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Worm farmer, S.I. naturalist John Karl remembered in street renaming

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John Karl and his duck "Duck Duck." (Courtesy of Elizabeth Zimmerman)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — Lifelong Great Kills resident John Karl passed away in August 2019. But the Staten Island naturalist and master composter who worked at the [Staten Island] Mall Greenmarket is remembered fondly by friends and family. In his honor the corner of Ramble Road and Adrienne Place will be renamed to memorialize him.

Karl's long-time friend, Kevin Mooney, helped coordinate the effort through Councilman Joe Borelli's office with Frank Rapacciuolo. Borelli will unveil the newly named street on Friday at 1 p.m. Karl, a paraplegic since 11 years old after a fall from a roof, was a passionate fisherman who kayaked and worked to preserve the borough's natural habitat. Mooney said his lifestyle "inspired and impressed" him.

Flashback to 2009: A paraplegic since age 11 after a fall from a roof, John Karl enjoyed fishing, crabbing, kayaking, caring for animals and his back-yard garden. "John never changed. He was the same strong guy I first met. Real solid guy. Good family," said Mooney.

In the '70s and '80s, said Mooney, "You have to remember there were no handicapped accommodations for guys in wheelchairs. You just saw the strength and willpower of the guy." Mooney met him in a blizzard in front of Talk of the Town pub as Karl plowed his way through Great Kills town in his wheelchair.

Karl's sister, Great Kills resident Mary Kate Strisik, said, "He was such a loving soul, such a great spirit. I feel him everywhere."

Karl had lived on Jack's Pond, now part of the Bluebelt's ecologically sound storm water management system. It was a part of the South Shore environment Karl successfully helped preserve. Residents of the area might remember Karl and his pet duck, "Duck Duck" who followed him like a dog. The animal was one of many Karl rescued and revived after entanglement with fishing wire and hooks left by those who fished the local waters.

