

Long-Time Member Profile: Joel H. Sachs

For this issue we have focused our Long-Time Member profile on Joel H. Sachs, who is a Senior Counsel at Keane and Beane, P.C. in White Plains and is the founding member of its Environmental Practice Group. Joel was one of the first to chair the Environmental & Energy Law Section and was one of the first environmental attorneys to receive the Section's Annual Award.

Joel has been a real pioneer in the field. He has practiced in state government, local government, and private law firms. He represents private entities and governmental agencies in a wide variety of environmental, land development, real estate, and zoning matters. What is most unusual about Joel is that he became an environmental attorney even though at the time he went to law school, University of Pennsylvania (J.D.) and New York University (LL.M), environmental law was not part of any law school curriculum.

As an attorney at the New York State Attorney General's Office in the 1970s, Joel played a significant role in the development of environmental law in New York. He was the first Deputy Chief of the Environmental Protection Bureau at the Attorney General's Office, the first such bureau in any state Attorney General's Office. Thereafter, he served several years as an attorney for the Town of Greenburgh, where he handled a variety of environmental issues.

When I asked Joel about important cases or projects that he handled, the first that he mentioned was early in his career. In the early 1970s he was lead counsel for New York State in an original jurisdiction lawsuit in the U.S. Supreme Court. The case was brought by the State of Vermont, which sued the State of New York and International Paper Company with regard to a paper mill on Lake Champlain that was causing air and water pollution issues in Vermont. The trial went on for months in New York City, Boston, and Burlington, Vermont, and the result was that the mill, which was something of an envi-



ronmental disaster, was closed, rebuilt, and has since operated without major pollution problems.

Another matter Joel described involved his representation of Key West, Florida. The city was concerned about the United States Navy's desire to locate new Navy housing in the City of Key West's Historic District. A NEPA lawsuit brought by Joel on behalf of the city forced the U.S. Navy to go through the full EIS process. However, rather than go through the entire process, the Navy decided to construct its housing in another part of Key West.

As an environmental attorney, I often hear that we are the people who say no, the people who block projects. I therefore find it very interesting that the first two projects that Joel mentioned were matters in which his role was not just to say no—it was to make sure that things were done in a manner that followed the requirements that were in place to protect the environment.

Joel has enjoyed writing and lecturing on environmental law matters for many years and has been given numerous awards for his contributions to environmental law. He has been teaching environmental law and municipal law courses as an Adjunct Professor at Pace Law School for more than 30 years. He is annually recognized as a Best Lawyer and as a Super Lawyer in the areas of environmental law and litigation. Joel has also been very active through his involvement in the New York State Bar Association. He has been Section Chair of both the Environmental & Energy Law Section and the Real Property Law Section and remains active in the New York State Bar Association.

Outside of his law practice, Joel enjoys the outdoors, including swimming, hiking, and golfing. He has two daughters who are also practicing attorneys.

Aaron Gershonowitz