the Federation of Fly Fishers, the United Fly Tyers, the Fly Dressers guild (UK), the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, and the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. He was a longtime member of Trout Unlimited and recipient of TU’s Silver Trout Conservation Award.

From Tom McCoy:

When the guys planned the first LI Fly Fishing Expo last spring, they invited Jack to be a part of it. He was there with his lovely wife, Shirley, and they were both smiling as so many stopped by to say hello. He had a special quality about him, one that you sensed without asking about it. A spiritual man who gave freely of himself and his talent.

I always felt a special closeness with him although I never walked through his door. That happens rarely to me. Eye to eye, we seemed to connect.

When Jack offered his Durham Ranger in a glass dome to benefit Casting for Recovery, I bought a couple of tickets hoping to win, which I didn't. He sent me a photo of the fly to use in the LITU newsletter. I framed it and hung it in my office. Over the years I wanted to ask him to make me one but never got around to it.

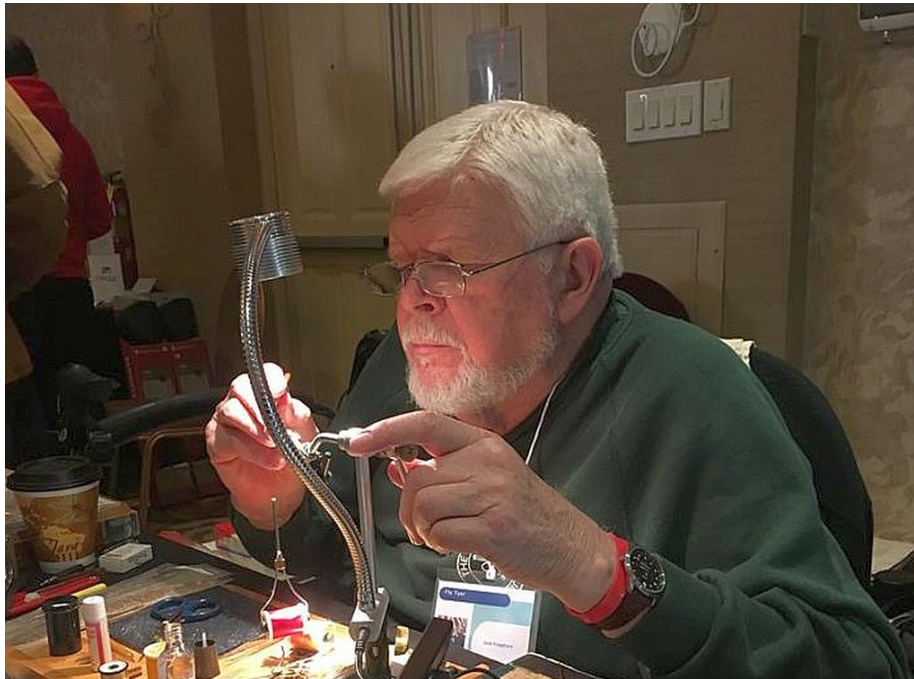
He donated so much to the organizations he loved: artwork, books, flies, and most of all, his time. We have a few of his drawings, books, and flies in our home and enjoy proudly showing them to guests.

When I wrote my books, I sent him copies; one for him and one for his buddy Howie Applegate. Because of Jack, *Letters to Mack* was reviewed in the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Newsletter. He was always encouraging and supportive.

Jack lived in the neighborhood I grew up in. He went to the church where I went to Boy Scout meetings. We may have crossed paths much earlier but there is no way to know.

What I do know is that I liked him. I liked him a lot and I am going to miss him being there. Being here.

Rest in Peace my friend.



—From Tom's Fishing Stories, <http://tomsfishingstories.com>.



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, [budbynack@verizon.net](mailto:budbynack@verizon.net) or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.



# THE CATSKILL FLY FISHING CENTER & MUSEUM

*Preserving America's Fly Fishing Heritage*

## The Arts of the Angler Show

November 5 and November 6

Ethan Allen Inn

Danbury, CT

Daily Admission \$12: Weekend Pass \$20

Kids 12 and under FREE

Hours: Saturday 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Sunday 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

The Arts of the Angler is a full-feature fly fishing show in an elegant atmosphere. Here one will find the finest contemporary and collectible fly-fishing tackle and accessories, fly-tying materials and display flies, books, gifts, and destination, instruction, guiding, and other services for the fly-fishing community. Saturday features a silent auction with items sure to be of interest to the discerning collector and aficionado. Environmental attorney, cinematographer, and fly fisherman Ted Rogowski is the featured speaker at the Thirty-Fifth Celebration Dinner at 5:30 P.M. on Saturday.



## The 26th Anniversary International Fly Tying Symposium



November 19 and 20, 2016

At the Garden State Exhibit Center

Somerset, NJ

SATURDAY: 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

SUNDAY: 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

ADULTS: \$15.00 SATURDAY

\$12.00 SUNDAY

Weekend Pass: \$22.00

For more information, go to: <http://www.internationalflytyingsymposium.com>.