

Sutton's Longtime Town Moderator

Chip Devenger was born in Lyndonville and brought up in Sutton, Vermont (between St. Johnsbury and Lake Willoughby). Although he has left Sutton periodically, he has always returned – and has been the Sutton Town Moderator for 54 years in a row. He readily points out that this is not as long as John McClaughry has held the role in Kirby.

Chip was raised to participate in the community. When he was a student at Sutton School, the seventh & eighth grade class attended Town Meeting every year to observe the action from the floor. At age 21, Chip attended Town Meeting as a brand new voter, and the previous moderator happened to retire. Chip had not planned to run for the office, and he doesn't recall who nominated him. He does remember that on that day, with his mother as the town

clerk/treasurer and his fifth & sixth grade teacher on the selectboard, the three other nominees lost in a series of votes. By then Chip's mother had been the Sutton Town Clerk and Treasurer for ten years, and Chip says they "became sort of a team at the meeting every year" during his first 40 years as moderator.

"In Sutton we have a school and we have a church, but not a store or even a post office – so town meeting is a reason to get together with neighbors." Chip notes that town meeting was definitely more fun when the school meeting was part of it – before the school began using the Australian ballot system – and it's more difficult now to get a lot



of people to attend and participate. "It helps to have food at the meeting: the longer meetings of course required food, but now people are in and out before noon, and there's less need to bring kids than there used to be. But it's still a fun job."

What stands out in his time as moderator? The year that a major article proposed erecting three towers on a Sutton ridge – the kind of issue that's likely to bring a lot of outsiders to town meeting. Chip was in Lake George with a badly broken ankle, but he made the trip back to Sutton because he expected the towers discussion to be very controversial and he didn't want to compel a less experienced person to try to moderate it. At the meeting he was fully dosed with painkillers and sitting on the stage with his bandaged leg showing. To this day he suspects that the discussion was subdued a bit by his clearly being in pain. And that article did not pass.

"Being the moderator is a positive job, and I am happy to do it. I am also a justice of the peace and a guardian ad litem in family court. I wish more people would come forward and fill the volunteer positions that are available." Chip goes on to explain that, as moderator, age has its advantages. "I am 75 now, so I can tell people they have to speak clearly so I can hear them." He concludes by saying "I hope to be reelected, and I will keep going as long as I can do it well. When I feel it's time to stop, I won't run. It has been great trip."

Editor's Notes: Learn more about Chip as the Sutton Town Moderator in [this WCAX3 interview](#) recorded at this year's Sutton Town Meeting. The North Star Monthly published [an informative and entertaining article](#) about Chip's mother, Dorreen Devenger, in February of 2008, and it sheds some light on other ways that a younger Chip was involved with town government.

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