



Where the Water Runs Clear: The Legacy of Steve Iwinski



Steve Iwinski was a passionate scientist, adventurer, and pioneer in erosion and sediment control. Born in Michigan, Steve spent his childhood immersed in books, tools, and the outdoors, curious about how the world worked and determined to explore it. He studied biology at Northern Michigan University in the 1970s, where he and his wife, Joyce, began their life together. They built a stacked-log cabin on 40 untamed acres near Marquette, hauled water, gardened, raised a goat named Dolly and dog named Washu, and skied over a mile daily through Upper Peninsula winters to get to class.



In his early twenties, Steve was drafted during the Vietnam War. He served as a mechanic in the Aleutian Islands of Alaska, maintaining heavy equipment in one of the most remote and rugged environments in the United States. His time in the service deepened his resourcefulness and broadened the range of practical skills he would later apply to both life and work.

In the early 1980s, Steve and Joyce moved to Juneau, Alaska, drawn by its wild beauty and opportunity. They quickly fell in love with the place and welcomed their first daughter, Seva.

Determined to provide for his growing family, Steve took on a variety of odd jobs while Joyce worked as a dedicated RN at the local hospital. Wanting something more stable and long-term, Steve began showing up every morning at the gate of a local gold mine, quietly waiting in the cold with quiet resolve. One day, someone finally stopped and asked, “Do you need a job?” Steve simply replied, “That’s what I’m here for.” That moment would change everything.



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His background in carpentry, mechanics, and biology made him a valuable jack-of-all-trades at the mine, but everything changed when a tailings pond failure sent metal-laden sediment into nearby estuaries. The mine needed someone with environmental knowledge, and Steve stepped forward. With his biology degree and passion for water, he led the response and was ultimately named the mine's environmental coordinator. It was there he discovered the power of flocculants to remove sediment and metals from water, a technology that would become his lifelong passion.



Steve's years in Alaska were rich and full. Weekends were spent on a 12-foot Boston Whaler exploring the island coastlines, fishing for salmon and halibut, and hunting for deer. He and Joyce welcomed two more daughters, Kyla and Virginia, and taught all three girls tennis at a local club. They quickly became nationally competitive players, traveling to tournaments around the country.

Still, Steve felt he could do more. In the mid-1990s, he and Joyce made a bold decision. They left behind the life they loved and their secure jobs to move to Georgia and build a new company from scratch. With three young daughters in tow, they moved into a small apartment and began introducing the Southeast to flocculant technology. Steve would drive from site to site, collecting jars of muddy water and cleaning them on the spot to convince skeptical contractors and inspectors. At night, he and Joyce made Flocc Logs by hand on their balcony to keep up with demand.



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That persistence paid off. The business grew quickly, eventually expanding into a warehouse, employing a team, and serving clients across the southeastern United States. Steve collaborated with universities and agencies and built a community through his passionate presentations at IECA conferences.

Despite the travel, Steve never missed his daughters' tennis matches. He proudly wore caps from Jacksonville University, Texas A&M, and the University of Denver, schools where each of his daughters earned Division I scholarships.



Later, Steve returned to Big Bay, Michigan, reconnecting with his roots in the Upper Peninsula. There, he continued experimenting in his garage lab, captaining lake health assessments, and spending peaceful hours fishing in the Iron River, Lake Independence, and Lake Superior. He loved the solitude and clarity of the water, and the quiet rhythm of small-town life. He raised chickens, ducks, and turkeys from eggs, read science magazines by the woodstove with his cat curled on his lap and his dog Odie nearby, and often plowed his neighbors' snow during the long winters just because he could. He was a familiar, friendly face around town and loved stopping by the local general store to chat with neighbors and strangers alike.



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Steve was known for his huge personality, insatiable curiosity, sense of adventure, and generous spirit. He mentored many young professionals and deeply believed in the power of education, hands-on science, and innovation to protect the natural world. But what he loved most was when his three daughters came to visit. They would sit for hours in the cozy living room, catching up on life, reflecting on the business, and sharing stories and laughter. Those conversations were his joy and his legacy.



The Steven Iwinski Young Professional Grant was created to honor that legacy by empowering the next generation of environmental stewards—those who, like Steve, are driven to protect soil and water with knowledge, courage, and heart.



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