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Photos Available Upon Request

BEAR MOUNTAIN BRIDGE MUSEUM DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF RICHY VACEK, FORMER BRIDGE FOREMAN

The New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA) and the nonprofit Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley (HBHV) announced that the museum and classroom space in the administration building at the Bear Mountain Bridge has been ceremonially designated as the “Richy Vacek Bear Mountain Bridge Museum,” in honor of the bridge’s late foreman. The two organizations gathered with family and friends of Mr. Vacek at a special dedication of the museum in October.



Left to right: Kathy Burke, Director of Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley; Lauren Melendez, Deputy Executive Director of the New York State Bridge Authority; Dawn Vacek, who was married to the late Richy Vacek.

The museum space began as a passion project of Mr. Vacek, an Orange County resident who began his career with the Bridge Authority at the age of 19, working at the Bear Mountain Bridge for over 30 years before retiring as foreman. While working at the bridge, Mr. Vacek began to collect and preserve various artifacts related to the bridge’s history and engineering. The displays he put together in the garage underneath the administration building would morph into the museum and classroom space that has come to be used in later years. In retirement, Mr. Vacek remained committed to

preserving and promoting the Hudson Valley's history and natural beauty. His service in the community included time as a founding board member of Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley, which organizes visits to the bridge museum and utilizes the Bridge Authority spans as tools in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education.

The museum and classroom space is open by appointment for visits from schools and other groups. Visitors are able to view artifacts and interpretive panels, as well as get an inside look at the engineering of the bridge and its continued maintenance. The bridge museum provides a great stop for groups looking to organize field trips to nearby parks, museums, and historic sites in Orange and Rockland Counties. Interested groups can learn more on HBHV's website at www.hbhv.org.

Dr. Minosca Alcantara, NYSBA Executive Director, said: "Richy was a teacher, mentor, and a friend who graced the Bear Mountain Bridge with his curiosity, his passion, and his love of this iconic structure. He was the everyday hero, the American worker who quietly walks among us and goes above and beyond his job description. We hope that the naming of this museum will inspire generations of New Yorkers to learn the story of Richy's contributions to NYSBA and its history, as well as inspire future careers in the STEM fields."

Kathryn Burke, Director of Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley, said: "One of the ways Richy was special was the way he loved and cared for the Bear Mountain Bridge. It was more than just a job. When he first created this museum space, he was able to help others know and love the bridge just like he did. His displays helped plant the seed for what became HBHV as an organization. Groups that visit this space quickly come to realize what important and special structures these bridges are for the Hudson Valley. It's because of people like Richy, who was so passionate about his work, that bridges like the Bear Mountain are standing strong nearly a century after they were first built."

The New York State Bridge Authority (NYSBA) operates the Bear Mountain, Newburgh-Beacon, Mid-Hudson, Kingston-Rhinecliff and Rip Van Winkle Bridges. It also owns and maintains the structure of the Walkway Over the Hudson pedestrian bridge. The Authority is funded principally from bridge tolls and receives no state or federal tax monies for bridge maintenance and operation. Learn more at www.nysba.ny.gov.

Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley (HBHV) was founded to promote the cultural awareness and general knowledge of Hudson Valley bridge history and the art of civil engineering, architecture, and bridge science. The organization also serves as a curator and custodian of historical artifacts regarding the vehicular bridges owned by the New York State Bridge Authority. STEM curriculum and other learning tools utilizing the NYSBA bridges are available by request for educators. Learn more at www.hbhv.org.

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