

2024 MWEE Award Winners



MWEE SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

Millville Jr/Sr High School Agriculture Department

The Millville Jr/Sr High School Agriculture Department MWEE experience took place during the 2022-2023 school year and continues to occur this school year. Ms. Guise, the Agriculture Education Teacher, made the connection with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission and began implementing the Eels in the Classroom program in her Wildlife Management and Natural Resource Management courses. Throughout the MWEE experience, students participated in cross-curricular learning activities, engaged with industry guest speakers, competed in the Agriscience Fair, and learned about the importance of the American Eel within the Susquehanna River Basin. At the conclusion of the MWEE experience, students demonstrated an average growth in knowledge of 17% (with some growth as high as 43%). In addition, 47% of students stated that they strongly agreed that the MWEE experience "deepened their understanding of environmental science" and 52% of students stated the experience "taught industry skills related to environmental science" that they could use in future careers within the field.



Riverbend Environmental Education Center Riverbend's Nature-Based STEM Community of Practice

The Nature-Based STEM Community of Practice is a yearlong PD program that gives teachers both confidence and skill in teaching nature-based STEM outdoors on their school grounds and beyond. Teachers become adept in teaching science with the new STEELS standards by designing and completing a MWEE with their students. This program develops teacher leaders in MWEEs and STEELS, phenomenon-based learning, outdoor nature education, sustainability, and environmental literacy, and it supports teachers with a regional community of peer science teachers and professional environmental educators.



Jill Shashaty

Jill Shashaty serves as Riverbend's Education Specialist. In this role, she develops EE programming for students and PD for teachers, directs Riverbend's Nature-Based STEM Community of Practice, and ensures that Riverbend's programs embody high-quality, best-practice environmental and science education. Jill's work in education has included teaching literature and writing in high school and university classrooms, with the natural world always a focal point of her teaching and research. She brings this interdisciplinary mindset to her work in STEM education. Jill is passionate about high-quality education for all learners, especially young children, and volunteers in the ECE field, with Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts, and as a PA Master Naturalist.

Suzanne Safran

Suzanne Safran serves as Riverbend's Education Operations Manager, designing programs, connecting with community partners, and overseeing program logistics. She is passionate about Riverbend's student-centered, hands-on approach to environmental education, and commitment to equity and access as core values in our work. Suzanne is an outdoor enthusiast who loves hiking, camping, and birding especially. She holds a BS in Biology from James Madison University, an MS in Public Policy from Georgia Institute of Technology, and is currently working toward a M.Ed. in Environmental Education at Slippery Rock University.

2024 PAEE Award Winners



KEYSTONE AWARD



Judy Acker

French Creek Valley Conservancy

Judy Acker is the French Creek Education and Outreach Specialist for the French Creek Valley Conservancy currently doing programming in nine school districts within the watershed as well as adult and community programs. Previous to that position, she worked for Audubon Pennsylvania for five and a half years focused on French Creek and native plants. Before that, Judy was the Director of the French Creek Outdoor Learning Center for 12 years located along French Creek on 179 acres doing outdoor programming for thousands of students each year. Acker became fascinated by French Creek as a non-traditional adult student at Allegheny College where she graduated with honors with a BS in Environmental Science. She has over 25 years' experience working with students, teachers and adults doing environmental programming on various topics.

OUTSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AWARD

Green Allies

The GreenAllies organization engages with, empowers and supports students to become local community leaders in environmental sustainability. Their Pottstown headquarters is the home of the student-led Althouse Arboretum, which serves as a replicable model of locally-focused, student environmental leadership. GreenAllies works with students to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to impact their communities. Nowhere is this more visible than the work the students do at GreenAllies' outdoor education center called the Althouse Arboretum. It started ten years ago as a vacant 17 acre lot, and through the vision, designing, planning, and physical labor by students from nearby high schools, it was converted into the most popular outdoor destination in the township. Today, GreenAllies students manage the facility and all its gardens and trails. They meet on a regular basis to design and plan over 30 community programs a year. GreenAllies visions a world where students lead the way to a more sustainable world and the Althouse Arboretum has distinguished itself as the exceptional example.



