

Oral surgeon/outdoors enthusiast gives \$2.2 million to CNY Land Trust in his will

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Bob Vitkus, an oral surgeon who died recently and donated \$2.2 million to the Central NY Land Trust in his will, casts an artificial fly while fishing the Bighorn River in Montana for trout.

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Dr. Robert Vitkus believed time spent outdoors with family and friends was a gift to be shared.

Vitkus, of Fayetteville, an oral surgeon who recently died following a long battle with pancreatic cancer, left \$2.2 million in his will to the Central New York Land Trust – money that will be used to support watershed protection, public access, recreation, hunting, fishing and forest management.

Vitkus, 67, never married or had children. He was wedded to the outdoors and enjoyed countless hours in the woods hunting or on waters fishing, or on mountain slopes skiing, said his brother, Jim.

“Bob always wanted to do something for wildlife and to promote hunting and fishing,” Jim said.

Born and raised in Endicott, N.Y., the two Vitkus boys grew up fishing the pond in their backyard and were active in Boy Scouts and frequently went on camping trips. Their father, Walter, an avid outdoorsman, taught them from an early age how to hunt and fish.

A graduate of Georgetown University Dental School, Vitkus began his oral surgery practice in the Central New York area in the 1980s and never left. He was past president of the Onondaga County Dental Society and member of the 5th District Dental Society, Dewitt Rod and Gun Club, Ruffed Grouse Society of Central New York and the Syracuse/Canadian Fish and Game Club (Mexico, NY).



Bob Vitkus, an oral surgeon, was taught to hunt at an early age by his father, Walter. He's pictured here with an impressive buck he shot in DeRuyter in Madison County.

Whether it was bone fishing in the Caribbean, trout fishing in Montana or hunting ruffed grouse, deer or wild turkey in Upstate New York, Vitkus was "all in" when it came to getting outdoors. He frequently entertained family and friends at his camp at Hardscrabble Point on the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake.

He also enjoyed shooting trap and skeet at the rod and gun club.

"Give Bob a shotgun and he could hit anything within the gun's limits," Jim said during the eulogy at his brother's funeral. "We called him 'Deadeye Vitkus.' He just never missed. Some say a master hunter in NYS is someone who has shot a huge buck, 10 or more grouse in a season, and called in and shot a big long-beard tom turkey. Bob did this on at least four occasions."

Marty Talcik, a retired dentist was among his closest companions and was the one who convinced him to get his two hunting dogs -- Fred and Sadie -- two German shorthaired pointers. Vitkus used the dogs to hunt ruffed grouse, woodcock and occasionally pheasant.



Bob Vitkus loved to fish and made a point to wet his line in a multitude of waters -- in the Caribbean, Montana and Upstate NY. Here, he holds a rainbow trout he landed fishing the Bighorn River in Montana.

Although feeling weak from his cancer treatments Vitkus tried to enjoy the outdoors as long as he could. He and Talcik were out wild turkey hunting this past May, a little more than a month before he died on June 22.

And it was Talcik who introduced Vitkus to Albert Joerger, executive director of the Central New York Land Trust. Talcik, Joerger and brother Jim talked with Bob about the donation and then the three walked Land Trust land just south of Lourdes Camp on Skaneateles Lake.

They saw a deer and some turkey during the outing on the hundred acres that stretch from the road down to the lake. Spotting the wildlife was a good sign, Jim said.

“Bob signed the papers (for the donation) about a week before he died,” he said, stressing that it was his brother’s wish that hunting and fishing be allowed whenever possible on lands in which his money was used.

“He was intent on wanting to conserve the natural habitats he so enjoyed, and it was his hope to create an environmental legacy here in our community,” said Joerger of the Land Trust.

“Over time, the cumulative benefit of his gift will be priceless.”

The Central New York Land Trust is a charitable organization protecting water quality in Central New York since 1972. With more than 46 preserves and 3,000 acres with public access, the Land Trust “seeks to preserve and protect natural areas in order to provide our communities clean water, clean air, wildlife habitat, and a chance to connect with the land.”

For more, see the Land Trust’s [website](#).