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Citation to Paul E. Olsen, 2024 Joe Webb Peoples Award Recipient

By Peter Drzewiecki

The Geological Society of Connecticut is pleased to honor **Paul E. Olsen** with the 2024 Joe Webb Peoples Award for his contributions to our understanding of the geology of Connecticut through decades of scholarship and education. While Paul's recent research on the sedimentology, paleoecology and dinosaur paleontology of the Hartford Basin is well known to many society members, it may be less known that his interest in these subjects began way back near the Triassic/Jurassic boundary, when he was a teenager growing up in New Jersey. He and a friend were responsible for the establishment of the Riker Hill Fossil Site, which preserves over 1000 dinosaur tracks. This process involved writing a letter and sending a plaster cast of a track to then US President Richard Nixon, and ultimately ended with a Presidential Commendation and a story in Life magazine in 1970.

From there, Paul attended Yale University where he earned a BA in 1978 and a PhD in 1984. His doctoral thesis focused on lacustrine sedimentology of the Newark Basin, but he did see the wisdom of expanding into Connecticut's Hartford Basin and other east coast rift basins. Throughout his career at the Lamont Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbia University, Paul has continued to work in the Connecticut rift basins. Some of his major accomplishments include improving our overall understanding of Newark Supergroup stratigraphy and paleolimnology, demonstrating a Milankovitch control on the Van Houten cyclicity preserved in the lacustrine strata, refining the ages of the stratigraphic units as well as the position of the Triassic/Jurassic boundary, improving our understanding of rift basin dynamics, and publishing on discoveries related to early Mesozoic fossils. While moving into a more international theater over more recent decades, with major projects in Arizona and China, Paul has continued to deepen his roots in the Hartford and Newark Basins. His global projects pertaining to the

emplacement of the Central Atlantic Magmatic Province basalts and their impact on the timing, cause, and species dynamics of the End Triassic Extinction Event at the Triassic/Jurassic boundary rely heavily on work in Connecticut. Currently, he is co-leading a team that is hoping to get NSF funding to drill a core at Dinosaur State Park in order to test the hypothesis that volcanic winters associated with basalt emplacement led to the global rise of dinosaur dominance in the earliest Jurassic.

Paul has been a valued member of the Geological Society of Connecticut since its establishment, most recently leading a field trip in the Hartford Basin for society members earlier this fall. Since the 1980's, he has led almost a dozen fieldtrips in the Hartford Basin. I have been on at least 3 trips, and I am always impressed with Paul's deep, interdisciplinary comprehension of the basin geology, creativity of his research ideas, and the enthusiasm with which he shares these ideas in the field with his colleagues. By sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm on these trips, Paul is helping to build and promote Connecticut's geological heritage.

Finally, I want to mention Paul's merits as a colleague. Those who have been lucky enough to have worked with him over the decades of his career speak highly of their interactions with him, and the genuine interest he has in sharing his knowledge. A few years back, as a newcomer to the rock types preserved in the Hartford Basin, I found Paul to be very happy to share his experience and ideas with unabated excitement, and to encourage involvement in his work. Currently, I doubt anyone would challenge him for the title of "Wikipedia of Hartford Basin Geology", and he continues to start projects that drive research on Connecticut geology into the future.

With the 2024 Joe Webb Peoples Award, The Connecticut Geological Society thanks Paul for all he has done to promote Connecticut geology and looks forward to what comes next.