DAISY S. KLINEDINST MEMORIAL AWARD

Justine O'Gara

Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education

Justine O'Gara began discovering her passion for connecting with people and nature after graduating with a double major in Biology and Environmental Science from La Salle University in 2021. After graduation, Justine began working as an Environmental Educator for the Wissahickon Environmental Center, where she led guided hikes, a variety of nature-based programming, and fostered communities in the Philadelphia area. Since then, Justine has transitioned to working with the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education where she currently oversees their Summer Camp, and continues making connections in other various educational programs. As an avid birder, Justine finds joy in observing our feathered friends and the ways they interact with their ecosystems. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time at the Wissahickon looking for new discoveries, trying to teach anyone who will listen, and playing with her two cats and lovely senior dog.



GOVERNMENT PARTNER AWARD

Carissa Longo

Carissa Longo is a Pennsylvania native who has worked in the EE field for over 26 years. She spent her childhood playing in the creeks and woods of Northeastern Pennsylvania, and this instilled an early passion for nature and conservation education. She joined the Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) - PA State Park's family in 1998 as a seasonal Environmental Education Specialist (EES). In 2013, after many years as an EES in the field, she moved to Harrisburg to become a Natural Resource Program Specialist (NRPS) for DCNR - PA State Parks.

As a NRPS and the Pennsylvania Project WILD and PA Songbirds Coordinator, Carissa's focus is working with PA State Park Outdoor Programming Services (OPS) staff, statewide facilitators, and other partners to offer top-quality teacher workshops, coordinate curricula, and improve and increase teacher professional development. In her career, Carissa has facilitated over 155 teacher workshops, has coordinated more than 60 staff trainings, and has led numerous facilitator trainings.



BUSINESS PARTNER AWARD

Aqua Pennsylvania

Aqua Pennsylvania, an Essential Utilities company, provides water and wastewater services for approximately 1.5 million people in 32 counties throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For more than 135 years, Aqua has been protecting and providing Earth's most essential resource, water. The company takes its responsibility seriously and has a strong commitment to sustainable business practices, as well as giving back to the communities they serve.

Accepting the award for Aqua is Krista Seng, who leads their corporate giving and community affairs programs. Krista is an environmental scientist who has spent her career partnering with nonprofits to protect water resources and improve Pennsylvania communities.



OUTSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR AWARD

Christina Moresi

Christina Moresi has been creating programming and connecting community youth and families with nature, sustainability practices, natural sciences, permaculture, and Pennsylvania environmental and agricultural history through hands-on, inclusive lessons and outdoor experiences since high school (almost 25 years!) in schools, nature-based nonprofits, urban arboretums and farms, and environmental centers. She is currently a part of Philadelphia Parks & Recreation's Pennypack Environmental Center education team. She loves working outdoors and sharing the mysteries of nature with children and adults. When she is not at work, she is in the garden or on "Auntie Adventures" with her nibblings.



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO EE AWARD #1

Leon Ressler

Leon Ressler is currently serving as a Penn State Extension Educator working on the Agronomy and Water Quality teams. He has been with Extension for 36 years and his first assignment was working in the Upper Conestoga Watershed on pioneering Nutrient Management planning focused on reducing Nitrogen and Phosphorus losses from farm fields. Leon has also done programming in well head protection, private well management, water rights, composting, odor reduction and served on the Susquehanna River Basin Commission's Agricultural Advisory Committee. He has also been a County Extension Director for 17 years. Leon and his wife Lou Ann have 4 adult children and 12 grandchildren and reside on their family farm in Lancaster County.



OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO EE AWARD #2

Lucy McClain

Dr. Lucy McClain is an Associate Teaching Professor and the Graduate Assistant Program Director at Shaver's Creek Environmental Center (Penn State University). She teaches environmental education and sustainability courses in both Penn State's Curriculum and Instruction (Science Education) department and Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management (RPTM) department, while also serving as the co-chair for Penn State's Outreach Sustainability Council.

Trained in the learning sciences, she studies how families engage with and learn about science in non-formal educational settings – including outdoor spaces, nature centers, and libraries – using both non-mobile and mobile devices as learning tools. This work has contributed to over 25 peer-reviewed articles and over 50 conference presentations on the topic since 2011.

Her happy place is exploring the Laurel Highlands area of Pennsylvania with her husband, two sons, and their dog, Scout.

