

# In Memoriam: Robert Douglas Lukens, Ph.D.

Rob Lukens, the popular and energetic leader of the Chester County Historical Society (CCHS) who pushed an organization devoted to the past into the present day with engaging exhibitions and national recognitions, has died at the age of 42. Lukens' death, which came on Saturday, August 1, 2015 after a long battle with cancer, was announced by the historical society. "Rob Lukens made an indelible mark on the Chester County Historical Society," said George Zumbrano, chairman of the society's board of trustees. "It was a pleasure and an honor to work with him. His enthusiasm for our region's history was contagious, and he brought a level of professional expertise that helped us move forward in innovative ways."

Lukens, who earned a Ph.D. in American History from Temple University, became the organization's president in 2011, although his association with the historical society began in 1993 when he helped catalog, pack, and move museum objects as a volunteer during his undergraduate studies.

Later, he was an intern at the society and then became collections manager in 1998. Lukens left CCHS in 2003 to become the head of collections at the Chemical Heritage Foundation. His career then took him to Historic Yellow Springs in northern Chester County, where he was executive director from 2005-09, and then on to the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center in Washington, D.C., before he returned to the CCHS in 2011, "ready to lead the institution that he loved so much," the society's release stated.

Lukens brought passion and a commitment to share the county's history with the community beyond the walls of the historical society, located on North High Street in West Chester. His leadership brought much needed upgrades to the organization's facilities and continuing plans for their improvement. He initiated a regular column titled "History's People" in the *Daily Local News*; a weekly radio program called "Passing Time" on WCHE-AM; and began the popular "History on Tap" series.

It was during the summer of 2012 that Michael Morrison and Roger Thorne, current and former presidents of TEHS, were guests on Lukens' radio show, beginning what was to become a warm and synergistic relationship between the two societies.

As Michael Morrison recalls, "In 2013, Rob joined a small group of local historians and dedicated individuals from the equestrian world to form the 'Rediscovering Devon Committee' for the purpose of preserving, documenting, and sharing the long and rich history of the Devon Horse Show and Country Fair, dating back to its inception in 1896, and also conserving and digitizing a large collection of images, manuscripts, and artifacts. The first program co-sponsored by the committee, CCHS, and TEHS was held at CCHS on October 27, 2013, where many historic horse show treasures were presented to the equestrian community for the first time." Working together with Rob on this effort brought TEHS much closer to CCHS as organizations, and all of those personally involved gained a great respect for his intelligence, insight, capable leadership, and collaborative approach. Sadly the relationship ended much too soon.

Throughout his illness he remained committed to CCHS, especially in developing plans for its new permanent exhibition. "The Chester County Historical Society Board of Trustees, staff members, and volunteers are grateful for the time that we had with Rob, and we will miss him dearly," the press announcement read. "His work, which is our work, will continue."

David B. Reinfeld, who had served as acting president of the historical society for the previous two years, was named Interim President. "David has done a remarkable job throughout this difficult time, and we are confident that CCHS remains in good hands," Zumbrano stated.

Rob Lukens is survived by his wife, Becky, and their two children, Abbie and Finn. Educational funds established for Abbie and Finn through DNB Investments & Insurance have received a memorial donation from Tredyffrin Easttown Historical Society. For information on making contributions to those educational funds, please contact DNB Investments & Insurance at 484-359-3583. Memorial contributions may also be made to Chester County Historical Society, 225 N. High St., West Chester, PA 19380



ABOVE: Rob Lukens c. 2014. *Courtesy of CCHS.* BELOW: Rob Lukens at Historic Yellow Springs c. 2008. *Courtesy of Historic Yellow Springs.*

(The preceding includes excerpts from the article written by Michael P. Rellahan in *The Daily Local News* on 2015-08-03)