



2017 AWARD WINNERS

KEYSTONE AWARD

Ruth Roperti, Past President of PA Association of Environmental Educators



This prestigious award recognizes an educator who has dedicated their life to advancing the quality and opportunity for environmental education in Pennsylvania. Recipients of this award should display uncommon and exceptional understanding, passion, and commitment to environmental education, and serve as an inspiration to other environmental educators. Ruth was nominated by her long-time colleague, Jane Konrad.

Ruth taught for 37 years at Riverside Beaver County School District, mostly third grade. From the very first start, she wove the environment into the curriculum she taught. It did not take a study like “Closing the Gap”, for her to know the impact experiencing the environment made on student’s learning and behavior. She blended in such activities as the Junior Master Gardener and 4H curriculums, involved the local farming community, grew plants everywhere in her classroom, and used the school’s nature trail. She also discovered the power of grants and began writing them to the Beaver County Education Trust, for special activities with her students. They planted bulbs, enjoyed local field

studies, initiated a school recycling program, and much more. After retirement, Ruth continued her interest in the Riverside elementary students, by creating an afterschool garden club, and traveling to elementary schools throughout Beaver County teaching classes on about the environment.

In 1994, Ruth was invited to join Moraine Preservation Fund (MPF), a friends group for Moraine State Park, to assist in developing an education program for their newly purchased pontoon boat. As a volunteer, she did help develop and direct the water quality program on board “*Nautical Nature*”, with a matching land program. She scheduled and co- ran MPF’s 24 summer environmental education programs, fed osprey, then owls in MPF’s reestablishment programs, assisted with the native plant butterfly trail, and served on the board. She continued to fuel these programs through grant writing, winning grants over \$100,000. Others who worked with Ruth on these efforts were June Marshall, Lesley Baker, Stacey Widenhofer, Natalie Price, and Obie Derr, the Park Manager.

Ruth first attended a PAEE conference when it was held in the 1980’s at Slippery Rock University. It was love at first sight! She went home with new ideas for her students and connections to environmental professionals offering to visit their classroom. Being a formal classroom teacher did not offer much opportunity to be involved beyond attending conferences, but when she retired in 2003, Barb Rupert nominated and Jay Gregg asked her to join the board as the Southwest Regional Director. By 2006, she was directing the Conference, then in 2007 was elected President. Serving in this position for 7 years, Ruth brought the programs Project Learning Tree (PLT) and Project Wet (PWT) to the organization. Starting in 2008, she again wrote grants and spurred the development of EE Certification, connected to national and regional environmental initiatives including creating the Mid-Atlantic Regional Affiliates (MARA), brought PAEE to the “*No Child Left Inside*” movement making us one of the first supporting Affiliates, secured the state environmental website for PAEE, directed or supported conferences, and wrote the EPA grants through NAAEE to bring PAEE the EE Capacity program to increase the reach of environmental education to Pennsylvania’s underserved audiences. All these efforts brought PAEE to the forefront of current environmental education across the country. She continues to remain active in these activities today.

OUTSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

Wildlands Conservancy, “Wild about Learning” Environmental Education Program



This award recognizes an exemplary or innovative environmental education program, which could serve as a model of excellence for educators throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. “Wild About Learning” was nominated for the *Outstanding Environmental Education Program* award for its nature-based, in-school program, that runs bi-weekly from October to June and includes 15 school visits and 2 field trips to the Pool Wildlife Sanctuary. First grade classrooms in each of United Way’s Priority Schools receive this grant funded program that combines hands-on discovery, field experiences, wildlife presentations and nature-themed books. This approach directly links nonfiction themes and fictional materials to enhance concepts and understanding and, ultimately, improve reading skills.

“Wild About Learning” has a 3-year track record of providing this successful literacy based program to the Lehigh Valley’s lowest income youth by promoting an enthusiasm for literacy, science and math using storybooks, live animals, nature journals, and interactive lessons that build upon Pennsylvania’s academic standards. Jason Sizemore, Assistant Principal at Hiram W. Dodd Elementary, said “Our Wild About Learning students look forward to the program every week. Wildlands’ staff has provided our kids with amazing opportunities to not only learn about animals and their environments, but to actually meet live animals. The students continue to talk about their Fall trip to Pool Wildlife Sanctuary and have been asking ever since, ‘When can we go there again?’ The program is providing opportunities that we would not be able to provide as a school, and we are very grateful.” “Wild About Learning’s” success is evidenced by the continued growing support by local funders to add additional classrooms to the program.



OUTSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR

Jennifer Brooks, Berks County Parks & Recreation Department



This award recognizes an educator who has made a significant impact and contribution to the environmental education field in a formal or non-formal setting through innovative or inspiring teaching practices. Jennifer was nominated by Lisa Guaker. Jennifer has been working for the Berks County Parks & Recreation Department since 2009. She started work with the Department as a Park Ranger who would occasionally offer preschool natural history programs to the public. The Berks County Parks & Recreation Department had never had an Environmental Educator on staff, and realized a need in the community to offer more environmental education programs. A position was created and the programs have since taken off. As the Environmental Education Program Manager, she oversees all environmental programs for the County. She develops the entire curriculum, instructs classes, writes grants, and implements projects within the parks system. She is currently stationed at the Angora Fruit Farm at Antietam Lake Park, which is situated in the middle of 665 acres of protected parkland. The site is utilized as an outdoor classroom that contains meandering spring

fed creeks, two spring fed ponds, a native meadow, and more. She has developed the site from scratch, tailoring it to their education departments' needs. What once was an old, overgrown orchard with over 2,000 fruit trees, is now an amazing outdoor classroom with a butterfly house, organic children's vegetable garden, natural play area, floating wetlands, and an "enchanted forest". She offers hands-on programs to the public, as well as to public, private schools, and other groups.

She has been working in the environmental field for almost 20 years. Her work for the Parks Department has been the most fulfilling and rewarding experience. She has said "to see the look in a child's eye as they realize they're not only permitted to, but encouraged to take a closer look at the natural world around them by letting the mud squish between their toes or letting a butterfly land on their nose, is the most gratifying feeling one could ask for."

She lives on a small farm with her husband and son in Berks County, where she enjoys gardening and tending to her chickens, goats, horses, dogs, and duck.

DAISY S. KLINEDENST MEMORIAL AWARD



Jenni Urban, Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve at Saint Vincent College

The award recognizes an educator with fewer than five years of experience who shows dedication to expanding their involvement with environmental education. Jenni was nominated by Allison Petris.

Jenni is an outstanding intern and essential part of the Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve (WPNR) team. Jenni has been a work study and an intern at WPNR for the past 3 years during her studies at Saint Vincent College. Jenni is an asset to WPNR's Environmental Education (EE) programming, outreach, and support. She is regularly entrusted to plan, organize, and teach EE programs from preschool students through adults

and she does a phenomenal job. She is also often responsible for the care of our education animals, a docent at the Reserve front desk, and involved in the planning of many large events, including Westmoreland Earth Day and Nature Night Out.

When Jenni is not studying for her Environmental Science degree or working at WPNR, she also interns at the Pittsburgh Zoo, and PPG Aquarium, in their education department and volunteers at Wildlife Works Animal Rehabilitation Center, caring for the animals and training and using their educational animals for outreach. Jenni is constantly finding ways to involve herself in the EE field. Her favorite event of the year is attending the PAEE Conference. She looks forward to learning new things, meeting new people in the field, and making herself into the best Environmental Educator she can possibly be. Her preparation for any program she has been asked to teach is extensive in research, creativity, and preparedness.

Her dedication and enthusiasm toward not only environmental education but toward expanding her personal wealth of knowledge to pass onto the students and visitors of WPNR. Even though Jenni is still currently a student, her investment in the field of Environmental Education (EE) is evident. She is constantly asking questions, doing research, and surrounding herself with experts to make sure she is prepared and knowledgeable for any program she is asked to teach. Her thoroughness and excitement make her a regularly requested educator for programs and she is given the freedom and opportunity to teach the programs on her own. She is WPNR's Nature Birthday Party extraordinaire and an asset to the Summer Camp programs. During hikes and programs led by someone else, Jenni is often found a few yards behind looking at some sort of bird or plant and asking a million questions. Her attention to detail and constant thirst for knowledge captures her thoughts and she will always find out what something is, what it's used for, what sound it makes, where it came from. She writes the numerous facts she discovers in her notebook and hold onto them for her favorite days when a visitor returns the favor and asks her the questions, and she can pull out her trusty notebook and wealth of knowledge and fire facts at them at the speed of light with the excitement and enthusiasm to make anyone as interested in any plant, bird, animal, or tree as she is.

She is a kind, caring, compassionate young woman whose future is bright in EE. Her upbeat personality, drive to succeed, and pure enjoyment of all things environmental make her incredibly deserving of this honor. She may be young and new to the field but Jenni Urban will be a super star in the EE field for many years to come.